

## Folly 601

Chapter 601: Enjoy Being Managed by Shuangshuang (Third Update)

Probably never seen someone as fierce as Mu Shuangshuang, the man was stunned and didn't speak for a while.

Mu Shuangshuang swung another blow, hitting another man.

This man cried out in pain and pleaded with the other man, "Bro, my butt is killing me. Just tell them what we're up to, I beg you...!"

"You... I didn't lie, why are you hitting my brother?" The man asked Mu Shuangshuang, his face flushed.

Mu Shuangshuang laughed arrogantly, "I hit whoever I want. If you have a problem with that, come over and bite me!"

Mu Dalang and Lu Yuanfeng exchanged a glance, both thinking the same thing.

She's really asking for a beating!

The man was so angry he gritted his teeth, but he couldn't move because Mu Dalang's foot was like a compass planted on a desk, firmly pressed against his chest.

Following the momentum, Mu Shuangshuang pummeled the man's brother again,

"I'll talk, I'll talk, isn't that enough? Stop hitting my brother; he doesn't know anything!"

The man spoke with a tone full of helplessness.

Never in his life had he seen such a bandit-like woman who didn't abide by any principles.

"Hurry up, don't waste my precious time!" Mu Shuangshuang urged.

Only then did the man start talking about his identity.

In fact, they weren't anyone special. The three of them came from a place north of Qianzhou Prefecture. They once had some acres at home, but since they were lazy, they first sold their fields, and later realized they could make money by scamming people, so they started doing this.

Avoiding detection by always choosing places with many peasant families.

Villages are generally far from the county, and most peasant families are honest. When wronged, they tend to pay money to settle the matter.

They had been doing this for five years; the three men long forgot how to make a living through honest labor.

Mu Shuangshuang borrowed a hemp rope from a nearby villager and tied the three of them together.

Mu Shuangshuang remembered her purpose for coming and asked Lu Yuanfeng, "Fengzi, how much did that young man get scammed for earlier?"

"Fifty wen!" Lu Yuanfeng replied.

Mu Shuangshuang was not polite and rummaged through the three men's bodies, finding about one hundred wen on each.

Guessing it was all scammed money, Mu Shuangshuang decided to confiscate it.

These three would be eating jail food anyway, holding money would be a waste, better contribute it to her.

After a brief discussion, Mu Shuangshuang and the others decided it would be best to bind them and send them to the government to prevent others from falling prey.

Mu Shuangshuang took out thirty wen and paid three men who had been watching the whole affair to take the scammers to town, and then have town folks take them to the county government.

With that, it was no longer their concern.

Lu Yuanfeng, after being involved in this incident, didn't feel relieved, instead, he felt even more nervous.

He was an accomplice and had assaulted the victim, making Lu Yuanfeng uncomfortable just thinking about it. Mu Dalang called him several times, and he didn't even react.

"Fengzi, it's really not your fault! If it were my brother, he would have also been hit."

Mu Shuangshuang understood Lu Yuanfeng's character and knew his nature.

Kind and honest, seeing an elder bullied by a young man would naturally go help.

In ancient times, people were simple and respected the elderly and loved the young; helping others was a trait cultivated from birth.

Moreover, Mu Shuangshuang herself also noticed, such scams were rare.

Three people orchestrating a fake accident together was even more uncommon!

"Fengzi, Shuangshuang is right, if it weren't for you, I might have just paid to settle the matter to avoid trouble." Mu Dalang rubbed his head, looking embarrassed.

It could have been anyone in Fengzi's shoes making the same mistake.

"You say that, but wrong is wrong! I want to find that man and apologize!" Lu Yuanfeng's eyes were filled with determination.

He remembered the direction the man left in; he thought he could find out by asking along that route.

"Fengzi, I'll go with you! Brother, you still have two milk sheep, go back early and don't delay your work." Mu Shuangshuang said.

"Okay, I'll go back first. Come back early, I'll find Shuangshuang this evening to figure out what I have to do tomorrow."

"Alright!"

Mu Dalang pulled the cart towards Er Gui Village, while Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng went in the direction where the man wronged by Lu Yuanfeng had left.

On the country road, although it was autumn, there was still a lot of grass, only the leaves had turned yellow, and stepping on them made a muffled sound.

Fortunately, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng were lucky and found a village in less than the time it takes to burn two sticks of incense.

The stone at the village entrance read Cao Village.

This place was unfamiliar to both Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, so they were cautious upon entering.

Lu Yuanfeng approached a villager and described the appearance of the man.

Coincidentally, the man was from this village and lived in the sixth house from the village entrance.

Lu Yuanfeng went to apologize, returning the fifty wen they were scammed out of and even adding another twenty wen. The matter was finally resolved.

Having lifted the burden from his heart, Lu Yuanfeng felt relaxed on the way back.

He kept glancing at Shuangshuang by his side, sometimes not watching where he was going and almost tripping.

Mu Shuangshuang finally spoke up, reaching out to pull Lu Yuanfeng's sleeve.

"You fool, if you don't watch the road, you'll end up in the ditch!"

Lu Yuanfeng looked ahead and saw he was indeed only a few steps from the ditch.

He chuckled, then said, "Shuangshuang, you look really nice!"

Mu Shuangshuang didn't expect Lu Yuanfeng to say it so directly.

Her face turned red, then she lifted her head confidently.

"Of course, I'm the village beauty around here, who else would be prettier?"

Lu Yuanfeng nodded vigorously.

He suddenly squatted down and said to Mu Shuangshuang behind him, "Shuangshuang, hop on! There's still several miles to go; I'll carry you home!"

"Sure!"

Mu Shuangshuang didn't hesitate; she'd never been carried before and was curious how it felt.

Climbing onto Lu Yuanfeng's sturdy shoulders, Mu Shuangshuang instantly felt sleepy, but she still needed to ask something important.

"Fengzi, do you think I'm too fierce? Do you find me scary?"

Just a casual question, but she didn't expect such a strong reaction from Lu Yuanfeng.

He said, "I don't find you scary at all, Shuangshuang. In fact, I like it when you treat me like this!"

Being under Shuangshuang's care was the most blissful thing for Lu Yuanfeng.

Wives should manage their husbands, and since he would eventually marry Shuangshuang, it was fine for her to exercise her rights early.

Mu Shuangshuang was very pleased with Lu Yuanfeng's reply.

She was clever and shrewd, if you were to put it nicely; or crafty and sly, if you weren't.

But there was no other way; in these times, honest people always suffered. If she remained too honest, there'd be nothing left of her family!

Chapter 602: Mrs. Lin Wants to Frame (Fourth Update)

"Yuan Feng, you said it yourself. If you ever dare to look down on me in the future..." Mu Shuangshuang left the rest unsaid, leaving it to Lu Yuanfeng's imagination.

"I won't, as long as Shuangshuang doesn't look down on me for just being a hunter!"

In Lu Yuanfeng's heart, Shuangshuang was smart, sensible, kind to him, and she handled everything herself without being overly delicate like other girls.

Lu Yuanfeng felt that Shuangshuang was just perfect for him.

Before meeting Shuangshuang, Lu Yuanfeng felt that half of his life was missing. With Shuangshuang, he felt like he had found his other half.

"I don't look down on you! Yuan Feng, things like status don't matter. We can be beggars or farmers, but we must have an aspiring heart. Starting as beggars, we can still become people with houses and land. We have hands and feet — as long as we're not lazy, there's nothing we can't achieve!"

Lu Yuanfeng agreed with what Shuangshuang said, and he raised her hand slightly.

The little girl on his back was really light, almost like a piece of paper. Lu Yuanfeng almost felt like he could run with Shuangshuang on his back.

But he didn't want to speed up; he wanted to walk slowly, carrying Shuangshuang.

Their pace was indeed leisurely. By the time they got home, Yu Si Niang had already gutted more than a dozen fish, scaled them, and even salted them.

Seeing them return, Yu Si Niang was surprised and said, "You two are back so soon! I thought you'd be out playing all day!"

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng both turned their heads shyly.

"Mom, you go rest, leave the rest to me!"

Seeing that Lu Yuanfeng hadn't left yet, Yu Si Niang generously left the time and space to the two kids and went to take care of her husband.

Yu Si Niang fetched a basin of hot water and went inside to wipe Mu Dashan's face.

Finished, she started thinking about Lu Yuanfeng and Shuangshuang's marriage.

