

Folly 631

Chapter 631: Regardless

After dinner, Mu Dashan went to find Mr. Mu to report the issue of Mu Xiangxiang inducing vomiting.

Mu Shuangshuang went to the latrine to confront Mu Xiangxiang.

Both sides taking action together, Xiangxiang couldn't deny it even if she wanted to.

In the Old Mu Family's courtyard, having just finished eating, Mr. Mu was walking around in the yard to aid digestion, a routine he always enjoyed.

As he got older, if he didn't eat, he'd be hungry.

When he ate too much, he'd easily feel full!

Walking a few laps in the yard was just the solution to this annoyance.

Mu Dashan entered the courtyard and quickly spotted Mr. Mu and approached him.

"Dad, I have something to tell you," said Mu Dashan.

Mr. Mu looked surprised; since the family split, the third son had never proactively approached him—why this time?

"Dad, do you know about Xiangxiang's issue? She..."

Mu Dashan told the entire story to Mr. Mu truthfully.

"Dad, Xiangxiang is still young; there's no need to do this just to eat more or maintain her figure. As you know, one's health is most crucial. She definitely won't listen to us, so you might want to talk to her."

After Mu Dashan finished, he handed over the decision-making to Mr. Mu.

The old man was utterly amazed.

Having lived most of his life, he had never heard of such a situation as Mu Dashan described.

Eating and then vomiting it out— isn't that wasting food?

The old man had always been conservative, regarding food as more valuable than anything else. The Old Mu Family's rules were typically "clean plate policy"; even leaving a grain of rice would earn a reprimand.

Now, hearing that Mu Xiangxiang was eating more than several strong men, yet ultimately vomiting it up—how could he not be shocked?

"Third son, are you sure you're talking about Xiangxiang and not someone else?"

Mr. Mu still couldn't believe it, though deep down he'd always sensed something odd about his youngest daughter.

"Dad, I wouldn't dare make this up. Come with me and see!"

With Mu Dashan leading the way, Mr. Mu followed him to the Old Mu Family's latrine.

It was just after mealtime; Mu Xiangxiang, as usual, entered the latrine, stuck a finger down her throat, followed by a bout of violent vomiting.

Outside, hearing this sound, Mr. Mu and Mu Dashan did not look pleased.

Mu Shuangshuang stood beside them, remaining silent, waiting for Mr. Mu to speak.

"Shuang, how long has your little aunt been doing this?" Mr. Mu asked in a low voice.

"I don't know. At noon, my grandma took two eggs from our third branch's chicken coop. I chased after her and saw little aunt vomiting in the kitchen's slop bucket."

While Mu Shuangshuang explained, she also brought up Old Mrs. Mu stealing her eggs.

"Shuang, about this, Grandpa owes you thanks. I'll make sure your grandma returns the eggs she took from your branch."

Saying this left Mr. Mu feeling embarrassed.

His wife, at her advanced age, resorting to such despicable acts.

Stealing even from the children—what disgrace!

Mu Shuangshuang nodded slightly, not refusing Mr. Mu's offer to return the eggs.

It wasn't about being stingy; Old Mrs. Mu's actions were just too much. If she were to take everything she wanted from the third branch, how would they survive?

"Grandpa..." Mu Shuangshuang had just opened her mouth when Mu Xiangxiang's sounds from the latrine fell silent.

It seemed she was about to emerge.

As soon as Mu Xiangxiang stepped out of the latrine, she saw the three people outside and was initially startled, then asked Mr. Mu, "Dad, what are you and my third brother, Shuang doing here? Are you all squatting in the latrine together?"

Mr. Mu's face darkened.

This girl's words—how could they be so off-putting?

"Xiangxiang, what were you doing in the latrine?"

Mu Xiangxiang said, "Pooping, what else? Dad, why are your words so sarcastic?"

"Enough! How long do you intend to keep this from me? Your mother is terrified you'll go hungry, so every day she finds ways to get you food, and you vomit it all out—who are you doing justice to?"

Mu Xiangxiang's face turned pale with fright, yet she defiantly replied, "Dad, what did you say? What vomit? I'm just having stomach trouble, went in to poop—if you want, go check!"

Mu Xiangxiang's evasive words seemed to Mr. Mu like a sign of guilt.

"You beast, still daring to lie—I heard it all. If you dare to vomit out the food you eat again, watch me not beat you to death!"

Mr. Mu was genuinely angry; he'd never spoken of beating someone to death before.

His words today were in the heat of the moment.

Mu Xiangxiang, however, took it seriously.

"Dad, it's just a few bites of your food—is it worth such a fuss? I'm your blood daughter."

Mu Xiangxiang stubbornly stuck her neck out, her eyes fixed fiercely on Mr. Mu.

"I don't care what relation you are; today you must confess everything you've been doing—tell me when you started this vile habit and who taught you."

Mu Xiangxiang spent most of her time in town, and growing up, she'd never even worked in the fields.

If she was engaged in these actions, it must have been learned from someone in town.

"Dad, I don't know what you're talking about—I didn't do it!"

Mu Xiangxiang refused to admit it on the pain of death, knowing that if she did, she wouldn't escape severe punishment.

"Then today I'll beat you to death!"

Mr. Mu had barely finished his sentence when his pipe struck sharply against Mu Xiangxiang's wrist.