"Shuangshuang's father, you think we should settle the marriage between Yuan Feng and our Shuangshuang, since they're always together?"

After all, Shuangshuang was fourteen, and Yu Si Niang didn't want to keep her unmarried too long. For women, getting married and having children was a path they must take.

Moreover, the girl grows more resented the longer she stays, especially now with Shuangshuang and Yuan Feng's good relationship.

"But didn't Shuangshuang say they would get engaged next Qixi Festival?"

The man had asked his daughter about this before, and her intention was to get engaged when she came of age. As for marriage, they'd have to discuss it further.

Unlike Yu Si Niang, Mu Dashan wanted to keep raising his daughter for a few more years.

A mother thinks about her daughter's future life, wondering if she'll be bullied by in-laws or live well.

A father thinks about how he can still work and wants to keep raising his daughter.

In the end, it's all for the daughter's good.

"That's true, but remember our Sixth Son? He married that Luo Xiuer in just a few days, and she turned around and ditched him for a city boy!"

"And our elder brother? Remember his childhood sweetheart who followed him and was so good to him? The whole village knew Ruan Xiao Jiao was supposed to marry our brother, but what happened?"

Our sister-in-law climbed into his bed, and Ruan Xiao Jiao was pushed out. Now, no one knows where she is!"

Yu Si Niang laid out two examples, both of which she witnessed firsthand.

She's worried that if something happens, these two kids' good relationship might be disrupted.

"Shuangshuang's mother, we can't compare like that. Sixth Son's situation was because Luo Xiuer was greedy for wealth. As for my brother, I remember it clearly; he could have refused our parents' request but did the wrong thing because of the sister-in-law's family fortune."

"In the end, in both cases, someone messed up! Our daughter Shuangshuang and Yuan Feng aren't like them; nothing like that will happen. Trust me, let's keep raising our daughter for a few more years and love her ourselves. No one else will care for her as deeply as we will."

Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang explained reason after reason.

Now, Yu Si suddenly came to a realization, resolving her years-long dilemma.

"Shuangshuang's father, you're right; our daughter has suffered enough. It's time to nurture her well at home! Let her eat whatever she wants, and if she doesn't want to work, then she shouldn't have to!"

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Old Mu Family, second branch

Mrs. Lin carried her flat belly with an anxious expression.

It's been months, and the fake pregnancy still hasn't come off.

The bigger the month, the harder it gets to keep up the pretense.

This troubled Mrs. Lin greatly; she kicked Mu Dazhong beside her.

"Daddy Gou Dan, what am I going to do about this belly? I'm about to be exposed now that it's supposed to start showing. Today, Mother was staring at my belly for ages, saying that I'm just eating for nothing, so it must be a daughter."

Old Mu Family already had too many daughters.

The eldest branch had two, the second, third, and fourth branches each had one, but only the second, third, and fourth branches had grandsons, making grandsons rare by comparison.

Even though the old lady wasn't especially fond of sons, if it truly was a granddaughter, she'd definitely be unhappy.

"What can I do? It was your dumb idea in the first place; now you deal with it yourself!" Mu Dazhong acted like it wasn't his problem at all.

Mrs. Lin was so angry her face turned green, pointing at Mu Dazhong's nose and scolding: "I'll tell you what, if you talk like that, I'll tell Mother that you stole the basket of eggs from the house, and that the piglets you bought were sickly on purpose to scam money! Let's see how Mother deals with you then!"

"You..." Mu Dazhong was so furious he couldn't speak.

He thought Mrs. Lin was a vicious woman.

She was capable of anything.

But he was caught in her grip.

Thinking it through, Mu Dazhong realized a direct confrontation wouldn't solve anything.

"Wifey, listen to what you're saying. We're family. How can family accuse family? Besides, you were also involved, weren't you? Accusing me is like accusing yourself." Mu Dazhong endured the unwashed smell from Mrs. Lin and moved closer.

"Stop playing dumb. Who just said that the issue with my belly was entirely my fault?" Mrs. Lin held on to Mu Dazhong, relentless.

"Who... who would dare say that? I'd be the first to not let them off! This is a second branch matter, so it's my matter as Mu Dazhong. Wifey, don't worry, I've thought of a plan!"

Mu Dazhong patted his chest.

Mrs. Lin's face lit up, urging, "So what is it? Tell me quickly; I can't stand Mother's suspicious nature even for a day!"

"Let's stick to the original plan and blame the third branch. Anyway, they've taken the fall often enough; one more time won't hurt!"

Chapter 603: Preparing a Banquet (Part 1)

Mu Dazhong's idea was approved by Mrs. Lin.

Calculating it, only the third branch and their second branch have a feud.

If not targeting the third branch, then who else?

"But I heard that the girl from the third branch is leaving tomorrow for a trip. I just asked Yu Si Niang, and she wouldn't say what the purpose is. What should we do? Should we wait for them to come back or go today?" Mrs. Lin said.

Mu Dazhong turned over on the kang and began to criticize Mrs. Lin.

"Of course, wait for them to come back! Si Niang and the third brother are easy to deal with, but that smelly girl from the third branch isn't. If you don't spill some dog's blood or something, do you think she'd believe it?"

Mrs. Lin listened and felt it made sense.

Actually, it doesn't necessarily have to be dog's blood; chicken's blood would do just fine. Anyway, the family has slaughtered quite a few chickens lately. If she secretly kills another one, she'll have blood and can also secretly eat it.

"Then let's wait, wait for the third branch to come back!"

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At the crack of dawn the next day, the people invited by Mu Shuangshuang set out from Er Gui Village, heading towards Zhao Village.

By the time they reached Zhao Village, it was just beginning to break dawn.

The Zhao family had also gotten up very early. When they saw Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, their mouths couldn't help but smile widely.

"Mu Family girl, Lu Family's boy, you arrived really early. No one has ever been earlier than you for our village banquets over the years," Old Sir Zhao said.

"Old Sir, since we've taken this job, we have to do it well. Today is your son's wedding banquet. We must show our best attitude and prepare the best banquet. If you're satisfied, please help spread the word about us!"

Mu Shuangshuang politely chatted with the Zhao family.

Old Sir Zhao laughed heartily a few times and nodded in agreement.

Mu Shuangshuang hadn't asked about Lu Yuanfeng's mother yet, as she first needed to help the Zhao family prepare the meal and, in the process, gauge the Zhao family's character.

As the saying goes, good people are hard to find. If you encounter bad people, troubles come in heaps.

The task of finding someone was urgent, but she couldn't just ask anyone for help directly.

Mu Shuangshuang said a word to Old Sir Zhao and started preparing breakfast.

For breakfast, Mu Shuangshuang made the simplest soy milk, fried dough sticks, and steamed buns.

The soybeans were soaked the night before, and the flour was brought from her home.

The Zhao family didn't have to worry about the meals for the whole day, relying entirely on the materials and other items Mu Shuangshuang prepared.

Setting up the stove and arranging the ingredients, Mu Shuangshuang got busy without taking a moment's rest.

Yu Si Niang helped make the buns on the side, while Lu Yuanfeng and several other laborers used a stone mill to grind the soybeans.

The flour was set to rise in the Third Branch of the Mu Family, and now it was ready, perfect for making fried dough sticks.

Mu Shuangshuang poured a fragrant half-pot of rapeseed oil into the large iron pot; it couldn't be too much, or it would be wasteful.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't like to reuse oil from frying dough sticks. The oil from this morning's fry could be used for stir-frying at noon, so the next batch of dough sticks would be fried in new oil.

While waiting for the oil to heat up, she started making dough sticks on the door panel next to her. Once the oil was hot, she began dropping the dough sticks into the oil pot.

Yu Si Niang, after finishing making the buns, let them sit for a while before putting them in the pot to steam.

The pace of division of labor was much quicker than usual. Once a batch of dough sticks was fried, all the soybeans had been ground into milk. There were three large iron pots in total — two for stir-frying and one for cooking rice.

For the cooking pot, Lu Yuanfeng used it to cook the soy milk, while Yu Si Niang used another pot to steam the buns.

Finally, breakfast was ready, and the Zhao family was invited over.

They stared, wide-eyed, at the breakfast prepared.

"Mu Family girl, your speed is impressive!" This time, Old Mrs. Zhao spoke.