"Ouch—it hurts!"

Mu Xiangxiang's wrist was red from the hit; she screamed at the top of her lungs.

The shout brought Old Mrs. Mu out from the main room where she was scolding Mrs. Liu. Mrs. Liu had gone to the Liu Family Village, claiming it was her mother's birthday, which had angered Old Mrs. Mu.

Anyone leaving during the harvest season was suspected of laziness.

She cursed for half a day, leaving Mrs. Liu with a red face and teary eyes.

Hearing her daughter's voice, she ignored Mrs. Liu kneeling on the ground and rushed out.

As Mr. Mu's second hit went down, Old Mrs. Mu charged up like her backside was on fire and snatched the pipe from Mr. Mu's hand, smashing it against a stone near the latrine.

With a snap, the pipe broke into two pieces.

Old Mrs. Mu didn't care about any of this.

"You old fool, what are you doing? How dare you hit my daughter—what did Xiangxiang do to you?"

Old Mrs. Mu was full of anger, speaking like a machine gun, firing relentlessly at Mr. Mu.

Mr. Mu's face looked more and more displeased.

"Your precious daughter ate enough for three strong men; do you even know where her food goes?"

"Where else could it go, if not out the other end? You old fellow, how can you be so stingy—being able to eat is a blessing, our daughter has loved eating since she was small, and what good does it do you to stop her now?"

Old Mrs. Mu didn't ask for reasons, instead just blaming Mr. Mu.

"A doting mother spoils the child; this beast vomits everything up by sticking her fingers down her throat—she's playing with her life!"

Eating just to vomit it up from the mouth.

Old Mrs. Mu looked like she'd been struck by lightning.

She said, "Old fellow, are you crazy? Why would Xiangxiang vomit after eating so much? Who's been deceiving you to harm our Xiangxiang? I'm telling you, Xiangxiang is my treasure—you won't harm her!"

Chapter 632: Betrothal on December 12

"Are you out of your mind? Which family's daughter eats as much as she does? Which daughter goes straight to the latrine after eating? Ask her yourself, what good deed has she done?"

Mr. Mu's attitude was not good.

The fact of the matter was, Mu Xiangxiang had gone too far.

"What good deed has my daughter done?" Old Mrs. Mu put her hands on her hips and demanded.

Mu Xiangxiang, knowing that Old Mrs. Mu was backing her, retorted directly.

"Mom, Dad listened to what my third brother said, claiming I've thrown up everything I've eaten. Do you think Xiangxiang would do such a thing?"

My third brother's family is just jealous that the eldest brother has succeeded in the examinations, and that we are about to live a good life, which is why they're like this."

Old Mrs. Mu believed Mu Xiangxiang's words without a doubt and launched into a tirade against Mu Dashan.

"You ungrateful third child, I raised you this big, not expecting you to care for me in old age, nor do I expect you to be nice to your sister, but you can't harm your sister like this.

I shouldn't have let you marry Yu Si Niang in the first place; I would rather you stayed a bachelor for life than bring such a meddlesome, disruptive woman into the family."

"Mom, you can talk about me, but don't talk about Si Niang. As for what's happened today, whether Xiangxiang did it or not, she knows herself. If you don't believe it, then forget it, we're leaving the third branch!"

Mu Dashan was also full of anger.

He had come in good faith to tell his parents that their little sister might be in trouble.

And the result? Not only was his mother not grateful,

but she also insulted his wife right in front of him.

Mu Shuangshuang was also furious, Old Mrs. Mu's words were too venomous, her mother hadn't even been there, yet she was indiscriminately involved.

"Grandpa, what my dad says, I say too. We've told you about it, how you deal with it is your business, the third branch won't care.

As for what Grandma said, Shuangshuang doesn't agree. The third branch would be nowhere near as good without Mom!"

Having said that, Mu Shuangshuang grabbed Mu Dashan and left in anger.

Mr. Mu was also extremely angry; the way Old Mrs. Mu spoke, not to mention that the third branch couldn't stand it and left, he couldn't stand it either.

"Xiangxiang's mom, this is all your doing. Since you don't let me discipline Xiangxiang, you'll be responsible for whatever happens in the future!"

After leaving harsh words, Mr. Mu walked back to his room without looking back.

Old Mrs. Mu didn't care about all this; her daughter looked perfectly healthy, without any problems, so what could possibly happen?

"Xiangxiang, if your third brother bothers you again in the future, tell me, and I promise I won't be polite to him," Old Mrs. Mu said.

"Mm-hmm, Mom treats Xiangxiang the best." Mu Xiangxiang nodded heavily, her face full of smugness.

"Mom, I'm hungry again?" Mu Xiangxiang pouted, looking pitiful.

"Okay, okay, Mom will make you something delicious right away. What do you want to eat?" Old Mrs. Mu asked.

"Lard, I want dishes cooked with lard, and also meat. Didn't you save half a bowl of meat for the evening? Xiangxiang wants to eat it."

Mu Xiangxiang managed to bring up all of Old Mrs. Mu's secret stash.

"Okay, Mom will go prepare it now!"

Old Mrs. Mu cooked a big pot of noodles for Mu Xiangxiang, and after finishing the noodles, not long after, Mu Xiangxiang naturally went to the latrine again, vomiting heavily.

After vomiting, Old Mrs. Mu had prepared hot water for Mu Xiangxiang, and only after resting for a while did she go to sleep.

Mu Shuangshuang returned to the third branch, still angry, not for anything else but because of Old Mrs. Mu's unreasonable nature.

Forget it, this old lady is so malicious; she'll suffer for it eventually.

"Shuangshuang's father, Shuangshuang, what happened with that matter?"

Yu Si Niang hadn't gone there and didn't know what had happened, so she was curious.

"Mom, Grandma thinks we're lying; Grandpa can't control Grandma. That's how it is, and from now on we'll just act as if we don't know," Mu Shuangshuang said.

Yu Si Niang regretted this in her heart for a while but soon returned to normal.

Their family didn't want to harm anyone, but they couldn't wake up someone pretending to be asleep.

"I understand, Mom won't talk about it anymore. It's getting late, you should accompany Yuanfeng!"

Returning to the main topic, Yu Si Niang urged Mu Shuangshuang to walk Lu Yuanfeng, mainly to let the two of them build their relationship.

A husband and wife should speak often, talk more.

These two kids should interact more.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't understand Yu Si Niang's intention, but still escorted Lu Yuanfeng to the outside of the courtyard.

Tonight, there was no moonlight, and it was dark everywhere. One could only barely see ahead by the faint glimmer of each household's oil lamps.

After washing up, Yuanbao walked at the front, feeling refreshed. He occasionally looked back at his second brother and Shuangshuang, trying to figure out what was going on.

Unfortunately, Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Shuangshuang were both quiet.

Just outside the courtyard, Lu Yuanfeng wouldn't let Mu Shuangshuang walk further.

"It's too dark, you stay here, and hurry back!"

Mu Shuangshuang nodded at the pitch-dark night sky.

Just as she was about to speak, she felt the blackness intensify before her, and a warm body leaned in.

Mu Shuangshuang felt a pair of hands on her waist, and Lu Yuanfeng lowered his voice to ask, "Shuangshuang, can I kiss you?"

It was something Lu Yuanfeng had wanted to do for a long time.

Back when they were catching the thief, he hurriedly picked her up.

In his mind, he was only thinking of Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang's body softened.

She smiled and imitated Lu Yuanfeng's tone, lowering her voice: "Okay, but you must be gentle!"

Mu Shuangshuang didn't want her lips to be swollen by this silly boy again.

As soon as the words were spoken, Lu Yuanfeng's lips pressed down, with a jelly-like softness, letting Mu Shuangshuang completely relax.

After the kiss ended, both Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng's faces were red.

Especially Lu Yuanfeng, who used his thumb to rub his lips, as if there was still a scent of Mu Shuangshuang lingering there.

"Shuangshuang, I'm leaving. Rest early tonight, cover yourself well, and remember to soak your feet before bed."

These were things Lu Yuanfeng never followed himself, yet he reminded Mu Shuangshuang daily.

Every time, Lu Yuanfeng never found it tedious.

On the contrary, he found it especially fulfilling to be able to remind Shuangshuang to do something.

"Got it, you too, soak your feet before bed, don't kick the covers, and that little brat Yuanbao, too, sleeps so restlessly."

Mu Shuangshuang took naps with Yuanbao, and it would be a crosswise battle; before sleep he was on the bed, and when he woke up, he could be on the floor.

Reluctantly, they parted ways.

Mu Shuangshuang returned to the kitchen, where the oil lamps hadn't yet been extinguished, and Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan were still having a private conversation.

Mu Shuangshuang leaned closer and heard words like auspicious date.

She guessed it was about her engagement to Yuanfeng.

Being one of the people involved, she didn't go in. She faintly heard the date was the twelfth of the twelfth lunar month, a double day.

Thinking about it, it really felt like time flew.

When she first arrived, she had nothing, but now life was good, the third branch even bought land, and come spring, Yuanbao and Xiao Han would be sent to study.

Chapter 633: Borrowing Money

Mu Shuangshuang secretly noted down her goals, intending to achieve them one by one.

Once the two kids started school, she planned to open a restaurant in town to earn more money.

As she pondered, she gradually got sleepy.

After washing up, Mu Shuangshuang went to sleep.

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Lu Yuanfeng returned home, surprised to see a lamp lit at the door.

Upon closer inspection, he realized it was lit by his grandmother, Old Lady Lu.

Since the last time Lu Yuanfeng had Mr. Mu write the severance letter, Old Lady Lu hadn't come around.

This time, who knows why she came.

Old Lady Lu was delighted to see Lu Yuanfeng and Yuanbao, and she approached them, saying to Lu Yuanfeng, "Fengzi, you're finally back. I've been waiting for you for a long time."

Lu Yuanfeng's face showed no emotion, but the familiar call of "grandmother" still moved him somewhat.

Especially Yuanbao.

After all, it was Old Lady Lu who raised him, and Yuanbao still had some affection for her.

However, to avoid making things difficult for Lu Yuanfeng, Yuanbao stood still, looking at Old Lady Lu with wide eyes.

"Do you need something?"

Waiting all evening like this, Lu Yuanfeng didn't think his grandmother was just there to chat.

Lu Yuanfeng's distant attitude saddened Old Lady Lu, but she didn't show it.

"I heard from your fourth aunt that you spent the whole day working for the Third Branch of the Old Mu Family, and she couldn't manage on her own, so she asked you for help, but you ignored her."