It's likely they had never seen anyone prepare such a variety of breakfast in such a short amount of time, especially for forty-odd people.

The Zhao family's bride was from the same village, so the combined number of relatives from both families, plus children, was indeed a lot. Adding in nearby neighbors and close acquaintances, it certainly added up to forty or fifty people.

"Old Mrs., today we have a lot of people helping, each capable of doing work, so the speed is understandably quick! And if we're not diligent, you wouldn't invite us for your family's next big event," Mu Shuangshuang said with a smile.

Old Mrs. Zhao felt that the young girl in front of her was very eloquent and treated Mu Shuangshuang with a bit more courtesy.

After talking with the Zhao family, Mu Shuangshuang handed over the breakfast to Yu Si Niang and Lu Yuanfeng, among others.

Huang Da and Huang Er had been hungry all the way, especially Huang Er, who had been clamoring for breakfast on the road. Now that the food was served, they grabbed steamed buns and stuffed them into their mouths.

"You two bosses, how did you come up with this way to make money? My brother and I cracked our heads but couldn't think of it!" Huang Er said.

Lines of black rolled across Mu Shuangshuang's forehead. The title 'boss' sounded like a miscreant, especially problematic if heard by outsiders, who might think she and Fengzi were up to no good.

"Huang Er, you should spare the 'boss' title, call me Shuangshuang, and you can call Fengzi as you wish. As for undertaking banquets, it's not an easy job. When others eat, you'll just have to watch from the side."

It's always difficult to begin; Mu Shuangshuang tried to forewarn Huang Da and Huang Er about potential challenges.

"Shuangshuang, my brother and I aren't afraid of hard work! Besides, it's not like you have work every day here."

Mu Shuangshuang had hired the Huang brothers and Mu Dalang with pay, thirty coins a day, including three meals.

It was less strenuous than transporting goods in town, but the wages were nearly double, and most importantly, the food was guaranteed.

You couldn't find work like this even if you searched with a lantern; Huang Da and Huang Er didn't find it hard at all.

"In that case, let's just do it this way for now. If this method proves successful in the future, I'll find a way to hire more people, with wages only increasing, not decreasing!"

Mu Shuangshuang was someone with ideas. She's currently organizing banquets partly to help Fengzi find his mother; once that issue is settled and her cooking skills improve further,

she could completely open a restaurant in town.

"Mom, this soy milk was made by Fengzi and the others. Try it!" Mu Shuangshuang handed the not-so-hot soy milk to Yu Si Niang.

Actually, Yu Si Niang wasn't quite used to the scale yet, given that it was a big event.

Previously, when she helped in the back kitchen at Wealth Master Zhang's house, she hadn't seen many people. But this was straightforwardly cooking and preparing dishes in front of a large audience, visible if not done well.

"Shuangshuang, do you think your dad and the three kids have had breakfast?" Yu Si Niang held her soy milk bowl, trying to shift her focus with a topic.

"Mom, didn't we ask Aunt Xiao Yun and Fourth Aunt to help take care of dad and the kids yesterday? Don't worry; they won't go hungry. Besides, with dad around, what are you worried about?"

Mu Shuangshuang completely understood Yu Si Niang.

Staying home for a long time makes you not want to go out; once out, you miss home.

But all these situations are inevitable and will get easier with experience!

Chapter 604: Provoking Shuangshuang (Second Update)

"What Shuangshuang said is right, I'm worrying for nothing!"

"Mom, hurry up and eat. You can just watch later, whether you lend a hand or not, it's fine. We should be able to handle it."

The formal banquet for the Zhao family is in the evening; lunch is simpler, easier to deal with.

The main event is at night, so Mu Shuangshuang has to start getting ready now, but there's enough time.

"It's okay, Mom can say she's helped with cooking before. Washing and picking vegetables, cooking rice, not many people can beat you at that!"

The feast prepared for the Zhao family in the evening consists of twenty tables, twelve dishes per table. Apart from the main dishes and the standard chicken, fish, and meat, the rest is up to Mu Shuangshuang's creativity.

However, the menu was prepared in advance, so Mu Shuangshuang just needs to follow it.

There's still a lot to be done, and as soon as they finish breakfast, they start clearing the dishes to get ready for washing.

Every now and then, fireworks go off at the Zhao house, followed by relatives arriving in succession.

From what Mu Shuangshuang has gathered over the days, the Zhao family's wedding is indeed quite grand.

For most rural families, after spending a lot on the betrothal gifts, they would prepare a banquet, and cut costs on welcoming the bride.

Especially for nearby ones, they might not even rent a sedan chair or a horse, opting for the matchmaker to carry the bride in directly for a fee.

The Zhao family, on the other hand, not only has horses but also uses a particularly valuable ornate sedan chair from town, decorated with a lot of bright red tassels and two large bells at the front. When the chair moves, the bells tinkle melodiously, drawing many onlookers.

While washing vegetables, Mu Shuangshuang sneaks a peek at the prepared carriage outside the courtyard.

When Yu Liulang got married previously, she wasn't interested much, believing that cooking well was more important than anything else.

Now, her mindset seems to have changed for some reason.

As if she wants to learn more!

"When we get married, we'll use this sedan chair!"

Lu Yuanfeng suddenly appears beside Shuangshuang. His voice isn't loud, but it carries a firmness, making him sound sincere rather than deceitful.

These words make Mu Shuangshuang blush.

She playfully punches Lu Yuanfeng's arm.

"Just enjoy the spectacle, don't drag me into it!"

Even though Lu Yuanfeng got hit, his heart is sweet with joy.

He glances at Mu Shuangshuang. Dressed in a plain white outfit, Shuangshuang wears an apron of the same color, protecting her from grease and adding a touch of homeliness.

Under Lu Yuanfeng's prolonged gaze, Mu Shuangshuang feels shy.

She lowers her head and continues working.

"Shuangshuang, are these snails soaked directly?" Yu Si Niang, while washing vegetables, comes over to ask Mu Shuangshuang.

A few days ago, while idle, Mu Shuangshuang went to the fields and ditches to pick some snails and dried them after extracting the meat.

Stir-fried snail meat is a dish specially requested by the Zhao family after having tasted it in Yu Family Village, claiming they can't forget the flavor.

Besides white chili peppers, Mu Shuangshuang didn't spend a coin on this dish, meaning she earns more from the banquet than the average chef.

"Mom, let's not handle those yet, let's focus on preparing lunch. We'll deal with tonight's after lunch."

"Alright, I won't touch them!"

Mu Shuangshuang sets down her tasks to check if the water heated by the large cauldron is ready.

It's time to slaughter the fifteen chickens and remove their feathers.

Lu Yuanfeng is chopping pork now. As for the chicken slaughtering, Huang Da takes over. Mu Shuangshuang uses a wooden bucket to collect hot water, and as soon as Huang Da finishes with a chicken, she throws it into the bucket to pluck.

The villagers of Zhao Village have never seen such a feast prepared in the courtyard, and the spatula used looks somewhat like their spades.

People start to gossip.

"What kind of cooking method is this, letting us watch so openly?"

"I heard the Zhao family was impressed by the cook's food before, so they invited her for this banquet," someone answers.

"Whether it's good or not, it's what we say that counts, isn't it?"

"Are you silly? The Zhao family isn't short of money; they wouldn't hire an incompetent chef. This person must be exceptionally talented!"

These comments are mostly from the young women and small wives in the village. They usually enjoy gossiping and now with a rare fresh incident, they eagerly await some juicy tidbits.

No one notices a horse-faced woman in the crowd heading briskly towards Mu Shuangshuang.

This woman is married to someone from the Ma family, known in the area for catering to weddings. This job from the Zhao family is quite lucrative; she could easily earn half a silver, or even a full silver with some shortcuts.

The Ma Family's Daughter-in-law had been waiting for a long time, expecting an invitation from the Zhao family, but instead hearing about some inexperienced country girl getting hired, felt deeply slighted.

Mu Shuangshuang is plucking chicken feathers when suddenly, a pair of dirty shoes, half-missing their surface, appears in her line of sight.

She thought it was someone from the Zhao family, but looking up sees a horse-faced woman glaring at her viciously.

"What are you doing?" Mu Shuangshuang asks warily.

"What am I doing? I heard you took my place to cook here?" the horse-faced woman questions.

Mu Shuangshuang looks completely baffled.

"I don't know what you're talking about. The Zhao family invited me from the start; there's no question of replacing anyone!"