Old Lady Lu's intention wasn't actually to blame Fengzi; she just couldn't think of any other topic.

Her visit today was pretty awkward, too.

Mr. Lu fell ill, but none of the family members were willing to pay for his treatment, even though they had invested a lot in marrying off Lu Zizhang, the fourth son, and the Fourth Branch turned their backs on them.

Now, none of the branches were willing to contribute money for Mr. Lu.

But the chickens, ducks, and fields at home had all been divided among a few people, leaving Mr. and Old Lady Lu with only two or three acres of poor-quality land.

Low yield aside, none of the children helped with harvesting.

Old Lady Lu's feet had been bound since childhood, she never worked in the fields, and the only person she could rely on was Mr. Lu.

Who knew that after falling ill, he couldn't get up?

Therefore, Old Lady Lu thought about borrowing some money from Lu Yuanfeng.

"You actually believe what Fourth Aunt Lu said?" Lu Yuanfeng didn't bother to explain further.

During the day, he indeed ran into his fourth aunt.

But she hadn't been polite about asking for help; instead, she'd scolded Shuangshuang, accusing her of bewitching Lu Yuanfeng, making him work only for the Third Branch.

After scolding, she still demanded that Lu Yuanfeng help the Fourth Branch with work.

Lu Yuanfeng simply refused, not retaliating, which was already being gracious.

So, Fourth Aunt Lu was indeed making trouble.

"Fengzi, it's not that grandmother doesn't trust you or came to blame you. If you think that girl from the Third Branch of the Old Mu Family is good, just marry her. Grandmother won't object.

This time, grandmother's here just to ask if you could lend me some money. Your grandfather fell ill and is bedridden. He knows he was wrong about the past; he shouldn't have..."

"Enough, grandmother. I don't want to talk about this, and you shouldn't bring it up. As for the money, Fengzi can't lend it!

You can ask my fourth uncle for money; after all, it was for his wedding that they sold my mother."

Lu Yuanfeng spoke frankly. If he talked about emotions, when he first returned and saw his grandmother had raised Yuanbao, he was grateful back then.

At that time, he was willing to pour his heart out and wasn't bothered by whatever his grandfather said, no matter how unpleasant.

"Your fourth aunt controls the family's money and doesn't lend a single cent; your grandfather can't borrow any money!" There was a quiver in Old Lady Lu's voice.

She was genuinely out of options.

"So you think I should be the one to provide it? Grandmother, you should know my nature: for those who treat me well, I'd give my all, but if someone harms the one I care about the most, I wouldn't be polite.

I have no ties with the Old Lu Family anymore. If you need help, you should ask my fourth uncle and aunt. Everything happened because of their marriage.

Now, it's also the time for them to show filial piety to you and my grandfather. Also, I don't have money; all the money is saved for Yuanbao's schooling and my own marriage."

Lu Yuanfeng didn't hide his plans to get married.

After all, it's something they would know sooner or later.

Old Lady Lu seemed struck by a heavy blow, and her whole demeanor sagged.

So, it really can't be done.

If Fengzi doesn't help, who else will?

"Fengzi, just think of this as grandmother begging you. Help your grandfather this time. Once he's better, I'll return it to you immediately."

Lu Yuanfeng's eyes wandered across the courtyard to his own house.

He suddenly said, "Grandmother, did my mother beg my grandfather not to sell her back then?"

Old Lady Lu's body slumped, staring at this familiar yet unfamiliar grandson, letting out a long sigh before picking up the oil lamp and slowly returning to the Old Lu Family.

Just from looking at Old Lady Lu's silhouette, one could sense the bleakness.

But without doing this, how could Lu Yuanfeng have ended the matter?

Once Old Lady Lu left, Yuanbao had something to say.

"Second brother, actually my grandmother doesn't have it easy either. The aunts have always scolded her, and Fourth Aunt even hit grandmother.

Grandfather has a terrible temper, and I don't want to save him, but he is my grandfather. If we don't save him, grandmother will be heartbroken, and I will also feel uneasy."

Children have a straightforward sense of perception.

Helping or not helping, it's not about one's own benefit but about whether the people they care about are doing well.

"But grandfather wanted to sell mother!"

Lu Yuanfeng wondered why he was reasoning with a child, and he regretted it as soon as the words left his mouth.

"But even so, I believe that if mother were here, she would help grandfather too," said Yuanbao.

However, this did remind Lu Yuanfeng.

His mother was a kind person, good to everyone.

If she were here now, she would surely think like Yuanbao.

"So, will second brother go to Grandpa Zhang tomorrow, okay?" Lu Yuanfeng asked.

"No, we must make Fourth Uncle and Aunt suffer. Fourth Aunt used to beat and scold me the most, and I've never made her suffer."

Lu Yuanfeng couldn't help but laugh.

This kid still remembered those past grievances.

"Alright, let's deal with Fourth Uncle and Aunt first, but for this matter, we need to find Sister Shuangshuang; she's the best at this!"

When it came to this kind of cleverness, Lu Yuanfeng considered himself no match for Mu Shuangshuang.

"It's getting late, let's get back to sleep!"

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The next day, the sun shone brightly, and it was another lively day in Er Gui Village. Everyone hurriedly climbed out of bed, afraid of falling behind.

The Old Mu Family members were also as energized as ever, running even faster than rabbits, finishing breakfast as soon as it hit the table.

No one knew whether it was because of the work or for some other purpose, but regardless of the reason, Mr. Mu was happy to see it.

Early in the morning, Mu Shuangshuang received two eggs sent by Mrs. Liu from the fourth branch, as instructed by Mr. Mu.

Although she didn't know how they came, Mu Shuangshuang happily accepted them and made egg custard to boost the health of the three children.

Chapter 634: Uncle Returns Triumphantly (Part 1)

After breakfast, the people from the Third Branch of the Old Mu Family continued to work in the fields.

Mu Dashan stayed at home to raise pigs and chickens, and cleaned the house while he was at it.

Today, they were harvesting the three acres of second-grade land bought from the Old Mu Family, according to the rules of Er Gui Village, the rice was harvested by Lu Yuanfeng.

After the harvest, half of the grain had to be stored in the Old Mu Family's warehouse,

which is why Mu Shuangshuang went to the field, but before she could say a few words to Lu Yuanfeng, Old Mrs. Mu came personally to supervise.

No need to ask, she was obviously afraid that the Third Branch would hide the grain.

As soon as Mu Shuangshuang thought of this, Old Mrs. Mu put her hands on her hips and said, "Old Third's wife, I'm watching you. Don't even think about colluding with outsiders to cheat us out of the Old Mu Family's rice."

Yu Si Niang's face immediately turned unpleasant.

She opened her mouth and said, "Mother, what kind of person I am, don't you know? I would never do such a thing."

Yu Si Niang was full of grievances, she had been supervised by Old Mrs. Mu while working before, but never as bluntly as now being told not to mess around.

"I don't care about so many things, anyway I'm watching, so you can't do anything even if you want to."

Old Mrs. Mu spat thick phlegm in Yu Si Niang's direction, but Mu Shuangshuang quickly pulled Yu Si Niang away, otherwise it would have landed on her face.

Mu Shuangshuang felt utterly nauseated.

Old Mrs. Mu had a habit of spitting on people's faces, and many suffered because of her.

"Mother, you go work over there, Shuangshuang will be here." Mu Shuangshuang pointed towards the distant ridge.

Yu Si Niang hesitated for a moment but walked over according to Mu Shuangshuang's direction.

Old Mrs. Mu stood on the slope, buzzing around like a fly behind Mu Shuangshuang, constantly babbling; if Mu Shuangshuang left a single stalk of rice, Old Mrs. Mu would think it was intentional.

Mu Shuangshuang couldn't stand the noise anymore and finally spoke up, "Grandmother, you've been nagging all morning. If you have nothing to do, can you stop nagging behind me?"

You standing here doesn't mean more grain will appear on an acre of land."

Of course, Old Mrs. Mu was furious.

"You little brat, watch me beat you to death!"

Upon saying that, Old Mrs. Mu jumped off the slope.

Only she jumped down too hurriedly, twisted her foot, and there's a cracking sound from the bone.

Old Mrs. Mu cried out in pain, "Oh... my foot, my foot hurts so much..."

Old Mrs. Mu called out loudly, and suddenly Mrs. Liu appeared on the slope.

She almost ran over, arriving breathlessly in front of Old Mrs. Mu.

But before she could speak, Old Mrs. Mu began to curse.

"You lazy woman, the housework isn't done yet, Xiangxiang isn't taken care of, and you dare come out to slack off?"

Mrs. Liu was full of grievances and replied, "Mother, big brother came back, and he's moving things into the house, just as you said... to inform you if anything is happening at home."

As soon as Mrs. Liu finished speaking, she was pushed aside by Old Mrs. Mu, who then frantically ran towards the Old Mu Family, showing no signs of having twisted her foot.

Mrs. Liu fell into the field, head first, legs in the air, and it was Mu Shuangshuang who helped her up.

"Fourth Aunt, are you okay?" Mu Shuangshuang asked concernedly.

Mrs. Liu shook her head, pale-faced.

"I'm fine, Shuangshuang, I'll go back to wash clothes now, you and your mother take care of yourselves, don't overwork."

"Fourth Aunt, you'd better not go back now. My uncle has returned, and later the other people from the Old Mu Family will follow, you should take this opportunity to rest for a while, my grandmother won't notice your absence." Mu Shuangshuang suggested.

"Can I... really?" Mrs. Liu asked hesitantly.

Returning from Liu Family Village last night, Mrs. Liu was scolded by Old Mrs. Mu for two whole hours, non-stop, with different curses, if not for Xiangxiang calling out later,

Mrs. Liu would definitely have been scolded to death last night.

"Of course you can! Listen to Shuangshuang, find a cool place to rest." Mu Shuangshuang said.

"I better not rest, I'll help you work." Mrs. Liu went down to the field, wanting to harvest rice with Mu Shuangshuang.

"No, Fourth Aunt, work in the Old Mu Family is divided into tasks now. It's better for you to help my Fourth Uncle, when the work is done, he can rest with Xiaxia."

Mu Shuangshuang didn't want Mrs. Liu helping with her family's work.

Knowing Old Mrs. Mu's temper, if she found out, she definitely wouldn't show Mrs. Liu a good face.