"Pretend all you like! So young, yet at such dirty deeds. My work isn't something a dirty girl like you can steal. I'm telling you, you better hand over all the money you earn from the Zhao family today!"

The woman roars at Mu Shuangshuang.

At this time, the Zhao family was busy entertaining guests and hadn't noticed the brewing commotion near Mu Shuangshuang.

Much less imagined the Ma Family's Daughter-in-law causing trouble for a girl in her teens.

"Ma'am, did you take your medicine before leaving today?" Mu Shuangshuang asks.

"You... you dare curse me? Aren't you a cheeky girl who knows how to cook a few dishes? Perhaps you're overreaching, but remember, you'll face consequences. If you're capable, compete with me, and the loser goes back home to drink her mom's milk."

The woman easily issues a challenge, but it's up to Mu Shuangshuang whether to accept.

"I don't even know who you are, why should I compete with you? You're not here to scam money, are you?"

Mu Shuangshuang raises her voice several times before someone from the Zhao family comes over.

"Cuihua, what are you doing?" Old Sir Zhao asks.

"What am I doing? We're from the same village, but you choose to give my job to a young girl. That's looking down on me!"

Chapter 605: Let Me Show You Power (Third Update)

"Cuihua, we're both honest people! Initially, it was you who said you'd handle the Wang Family's banquet in the neighboring village, leaving no time to do it for our Zhao family.

That's why I sought out Miss Shuangshuang. Otherwise, our Zhao family wouldn't have anyone to handle the banquet today. Now you're causing trouble during my son's wedding, accusing me of giving the job to outsiders instead of you, claiming I neglected your business.

Search your conscience and tell me, how has our Zhao family wronged you, Cuihua, for you to treat us this way?"

Old Sir Zhao's expression turned cold, his tone also carried a certain unkindness.

"Old Sir, that's not how you should put it. I've been doing all the banquets around here, Zhang Cuihua. Even if I couldn't do it, you should have informed me if you invited someone else. Now everyone's left in an awkward position. So, what are you going to do about it?"

The horse-faced woman put her hands on her waist, speaking with extreme arrogance.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't know this person's background, only felt that speaking like this at someone else's wedding banquet was truly a bit much!

Besides, they didn't ignore her initially; she was the one who said she was occupied with other work.

It seems like the later job fell through for her or something. They say a good horse doesn't turn back for grass, yet she's intent on going back and even blames the grass. It's truly detestable, and Mu Shuangshuang wasn't fond of her.

"What else can be done? This matter was originally your fault, Cuihua. You can't expect an old man like me to apologize and beg you to handle our banquet, right?" Old Sir Zhao said, displeased.

"There's no need for that. I just want to have a cook-off with this brat. At noon, we'll each cook a table of dishes to see whose is more delicious. If I win, your Zhao family should pay me double the fee promised to this brat and make this bunch of misfits leave!"

Zhang Cuihua smirked confidently. She had been cooking banquets for almost ten years in the village; she couldn't believe this little brat with no hair on her lips could be a match for her.

"You..." Old Sir Zhao's face turned red with anger.

This Zhang Cuihua is clearly here to cause a scene and embarrass the Zhao family.

If they don't accept the challenge, she'll continue to cause trouble.

But if they do and lose, the Zhao family would lose six taels of silver.

Six taels is no small sum.

Old Sir Zhao looked at Mu Shuangshuang, hoping she'd come up with a solution.

"What if you lose?" Mu Shuangshuang stood up and asked.

"Hmph, joke, me, Zhang Cuihua, lose? You brat better not act tough, or it'll be embarrassing when you lose!"

Zhang Cuihua's every word belittled Mu Shuangshuang. Right now, she felt like she'd already won.

A full vessel makes no sound, a half-full one sloshes around. Mu Shuangshuang knew this well and didn't argue with Zhang Cuihua.

"You're only making Zhao family put up a stake but not yourself. How about this: if you lose, you have to stay behind and assist me, wash all the dishes of the Zhao family, and serve the dishes!"

"If I lose, I'll kneel and kowtow to you three times! I just don't believe a little girl like you can make anything edible, probably no better than pig feed," Zhang Cuihua responded.

"Don't speak nonsense. The food our Shuangshuang makes is better than any chef I've ever seen in town!" Yu Si Niang retorted.

Zhang Cuihua cast a sidelong glance at Yu Si Niang, laughed, clutching her belly, and said, "Do you think I'm just a bumpkin who's never seen the world? With her skills, can she even compare to town chefs?"

"You..." Even Yu Si Niang, who usually avoids disputes, was angered by Zhang Cuihua and was about to argue when Mu Shuangshuang stopped her.

"Mother, let's not stoop to her level. Let's prove our ability with actions, not words!"

Yu Si Niang nodded at Mu Shuangshuang.

"Then it's settled. Miss Shuangshuang, for today's competition, I, this old man, will provide the ingredients, whatever you need. Consider it as adding to my son's happiness!" Old Sir Zhao spoke up, saving Shuangshuang the cost of ingredients.

Zhang Cuihua gave Old Sir Zhao an angry glare, wanting him to provide her ingredients as well.

Before she could express her intention, Mu Shuangshuang cut in.

"Since Chef Zhang has come with such vigor today, she must have prepared the ingredients herself, right? Surely she wouldn't want the Zhao family to provide them for free, right?"

The villagers watching chimed in.

"Yeah, Cuihua, you're not even employed by the Zhao family, you should use your own ingredients."

Zhang Cuihua's face changed immediately. Being asked to provide all the ingredients for a large table of dishes, this was not going to be easy on her.

"Chef Zhang, don't tell me you're stingy about these ingredients. Winning means you earn six taels of silver," Mu Shuangshuang openly mentioned the price Zhao family promised her.

Zhang Cuihua hesitated no more.

Six taels is no small amount; it's enough to buy an acre of second-grade land.

After some chit-chat, everyone began focusing on their respective banquets again.

Mu Shuangshuang had a heavy task, preparing the noon meal for five tables, which was quite a load. Both her and Zhang Cuihua's dishes counted among these tables; otherwise, she'd be exhausted.

The villagers gathered around, occasionally pointing or whispering about Mu Shuangshuang.

It seemed like today the main focus wasn't Zhao family's Zhao Si but Mu Shuangshuang.

"I bet this girl can't match up to the Ma Family's daughter-in-law. Though that woman is not pretty, her cooking skills are good. Last year she cooked at my family's relative's banquet, and everyone praised her!"

"It might not be the case. Since this girl came here, she might have some skills!"

The crowd continued debating back and forth.

Eventually, the Zhao family set off fireworks outside their courtyard, which temporarily put the discussions on hold.

Yu Si Niang saw Mu Shuangshuang washing vegetables and wasn't sure if Shuangshuang was confident, so she asked boldly, "Shuangshuang, what are we cooking for lunch?"

"Mother, don't worry about it! I'm confident about this. Let me go get the ingredients from the Zhao family first!"

Mu Shuangshuang asked for a chicken, two pounds of pork, plus noodles and some vegetables, and she also requested a fish.

Popular dishes don't always have to be intricately carved; they just need to be plentiful, tasty, and healthy.

These dishes were ones Mu Shuangshuang had made before: roast fish, fried chicken, braised pork, and head vegetables. The remaining dishes were vegetables that Mu Shuangshuang was good at.

Home-cooked meals have their own style. The specialty dishes in Mu Shuangshuang's hands were reserved for when she opens a restaurant.

On one side, Mu Shuangshuang prepared the ingredients, stir-frying in the iron skillet with smooth and impressive moves.

On the other side, Zhang Cuihua was using all her skills at home, cooking dishes she had been making for ten years, each dish heavy with oil and salt, fearing others might not enjoy them.

She thought: I must win those six taels of silver today and make that brat who snatched my job leave humiliated.

Both were busy with their preparations, and by noon, the tables of dishes were finally complete!

Chapter 606: Overwhelming (Four Updates)

Mu Shuangshuang's task was heavier, but she completed it on time.

The Zhao family invited the village chief and several respected elder uncles, fearing that Zhang Cuihua would cause trouble and cheat.

The Zhao family was determined to show Zhang Cuihua how foolish her actions really were.

At the dining table, Lu Yuanfeng and others served the dishes, and the invited judges began to taste the dishes from both tables.