Mrs. Liu was embarrassed, but she still did as Mu Shuangshuang suggested and went to find the other people from the Old Mu Family.

As Mrs. Liu left, she naturally told the others about Mu Dade's return.

As a result, everyone threw down their scythes and stopped working.

"Father, let's go back, big brother is back."

No one was more excited than Mu Danyan.

His big brother's return must have brought good news.

He could look forward to living a good life along with him.

Mu Dazhong and Mrs. Lin exchanged a glance, wondering if they should come back after lunch.

Last night, neither of them got the work done, Mu Dazhong had a sudden diarrhea, and by the time his stomach was settled, it was too dark to see anything, Mrs. Lin was afraid Mu Dazhong might hold onto a snake or something else.

So she suggested continuing at noon the next day, but unexpectedly, Mu Dade returned today.

With Mu Dade back, who had the mood for work?

"I'll head back, you all stay here, whoever finishes first can leave!"

Mr. Mu solemnly glanced at the others in the field, giving his orders.

He was not senile; he knew that the Old Mu Family's children had been working diligently recently and didn't want to disrupt their rhythm.

The other people of the Old Mu Family looked at one another.

Full of complaints, yet unable to voice them.

With hands behind his back, Mr. Mu walked proudly towards home.

Passing a few field slopes, he encountered some questions.

Mr. Mu smiled and said, "My son Dade is back, I have to go see what's up."

The villagers looked enviously at the direction Mr. Mu left, filled with jealousy.

Everyone thought: Why don't I have such a successful son? Even if he only succeeds at thirty-something, I'd still be willing!

However, on the other hand, they cursed the Old Mu Family, wishing for their early downfall.

Poverty, everyone should be poor together, why should the Old Mu Family live a good life?

In the Old Mu Family's field, as Mr. Mu's figure disappeared, Mu Danyan climbed up from the slope,

he said, "From today on, I won't work, whoever wants to work can go ahead!"

Mu Danyan knew very well that once Mu Dade returned, everything had to be recalculated, and he had a hold on his own brother's secret.

Including his Honghong, who could return home now.

He was used to having someone on the kang every day, and now that Chen Hong was sent away, Mu Danyan felt uncomfortable.

Luckily, Chen Hong also knew his brother's secret, they could join forces, and made some silver to spend.

Mu Danyan climbed the slope and on his way, he looked up at the sky until he reached the Old Mu Family.

Chapter 635: The Old Man Was Humiliated

Mu Danian left, and the others couldn't sit still either.

Mrs. Lin nudged Mu Dazhong.

"Daddy Gou Dan, let's take the kids and leave. This work isn't for people."

At this moment, Mrs. Lin felt that holding a sickle was an insult to herself.

Mu Dazhong thought for a moment, then imitated Mu Danian by throwing the sickle heavily on the ground,

he shouted, "Qing, Gou Dan, let's go with your father and mother to enjoy life, we're not doing this crappy work anymore!"

The kids didn't want to work in the first place, so as soon as Mu Dazhong spoke, they started to run wildly.

Soon, only the fourth branch's Mu Dajiang, Mu Xiaxia, and Mrs. Liu were left on the field ridge.

Xiao Chu was only three years old, not an age for work, so Old Mrs. Mu didn't let him come out to work.

Plus, Mrs. Liu was usually at home cooking, washing clothes, making it easier to take care of the children.

"Daddy Xiaxia, should we also leave?" asked Mrs. Liu, glancing at the second branch that had already gone far.

"Forget it, everyone is rushing to see Big Brother, and he might not even care about them. Let's finish the work here and rest with dignity!"

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Old Mu Family

Mr. Mu hurried home, the mud on his legs and face was not yet cleaned.

When he rushed into his own main room, he saw that many people had come to his home.

Mu Dade was wearing fine silk, sitting in the central position, chatting with these people.

Those people surrounded Mu Dade, flattering him with their expressions.

These were all Mu Dade's schoolmates over the years, of all ages.

The youngest was just over ten, the oldest already in their thirties or forties.

Everyone had a similar aim to Mu Dade, working hard all these years to become a scholar, then go to the Capital for the Imperial Examination, followed by the Palace Examination to see the Holy Emperor.

This is the dream of many scholars for a lifetime; even if they don't achieve an official position in the end, just meeting the current Holy Emperor would be enough in this life.

"Dade, you're really amazing. When we studied together back then, none of us were as good as you."

said a well-dressed middle-aged man.

Mu Dade smiled broadly: "This matter isn't really about my brilliance, but over the years, I've repeatedly reviewed and learned, combined with the good teaching of my teacher, that's how I became a scholar."

Mu Dade was all drama when boasting.

The crowd praised him again, and Mu Dade was almost flying with joy.

Suddenly someone pointed at Mr. Mu and said, "Who's this old man? Why is he barging into someone else's home?"

"He's so dark and filthy, he must be some beggar here for the excitement," another man echoed.

Mu Dade's classmates generally came from decent families.

After all, to afford education, one would need a few taels of silver each year, which wasn't available to most families.

Everyone knew Mu Dade's home was in the countryside, but Mu Dade always said his parents were old and resting in the countryside.

His siblings never enjoyed studying since childhood and had to rely on farming, so no one expected Mr. Mu to be farming, especially not showing up in such a dusty manner.

Mu Dade's expression wasn't good.