Zhang Cuihua accepted the judges because they were from the same village. She believed they wouldn't side with the Zhao Family like they would with Mu Shuangshuang.

Comparing the dishes on both tables, Mu Shuangshuang's dishes had a good balance of meat and vegetables, with appealing color, aroma, and taste. The braised pork had a layer of translucent oil that looked incredibly enticing.

As for Zhang Cuihua, she was used to making large batches of food, not caring much about the presentation. Even the chunks of meat were finger-length pieces of white fat, presented without even having been rendered in a pan.

Just looking at them felt greasy.

She said that good-looking dishes weren't necessarily delicious and that Mu Shuangshuang's was surely unpalatable.

Actually, the outcome was clear the moment the dishes were served; everyone wasn't blind.

But for the sake of fairness, everyone gave them a try.

The final result was no surprise: Mu Shuangshuang won, and it was a crushing victory.

Additionally, she secured a few banquet deals in Zhao Village, which Mu Shuangshuang hadn't anticipated.

The banquets were all in the twelfth lunar month and didn't clash with Mu Dalang's banquet, so after discussing with Lu Yuanfeng, they decided to tentatively agree and settle on the price before deciding whether to accept them.

Zhang Cuihua stood wide-eyed, with a look of disbelief when the village chief told her the results.

"You're telling me that brat beat me? Do you even know how to taste food? That brat's dishes just look good, you're bullying people."

Zhang Cuihua shouted loudly.

The Zhao family was thoroughly enraged this time.

Someone has a wedding, and you're causing a fuss at their place. Isn't that inviting bad luck?

"Zhang Cuihua, I've given you face, you come to cause trouble, didn't drive you out, and now you want to ruin my son's wedding. Today the Zhao family will see what kind of daughter-in-law they raised in the Ma family!"

Old Sir Zhao personally went to the Old Ma Family to bring over Mr. Ma and Ma San.

He explained the situation clearly.

In front of the village chief, Mr. Ma apologized and wanted to take Zhang Cuihua back.

Mu Shuangshuang stopped them: "A deal is a deal. Since Chef Zhang lost, she must help me today. She has to wash the dishes for both lunch and dinner!"

Zhang Cuihua rushed over to hit Mu Shuangshuang but was blocked by Ma San.

"This woman wants more trouble, isn't this enough shame today?"

Ma San valued face, and dealing with the mess caused by his wife didn't please him.

"It's not my fault, this brat must've bribed the village chief and the others. I didn't lose."

Zhang Cuihua remained stubborn, and her words made everyone uncomfortable.

Mu Shuangshuang simply brought over a dish she saved for herself and placed it in front of the Ma family.

She then picked up Zhang Cuihua's dishes, which no one had touched.

"You are Chef Zhang's family, be the judges. If mine is bad, I'll admit defeat and pay six taels of silver. If mine is good, the bet stands!"

The villagers gasped.

People say that family always protects its own. Wasn't she afraid the Ma family would cheat?

Even Yu Si Niang worriedly watched Mu Shuangshuang.

If it were up to her to judge, she'd pick Shuangshuang for sure.

The Ma family likely wouldn't be different.

"Shuangshuang, you must be out of your mind. In these times, no one goes against their own family. You let the Ma family judge, they won't eat but still say this woman's cooking is the best." Huang Er reminded Shuangshuang.

Even Huang Da and Mu Dalang chimed in, and everyone hoped Mu Shuangshuang wouldn't lose out on such unfairness.

Only Lu Yuanfeng quietly watched Mu Shuangshuang without a word, believing every decision she made was correct.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't explain, leaving the decision to the Ma family father and son.

For the outside world, it seemed easy, but it truly worried the Ma family father and son.

Outwardly, they could curse Zhang Cuihua, but deep down, if Zhang Cuihua had won, six taels of silver would be in their pockets.

If they lost, the Ma family would be utterly disgraced today.

Holding chopsticks, their hands trembled, yet the taste in their mouths unmistakably clarified the difference.

Obviously, this young girl's cooking was better.

But they had to save face for family.

"Mr. Ma, Uncle Ma, what's the answer? Tell the villagers!"

Mu Shuangshuang's eyes were sharp as she demanded the answer from the Ma family father and son.

The Ma family father and son were already tense, and Mu Shuangshuang's gaze made them break into a cold sweat, unable to speak for a long time.

The villagers were already anxious, even the village chief of Zhao Village was looking at the Ma family.

Under so many eyes, Ma San's legs went soft, and he fell to his knees.

Zhang Cuihua, losing her temper, pointed at Ma San and began to scold: "You useless man, tell them my cooking is ten thousand times better than that brat's!"

Such shameless words painted an even worse picture of Zhang Cuihua.

Ma San, who had been holding on, suddenly seemed shocked, shouting loudly.

"This girl's cooking is delicious, this girl's cooking is delicious..."

It was unexpected by everyone, leaving them stunned looking at Ma San.

Even Old Ma followed the crowd because his son had spoken.

"Indeed, this young girl's cooking tastes better; we lost!"

This time Zhang Cuihua couldn't argue because the judges were her own family.

"Aunt Zhang, please clear these dishes and wash them. Of course, if you don't want to, kneel and kowtow three times; I, Mu Shuangshuang, can take it!"

Mu Shuangshuang remembered Zhang Cuihua's sworn words clearly.

She had ways to deal with this woman.

The Zhao family's disputes temporarily came to an end. Zhang Cuihua, held by Huang Er, went to wash dishes. With this towering man watching, if Zhang Cuihua misbehaved, Huang Er would make her kneel.

As a result, Zhang Cuihua, frightened, actually did the work.

But her pace was so slow, seemingly trying to delay and affect the evening's feast.

Huang Er realized this, holding a broom as he urged: "Dirty woman, you lost, so work for me. If you dare slack off, I'll skin you!"

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At the Old Mu Family, Mrs. Lin secretly caught a chicken and tied it up at home, waiting for Mu Shuangshuang to return so she could kill it for blood.

This time, she wanted to see the third branch not come begging to her!

Chapter 607: Days of Making Money (Part 1)

After the banquet, the Zhao family called Mu Shuangshuang over to settle the bill privately.

Receiving the three taels of silver handed over by Old Sir Zhao, Mu Shuangshuang instantly felt that all the hardships and troubles of the day were worth it!

"Miss Shuangshuang, I, this old man, must thank you properly today! You've brought honor to our Zhao family and this is fifty wen I'm giving you personally. Use it to buy some food for everyone."

Old Sir Zhao took out another fifty wen and handed it to Mu Shuangshuang.

"Old sir, I can't accept this money. What happened today was something Shuangshuang should have done."

"Listen to me, that Zhang Cuihua usually flaunts herself as the only banquet chef around these villages, behaving arrogantly. Sometimes she even takes the host's dishes away. Everyone suffers but can't find someone to replace her. You've saved me money today and taught her a lesson, so you deserve this."

With Old Sir Zhao speaking this way, Mu Shuangshuang accepted the silver without further refusal.

"Old sir, next time you host a banquet you can call on me again. I wish your son and daughter-in-law to have children soon, two in three years."

As these congratulations were spoken, Old Sir Zhao grinned broadly, and Mu Shuangshuang took the opportunity to show Mrs. Fengzi's portrait to the old man, asking him to keep an eye out.

Given what had happened earlier, Mu Shuangshuang's request now seemed a major task to Old Sir Zhao.

He patted his chest making a promise that if he saw her, he would immediately go to Er Gui Village.

Mu Shuangshuang sighed with relief, expanding the search area to another village.

She only hoped that after almost six years, nothing had happened to Mrs. Fengzi.

Back in the courtyard, Huang Da and Huang Er urged Zhang Cuihua to hurry up with the dishwashing. Everything was almost tidied up, just waiting on the dishes, after which Mu Shuangshuang and her group could leave.

It was already dark by now, and Yu Si Niang, following Mu Shuangshuang's instructions, had put on slightly thicker clothes but was still cold.

The third branch hadn't made new clothes in a long time, and the previous ones were for summer, light and not warm.

Mu Shuangshuang looked at Yu Si Niang and told herself to go to town again to buy cloth for the family's new autumn clothes.

"How's it going? Are the dishes done?" Mu Shuangshuang walked up and asked.

"No way, this woman is still slacking off, taking forever with a few dishes. Who knows when she'll finish," Huang Er complained nearby.

"If she weren't a woman, I'd have beaten her by now!" Huang Da chimed in.

"Shuangshuang, why don't we just wash these dishes? Waiting like this isn't helping," Yu Si Niang suggested.

Yu Si Niang was anxious to return home, not knowing if her kids and husband had eaten.

Hearing Yu Si Niang's words, Zhang Cuihua slowed down even more.

Where before she could wash a dish in a minute, now she couldn't even do one side in a minute.

Mu Shuangshuang, eagle-eyed, noticed this. She saw the dark courtyard outside and suddenly said, "It's getting late, Aunt Zhang, let me walk you home!"

Zhang Cuihua fell for it, thinking Mu Shuangshuang truly was letting her go. She wiped her greasy, dirty hands on herself and gleefully followed Mu Shuangshuang out of the Zhao family's courtyard.

Huang Er was full of confusion.

"Why'd Boss Shuangshuang let her go? That woman's so dishonest, she needed a lesson!"

The moment Huang Er finished speaking, sounds of thumping, like a stick hitting someone, echoed from outside the Zhao courtyard.

Everyone was puzzled except for Lu Yuanfeng, whose lips curled into a charming smile.

He knew what Shuangshuang was up to. Or rather, among everyone, he understood her best.

For the way Zhang Cuihua provoked Shuangshuang, she had it coming.

Outside the Zhao family's courtyard, after tiring of hitting Zhang Cuihua, Mu Shuangshuang stomped on her a few more times.

The whole time, there was only the sound of the stick hitting flesh, without a single scream from a woman.

Zhang Cuihua was beaten black and blue, her face covered in snot and tears.

She never expected Mu Shuangshuang to play dirty, taking her out to the dark, only to stuff her own rotten shoes in her mouth.

"Zhang Cuihua, this auntie has a bad temper. If you dare slack off or play tricks again today, it won't just be a beating. Now get back and wash the dishes."

Zhang Cuihua limped back to wash dishes, her speed unknowably faster than before, leaving Huang Er watching dumbfounded, not snapping out of it for a long while.

Seeing Zhang Cuihua's battered face, he knew she had been taught a lesson and admired Shuangshuang.

"Boss Shuangshuang, good thing we're not enemies. If we crossed you, there'd be nothing left but bone dust!" Huang Er said ingratiatingly.

He didn't pay attention to Yu Si Niang beside him.

Mu Shuangshuang lightly coughed, reminding Huang Er to be mindful of his words.

She was quite the perfect little cotton-padded jacket in front of elders, not a violent girl!

Lu Yuanfeng affectionately watched Shuangshuang nearby, and just as Mu Shuangshuang sensed it, she turned and gave him a mischievous smile.

Zhang Cuihua finished washing the dishes, and after speaking with the Zhao family, Mu Shuangshuang and the group hurriedly pushed the cart heading for Er Gui Village.

On a late autumn night, the temperature was still quite low, and as Yu Si Niang shivered along the road, Mu Shuangshuang considered giving her own coat, but Mu Dalang beat her to it.

"Aunt, wear my coat. I'm sturdy, but next time, let's each wear thicker clothes!"

"Da Lang, you're young and shouldn't catch cold. Aunt's older and can handle a breeze," Yu Si Niang refused to accept Mu Dalang's coat.

"Mom, take it. Although my big cousin isn't fat, he's not a delicate scholar who'd blow away with the wind!" Mu Shuangshuang joked with everyone.

Just then, a coat was draped over her shoulders, it was Lu Yuanfeng's, warm and carrying his warmth.

Mu Shuangshuang stood still, letting Lu Yuanfeng tuck in the coat edges carefully. His coat was so big it could almost wrap her up entirely, making her feel much warmer.

"Everyone, we got a pay raise today. It was thirty wen a day, but now it's forty wen. I'll distribute the wages once we reach the village entrance!"

Mu Shuangshuang shouted to the Huang brothers on the cart behind them.

The two carts, one pulled by the Huang brothers and the other by Lu Yuanfeng.

Huang brothers perked up on hearing the raise, especially Huang Er, who despite being behind Lu Yuanfeng, instantly overtook him.

The few people behind called out many times, but Huang Er wouldn't stop.

"Seems money's power is pretty strong. How did I not realize before?" Mu Shuangshuang laughed helplessly.

"Yeah, a forty-wen-a-day job is hard to find these days!" Yu Si Niang commented.

"Indeed, I've been an apprentice in town for years, and Master only gave me two taels of silver."

Mu Dalang and Yu Si Niang had both worked in town and were well aware of the prices, so they both agreed Shuangshuang was offering high wages here.

## Chapter 608: Life Gains Momentum (Part 2)

Back at Er Gui Village, Mu Shuangshuang handed over eighty coins to the Huang brothers at the village entrance. Initially, she meant for the brothers to leave the cart at the entrance, but they insisted on delivering to the door since the payment was too high not to.

Lately, Mu Shuangshuang has noticed a change in the Huang brothers. She isn't sure how they treat others.

At least in front of her, they haven't done anything wrong to her or Fengzi, and they have been quite diligent.

Mu Shuangshuang decided that if she were to open a tavern, she would definitely hire them to help out.

Third Branch of the Mu Family

Mu Shuangshuang thought the house might be pitch black at this hour, but unexpectedly, someone had set a bonfire in the yard, with wood still burning in it.

Around the fire, three Little Doudings were eagerly watching the entrance.

Upon hearing the sound of the cart wheels, they each jumped up. Little Zhi ran inside to call Mu Dashan, while Xiao Han and Yuanbao came forward, each holding a bowl of tea, still warm.

The Third Branch's yard instantly became lively, not at all like nighttime, but rather no different from daytime.

Watching this heartwarming scene, the Huang brothers felt both envious and jealous, especially Huang Er, who started sobbing.

"Whenever my brother and I go home, it's always a cold pot and stove, how pitiful... boo hoo..."

It's quite unusual for a grown man to cry without concern for image.

Mu Shuangshuang had to comfort him: "Work hard, earn money, and you can marry a wife, don't cry!"

Huang Er finally stopped crying, placed the cart properly with Huang Da, and bid farewell to Mu Shuangshuang.

They agreed that if there were similar jobs in the future, they should be called again.

They also realized they couldn't stay in such a place anymore, lest they die of jealousy.

Seeing that the two were sturdy men and unlikely to encounter danger, Mu Shuangshuang didn't see them off.

"So, tell me, whose idea was it today?" Mu Shuangshuang asked while taking money out of her pocket.

"Of course, it was Yuanbao's idea. Yuanbao thought Sister Shuangshuang, Brother Er, and Auntie worked so hard, so he decided to do something special." Yuanbao patted his chest proudly.

"Alright, alright, you're amazing! Here, take this money to buy candied haws."

Mu Shuangshuang took out six coins and handed them to the three little ones.

Yuanbao put the money in his pocket, but Xiao Han and Little Zhi returned theirs. "Sister, we don't need money, having food at home is enough!"

Seeing this, Yuanbao also took out the money from his pocket and handed it to Lu Yuanfeng.

"Brother Er, I'm like Little Zhi, I don't need money either."

But, as he spoke, Yuanbao's eyes were still fixed on the two coins in his hand, clearly reluctant to part with them.

Mu Shuangshuang gently touched Yuanbao's head and said, "This is for buying snacks. You don't have to return it to me. Besides, you're not three-year-old children anymore; you should learn to manage your own money!"

Only then did Yuanbao smile and take back his money, and so did Little Zhi and Xiao Han.

"Cousin, here's your payment for the work!" Mu Shuangshuang handed the wage tied with a hemp rope to Mu Dalang.

"Shuangshuang, I wanted to say earlier, the Huang brothers are outsiders, so they should be paid, but we're family, I don't need it."

Mu Dalang shook his head firmly.

To him, the Third Branch has helped him a lot. If it wasn't for Shuangshuang, he still wouldn't know when he could get married.

"Cousin, you're confused. This money isn't yours; it's for Sister-in-law Bitao. Once you're married, the woman manages the household, and all money goes to her. Refusing now is harming her interests. Does she know?" Mu Shuangshuang teased with a mischievous grin.

"Dalang, just take it. You've worked all day, and it's only right to take your pay. Besides, you're about to get married, and there are lots of expenses," Yu Si Niang chimed in.