After all, today was the day these schoolmates came to his house to congratulate him.

"Hey, old man, don't embarrass yourself here. There's no place for you to spectate. If something goes wrong, you can't afford to pay!"

Mr. Mu was so angry his lips twisted.

Being driven out from his own home, called a beggar, he opened his mouth and said, "What are you all talking about? I'm Dade's..."

Mr. Mu had just opened his mouth when Mu Dade interrupted: "That's my uncle, I hired him to work for my parents. Don't worry about him, I'll take him to freshen up!"

After speaking, Mu Dade stood up and walked towards Mr. Mu.

Mr. Mu looked utterly stunned.

He had never expected his own son to disown him, especially in front of so many people.

"Eldest..." Mr. Mu just started to speak when Mu Dade pushed him out.

Outside, Mu Dade hurriedly said, "Dad, why didn't you dress properly before coming out? Dressed so raggedly, what would those people think of me as a scholar?"

Do you want them to think I'm mistreating you and mom? Want them to think poorly of my character?"

Mu Dade questioned Mr. Mu.

Mr. Mu suddenly felt a bit sad for some reason.

Back when they arranged a match for Fifth, the entire Old Mu Family attended, including the third branch.

Only the fourth branch wasn't present, his old wife said the fourth branch didn't have a new piece of clothing, dressed like that, they would definitely be laughed at.

At that time, Mr. Mu didn't think much of it.

In hindsight, he felt he was excessive.

But things were already like this, and he didn't want to affect the eldest.

"Eldest, I'll go change right away, clean up nicely, and later you can tell your schoolmates that I am your dad, okay?"

Mr. Mu had just one scholar son in his life, and he wanted to show off a bit in front of everyone.

"No way! Dad, do you think everyone is an idiot? I just introduced you as my uncle, now saying you're my dad, people will surely think I'm lying, perhaps they won't even associate with me in the future.

So, you don't have to change your clothes, just wash the mud off and help mom in the kitchen. The front hall is covered by Dan Dan's mother and me."

Just as Mu Dade finished speaking, someone inside the house shouted.

"Brother Da De, come quickly~"

Mu Dade rushed back inside, not forgetting to instruct Mr. Mu beforehand: "Dad, tell the second brother and them to restrain themselves too, preferably not to come to the front hall's main room today, my schoolmates will leave by afternoon."

Also, kill two old hens for lunch, one for soup, one for frying dry, it's best if we ask Third Sister-in-law to make it, she's a good cook."

Mr. Mu felt uneasy inside.

As if he was suddenly drained of all energy.

And Mu Dade didn't care whether he heard it or not.

He went inside and chatted with a few classmates.

Naturally, the crowd brought it up.

"Brother Da De, why was that person in your home earlier?"

Mu Dade smiled awkwardly: "My uncle never married and has no one to care for him at home. I used to give him some silver every month for living expenses,

you might not know, but it's harvest time recently, the busiest time for farmers, my family has almost a hundred acres of land and no one to work it, so I thought of paying him."

When Mu Dade mentioned a hundred acres of land, the crowd drew a sharp breath.

Nowadays, land is a rare commodity, worth several taels of silver per acre.

Nearly a hundred acres, just the land alone was worth several hundred taels of silver.

"Brother Da De, your family is really wealthy, impressive, admirable!"

This is how literati and poets socialize; either you flatter me or I flatter you, or write poetry together.

It's clear these people came to flatter Mu Dade and cozy up to him today.

Mu Dade looked utterly content; this was the life he felt he should be living.

Chapter 636: Various Reprimands

Mr. Mu fetched a bucket of water in the kitchen, washed the mud off himself, and sat alone in the yard, smoking dry tobacco.

After a few puffs, his entire demeanor seemed noticeably more haggard.

After a while, Mu Danian hurried back.

He was in such a rush, like his eyebrows were on fire, that he ran straight to the main room, completely missing Mr. Mu under the big willow tree in the yard.

It was only when Mr. Mu called out to him that Mu Danian stopped in his tracks.

"Fifth, your father has a few words to say to you..."

Mr. Mu explained to Mu Danian the importance of not addressing him incorrectly later.

Originally, he hoped for a few comforting words from Mu Danian, but instead, Mu Danian bluntly said, "Dad, my older brother makes sense. He's a scholar now, and with so many classmates around, of course, he wants to save face.

You say you're in a hurry to come back, but you should at least change into clean clothes. What if my brother becomes a high official—shouldn't he maintain some decorum?"

Mr. Mu remained silent, only deepening his smoking actions.

The old man felt wronged but couldn't find a reason for his grievance.

He could only suffer in silence.

When the second branch arrived, the situation was similar; they reprimanded Mr. Mu and then went home to get dressed up.

The fourth branch was the last to return, coming back filthy, resembling Mr. Mu.

Mr. Mu explained the situation clearly as well.

Mu Dajiang showed some displeasure on his face.

"Dad, we of the fourth branch won't go to our brother's place. Later, we won't ask for chicken to eat; just having a bowl of porridge will do. Don't be too upset, go inside and rest!"

"Yes, Dad, though you won't get sun under the big tree, it's close to the ground. If you absorb moisture, it won't be good for your health."

Mrs. Liu was also very concerned about Mr. Mu, but they ultimately didn't speak a word against Mu Dade.