"I can't accept that. After marriage, I can earn my own, and even if Bitao were here, she wouldn't blame me."

Mu Dalang was resolute in refusing, so Mu Shuangshuang kept it to give him when he marries, or perhaps buy some nourishing things for Huang Bitao, just so she wouldn't take advantage.

They chatted for a bit longer, and Mu Dalang left. The three little ones were taken to bathe by Yu Si Niang, leaving only Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng.

Mu Shuangshuang found a chair, and as soon as he sat down, Lu Yuanfeng came over.

"Are you tired? Let me massage your legs!" He said as he placed Shuangshuang's legs on a chair, gently tapping the joints.

Mu Shuangshuang felt completely satisfied. Though this day wasn't too tiring, having someone massage her legs was immensely comforting.

After a while, Mu Shuangshuang felt comfortable and stood up.

"Fengzi, let's bake some sweet potatoes, I didn't fill up at dinner, and after such a long walk, I'm hungry."

Lu Yuanfeng naturally nodded along; he was hungry too.

Sweet potatoes are the one thing rural households never run short of, aside from vegetable and cotton or hemp planting land, they grow sweet potatoes.

Sweet potatoes have a high yield and are filling. Most families cook with a lot of sweet potatoes and wild greens, making a sack of rice last a long time.

From the kitchen, Mu Shuangshuang picked six smaller sweet potatoes, took the fire tongs, and buried the potatoes in the fire.

On cold days, enjoying a few baked sweet potatoes is a particularly blissful experience.

As Mu Shuangshuang tended the bonfire and adjusted the sweet potatoes with tongs,

Lu Yuanfeng watched Shuangshuang. Even with something as simple as baking sweet potatoes, she was meticulously focused, not slacking off at all.

Soon, the aroma of baked sweet potatoes began to fill the air, making Lu Yuanfeng's mouth water.

Sometimes Lu Yuanfeng wondered, if Shuangshuang didn't cook for him someday, he would lose more than half his joy.

Shuangshuang's cooking was exceptional, turning the simplest ingredients into colorful, fragrant, and flavorful dishes.

Even the simplest home-cooked meal was far tastier than what others could make.

The air was filled with a warm, comforting scent.

The sweet potatoes were done, and Mu Shuangshuang used her homemade gloves to peel them, releasing even more fragrance as she handed one to Lu Yuanfeng.

"Eat quickly while I report on our situation."

In Mu Shuangshuang's mind, it was fair to say they earned the business together, so she had to explain everything clearly.

"Tonight, Old Sir Zhao gave me an additional fifty coins, so I could pay the Huang brothers more. As for the silver we earned, strictly speaking, we hadn't factored in the seventy pounds of wild boar."

The materials mostly belonged to her, but Fengzi hunted the wild boar, which could be sold. After deducting labor costs and such, we didn't earn much.

But this gives each day a bit more momentum to move forward.

Chapter 609: All the Toilet Paper Was Taken (Third Update)

"Shuangshuang handles the finances, so you can give money to whoever you want, without needing to tell me."

Lu Yuanfeng said while stuffing roasted sweet potato into his mouth.

His words gave Mu Shuangshuang considerable authority over the joint funds.

But Mu Shuangshuang wasn't happy about it.

"Are you really that stupid? What if I give all your money away to someone else?"

Mu Shuangshuang actually had her own bookkeeping; the silver Lu Yuanfeng entrusted with her was quite a sum.

Although they hadn't made big money since they started collaborating, the small earnings kept piling up and weren't a trivial amount either.

"If it's given away, I can earn more. Isn't it like Shuangshuang said? As long as we have hands and feet and are alive, there will always be money."

Mu Shuangshuang had no choice but to accept that she ended up with a man who didn't care about money. Luckily, he had a brother, or all the finances would really fall on her.

"You really are blessed. If it weren't for meeting me, your money would have been swept away by someone else long ago, and you wouldn't be enjoying a midnight snack so easily!"

Mu Shuangshuang lamented but couldn't help feeling amused.

Lu Yuanfeng occasionally looked up at her, smiling, his eyes filled with contentment.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't delay any further and started eating the sweet potato. After eating her fill, she drank a cup of cold water, and both of them felt a bit stuffed.

"Fengzi, I guess Yuanbao is sleeping with Xiaohan tonight, so don't call him anymore," Mu Shuangshuang spoke up when she saw Lu Yuanfeng glancing towards her parents' house, knowing he was hesitating about whether to call Yuanbao, so she decided to intervene.

"Alright then, I'll come call him tomorrow morning."

It was getting late, and Mu Shuangshuang saw Lu Yuanfeng off to the courtyard gate before turning back to extinguish the campfire in the yard.

After washing up, she finally went to bed.

Next day, bathed in sunlight, Mu Shuangshuang stayed in bed until the sun was high in the sky before getting up.

Breakfast was already prepared by Yu Si Niang and brought into her room. She brushed her teeth sleepily and ate a few bites in a daze. Overall, Mu Shuangshuang was in a fog all morning.

In the courtyard, Yu Si Niang was washing the family's clothes, including some of Yuanbao's. The children had stayed up late waiting for people last night and hadn't woken up yet.

After doing a few stretches, Mu Shuangshuang went over to Yu Si Niang.

"Mom, let me help you with the laundry. You rest for a while, don't tire yourself out!"

Yu Si Niang refused, knowing her daughter had worked so hard yesterday, cooking for over a hundred people with a big spatula.

How could a mother not let her daughter rest and make her work?

"Shuangshuang, good girl, listen to your mother. Take a day off today, don't do anything. I can handle these chores myself."

Mu Shuangshuang smiled beside her, unable to insist.

It was too late last night, so she hadn't told Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan how much silver she had earned. She had planned to do so during the day, but it seemed she'd have to wait until her mom wasn't busy.

"Then I'll go rest. Mom, if you get tired, just call for Shuangshuang!"

As Mu Shuangshuang turned around, she saw Mrs. Lin clutching her stomach, sneaking over.

Mu Shuangshuang quickly stopped her: "Second Aunt, what are you up to?"

Mrs. Lin was indeed looking for Mu Shuangshuang. Seeing her, Mrs. Lin's eyes lit up, and she feigned a pitiful look.

"Shuang girl, can I use your family's outhouse? My stomach hurts badly, and I think I might have diarrhea!"

Only someone like Mrs. Lin would casually mention diarrhea so early in the morning.

"Second Aunt, doesn't the Old Mu Family have an outhouse? Why do you insist on unloading your bowels in the third branch's outhouse to feel comfortable?"

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't interested in Mrs. Lin's business. Her land didn't rely on Mrs. Lin's bit of fertilizer.

And Mrs. Lin's sneaky little eyes kept darting towards her, clearly up to no good.

"Well..." Mrs. Lin was in a bind, realizing her excuse for borrowing the outhouse was not convincing.

"Shuang girl, do you really have to? Your second aunt used to be difficult, always opposing you, but now in need, she just wants to handle a life situation. You won't even agree to that? Oh dear, my stomach, I can't hold it anymore, I'm going to soil my pants..."

Mrs. Lin clutched her stomach, wailing pitifully.

At that moment, seeing Yu Si Niang, Mrs. Lin quickly tried her luck with her.

"Si Niang, we both married into the Old Mu Family around the same time, back then when the third branch had it tough, our second branch didn't have it easy either. Don't you remember we used to work in the fields together?"

Mrs. Lin rambled on, playing on emotions.

Yu Si Niang wasn't stingy, and lending out an outhouse wouldn't hurt the third branch.

But since her daughter wasn't willing, it became a tricky situation.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't want Yu Si Niang to feel awkward, so she spoke up.

"Second Aunt, go quickly, but remember not to dirty my outhouse. It's not like the Old Mu Family's, where you can just leave after making a mess."

This wasn't Mu Shuangshuang being snide; it was after the Old Mu Family collectively had diarrhea, leaving the outhouse filthy, even the planks were soiled, and Old Mrs. Mu had just casually blamed the fourth branch.

Poor fourth branch, who never even used it, ended up taking the fall.

"You..." Mrs. Lin was so angry she nearly spat blood.

But thinking of her plan, she held back.

She quickly rushed toward the Mu Shuangshuang's outhouse.

"Shuangshuang, just now I..." Yu Si Niang started to speak about her moment of weakness but was interrupted by Mu Shuangshuang.

"Mom, I'm going to see what my second aunt is up to. Don't follow me." Mu Shuangshuang followed Mrs. Lin, running after her.

The outhouse at Mu Shuangshuang's house still had one movable brick. Initially, Mu Shuangshuang planned to place some straw paper there, then realized it was unnecessary. Instead, she hung a box on the outhouse beam to hold the straw paper.

Circling around to the back of the outhouse, she removed the brick to peek at Mrs. Lin inside.

Though peeking into an outhouse might seem degrading, exceptional people require exceptional measures!

Mrs. Lin hurried into the third branch's outhouse, taking a moment to survey.

The third branch's outhouse was spacious, designed by Mu Shuangshuang, with the bathroom nearby.

Mrs. Lin's eyes landed on the box containing straw paper. Thinking there might be some treasure inside, she opened it, only to find it full of straw paper and felt disappointed, then did something even Mu Shuangshuang wouldn't have imagined in her wildest dreams.

Mrs. Lin opened her clothing at the chest and began stuffing sheets of straw paper into her undergarment one by one.

Mumbling all the while, "This little girl really is generous to have such useful straw paper. I have to take it back and use one piece a day. Good things should be shared with everyone!"

#### Chapter 610: Exposing Second Aunt's Scheme (Fourth Update)

In rural households, straw paper is indeed considered a valuable item.

People generally use bamboo pieces and wooden sticks in the outhouse. Bamboo is cut into square pieces, and after wiping, it's either washed clean in the stream for next use or replaced with new ones.

As for the wooden sticks, they are usually as thick as a wrist and can be used turn by turn after cleaning the outer bark.

Before Mu Shuangshuang earned money, she used bamboo pieces and wooden sticks, but after several attempts, her skin got scraped. Now that she indeed earned money, she went to town to buy straw paper.

Although it's not as soft as modern toilet paper, it's still better than bamboo pieces.

Mu Shuangshuang stared at Mrs. Lin, curious to see how much straw paper she intended to steal from her home.

Unexpectedly, Mrs. Lin turned out to be quite ruthless, not leaving a single piece of straw paper for the third branch, shamelessly declaring, "In the future, I'll just come to the third branch's outhouse, using all their straw paper!"

Mu Shuangshuang thought Mrs. Lin was just there for straw paper and was already prepared to rush in and beat someone up.

Who would have thought Mrs. Lin suddenly bent down and took out an oiled paper packet from her belly.

Mu Shuangshuang had long known that Mrs. Lin's belly was fake. Last time, during a fight with Mrs. Liu of the fourth branch, even after being punched in the belly, nothing happened.

But watching Mrs. Lin actually take an oiled paper packet from her belly was indeed somewhat shocking.

Even more shocking, Mu Shuangshuang watched as Mrs. Lin pulled down her underpants, opened the oiled packet, and poured its contents into her underpants.

It was chicken blood prepared by Mrs. Lin.

Having birthed several children,

It wouldn't make sense if there wasn't some blood on her pants after a miscarriage.

But having this chicken blood in her crotch was truly uncomfortable; even Mrs. Lin found it disgusting.

Let alone Mu Shuangshuang.

From the moment Mrs. Lin poured the chicken blood, the smell was overwhelming. Seeing this, if Mu Shuangshuang still hadn't figured out Mrs. Lin's intention, she'd be embarrassed to say she was a former police officer; it was just too humiliating.

In the outhouse, after Mrs. Lin was ready, she picked up her wet pants and was about to walk out. Just as she lifted the curtain, she was blocked by Mu Shuangshuang holding a wooden stick.

"Second Aunt, using my third branch's straw paper, what are you planning to do?" Mu Shuangshuang sneered, tightening her grip on the wooden stick.

Having just prepared to do something bad, yet getting caught before action, Mrs. Lin was startled.

"You... what nonsense are you talking? What straw paper? What plan?" Mrs. Lin retorted with a stiff neck, her face flushed.

"Keep pretending, but the stick in Shuangshuang's hand has no eyes." Looking at Mrs. Lin, stiff-necked even on the verge of demise, Mu Shuangshuang felt Mrs. Lin's brain was as dumb as a pig's.

"Brat, don't forget that there's a child inside me!" Mrs. Lin spoke defiantly.

At this point, her eyes scanned Mu Shuangshuang, hesitating about whether to bump into her.

"Second Aunt, you'd better save those sordid ideas. Whether you're pregnant, I may not know, but I know very well." Mu Shuangshuang said.

"You're lying. What evidence do you have? I'll tell you what, if you dare to slander me, it'll be the end between your third branch and me."

By now, Mrs. Lin was already in chaos. She believed Mu Shuangshuang knew all her secrets.

More importantly, the chicken blood she just poured started reacting, and an itch crept over her body.

After all, pouring it down there carried some risks.

"Zhang Huai Shu's diagnosis comes to mind. Weren't you not pregnant when he examined you?" Mu Shuangshuang improvised.

Speaking of this, it was indeed due to her negligence for not having verified with Zhang Huai Shu. Mainly, since the third branch had split from the family and the second branch rarely came, Mu Shuangshuang initially thought the second branch was simply being lazy, trying to eat better food.

After all, with a pregnant woman, a mother-in-law wouldn't make her daughter-in-law eat poorly.

So they let the second branch be.

Who would have guessed the second branch was here to harm them?

Did they really think the third branch was just a big shot meant for bullying?

Mrs. Lin couldn't utter a word in reply now; she looked at Mu Shuangshuang, eyes filled with fear.

This girl was here to restrain her.

"Shuang, Second Aunt was wrong. Second Aunt apologizes, this is your family's straw paper, I'm giving it back!" As Mrs. Lin spoke, she pulled out the straw paper she had stuffed in her clothes, shaking uncontrollably as she did so.

Mrs. Lin fearfully asked, "Shuangshuang, you wouldn't tell your grandma about this, would you?"

If Old Mrs. Mu found out about Mrs. Lin's fake pregnancy, her life would be over.

She might even get divorced.

Thinking of this, Mrs. Lin almost knelt to beg Mu Shuangshuang.

To hell with grudges and hatred, all Mrs. Lin wanted was to live the life of an official's wife with the first branch.

She didn't want to serve an old lady in Er Gui Village her whole life.

Mu Shuangshuang took back the straw paper one by one, placing it back in the wooden box.

Luckily, it was only for wiping, if it were food, she definitely wouldn't want it anymore.

Because it was just too disgusting!

"Second Aunt, although you did something wrong, Shuangshuang doesn't intend to be ruthless. After all, if my grandma finds out, you'll not only lose any benefit from my uncle, but even Gou Dan would call another woman mom."

Hearing this, Mrs. Lin realized she wouldn't be taken to face the old lady, so she felt a bit relieved.

"But, according to your understanding of my uncle and aunt, would they obediently take you and my second uncle to the county?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Why wouldn't they? Your uncle was nurtured by our branches. Without us, how could he have taken the exams or succeeded?" Mrs. Lin replied excitedly.

"Second Aunt, why are you so naive? If my uncle becomes a high official, would he take you? Don't forget, when they returned from Qianzhou Prefecture, what did they bring for you? Didn't they even begrudge small things, let alone give you bigger benefits?"

"Don't even mention my grandparents. At most, they'd take my grandparents along. My grandma likes my youngest aunt; in any case, it won't be the second branch's turn."

Finishing her words, Mu Shuangshuang left Mrs. Lin pale with fear.

She couldn't think of anything else but to go find the first branch for a confrontation.

The eldest brother wasn't back yet, the sister-in-law was, so she didn't believe they dared to abandon her.

"I do have a way to make Big Uncle have to take the second branch with him!" Mu Shuangshuang smiled mysteriously at Mrs. Lin.

Given the previous conversation, Mrs. Lin now treated Mu Shuangshuang's words as a lifeline.

She said, "Shuang, Second Aunt was wrong before and apologizes to you. Tell me what way it is, when Second Aunt becomes an official's wife, she'll buy you candy, how about that?"

Mu Shuangshuang snickered internally, thinking how stingy she was; even such a great favor only earned her candy.

"Alright, seeing Second Aunt's good attitude, I'll reluctantly tell you. The best method..." Mu Shuangshuang tantalized, making Mrs. Lin anxious.

"What is it? Hurry and tell me, my little ancestor..." Mrs. Lin urged.

"Use the same trick you did with me, but this time against my aunt!"