Right now, the entire family relied on Mu Dade for support—who dared to speak against him?

The warmth lingered in the old man's heart, but he still sat under the big tree, unwilling to move an inch.

The fourth branch had no choice and went to their own house to rest.

Mrs. Liu stayed for a while, then continued washing the family's clothes, with Mu Xiaxia helping her out. The mother and daughter worked diligently.

Over at the third branch, without Old Mrs. Mu watching over them, everyone worked a lot faster.

By the end of the morning, Mu Shuangshuang and Yu Si Niang had managed to handle almost an acre of land. Estimating that they would need one more afternoon and another morning, the Old Mu Family's three acres would be harvested completely.

Standing on the ridge between fields, looking at the piles of rice, Yu Si Niang felt deeply satisfied.

She never expected Shuangshuang and Fengzi to work so hard that even an adult couldn't compete with either of the children.

"I'll be cooking at midday, let me know if there's anything you want to eat," she called as she prepared to leave to start cooking.

For the past few days, the meals were all prepared by Yu Si Niang, who usually left their working area early to cook, so when the food was ready, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng would return.

"Mom, I want meat, braised pork, and pork stewed with vermicelli, or perhaps you could make some potstickers..." Mu Shuangshuang listed out dishes, waiting for Yu Si Niang to make them.

"And Fengzi? Any requests?" Yu Si Niang asked.

"Aunt, I'm easy, whatever Shuangshuang wants, I'll have the same!"

Lu Yuanfeng answered casually, but to Shuangshuang, it seemed like he truly wasn't picky, eating whatever was offered.

"Alright then, you two should come back soon. We don't mind what we're doing at the moment, we've got plenty of time." Yu Si Niang remarked.

Yu Si Niang clearly understood how hard the two kids were working.

She wished the children would follow her early each day. But both had their own thoughts; her words didn't change a thing.

However, Lu Yuanfeng really would return early today, as he needed to visit Zhang Huai Shu to inquire about his grandpa's condition.

After Yu Si Niang left, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng hid their sickles and such in the fields.

Before leaving, Mu Shuangshuang walked around the rice paddy, noting the positioning of the rice in the field.

That way, if anyone tampered with it, she would definitely notice and avoid being kept in the dark.

On their way back, they didn't say a word, but both had smiles on their faces.

Lu Yuanfeng occasionally sneaked a glance at Mu Shuangshuang, his eyes full of affection.

At Zhang Huai Shu's house, the old man happened to be in his yard drying herbs, not noticing the two of them.

Not until they entered the yard did Zhang Huai Shu become aware.

"Oh, Little Shuang, Little Feng, come, come! I've just made something delicious for you, come in and have a taste," Zhang Huai Shu paused his herb drying, raising his voice to welcome them.

"What good stuff, Grandpa Zhang? Long time no see, you look much younger!" Mu Shuangshuang stepped closer, full of curiosity.

"You cheeky little girl, such sweet words. Seems like I didn't invite you to taste good food in vain today!" Zhang Huai Shu chuckled at Mu Shuangshuang, his eyes playfully watching Lu Yuanfeng.

"Grandpa Zhang, what is it exactly? Tell me, it's not fair to keep me in such suspense." Mu Shuangshuang spoke softly.

Zhang Huai Shu laughed heartily, saying, "Yesterday, a patient I cured gifted me a black-boned chicken. I stewed it with herbs for a whole morning; it's just about ready."

Afraid Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng wouldn't recognize the treasure, Zhang Huai Shu elaborated, "Black-boned chicken is a great tonic, and with several kinds of herbs added, not just anyone gets to eat it!"

Hearing this, Mu Shuangshuang's anticipation only grew.

Inside the house, Cui Shi had just placed the black-boned chicken on the table and beamed when she saw Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng.

"Oh my, it's a rare guest indeed today. Just in time for the black-boned chicken, I'll fetch you some bowls."

Cui Shi turned to the cabinet, pulled out two bowls, two sets of chopsticks, rinsed them in hot water, and handed them to Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng.

"Grandpa Zhang, what illness does my grandpa have?" Lu Yuanfeng asked about Old Sir Lu while sipping the chicken soup.

"It's nothing much really, just a minor cold. But since it's summer and he delayed it too long, this time it hit harder. I've prescribed two sets of herbs for your grandma to cook twice daily for him.

As long as he takes the medicine on time and rests, it shouldn't be a big problem. Don't worry, I've reminded your grandma to take good care of him."

"Thank you, Grandpa Zhang. If any further costs arise for the treatment, just tell me!" Lu Yuanfeng said.

Zhang Huai Shu nodded, his admiration for Lu Yuanfeng growing even more.

Zhang Huai Shu considered Lu Yuanfeng to be a remarkably good kid.

He had come to him early in the morning, asking for treatment for Old Sir Lu, even paying in advance to ensure no delay in treatment.

Zhang Huai Shu also knew very well about the things Old Sir Lu had done in the family.

What the old man did was indeed excessive; Feng had every reason not to help him. Who wouldn't be angry with such excessive behavior from the old man?

Chapter 637: Dogs Don't Despise Poverty

"Alright, alright, it's midday, let's not talk about illness. Fengzi, you and Shuangshuang eat more, enjoy the silky chicken, don't be too polite. It's rare to have such a good chance."

Cui Family couldn't help but remind them seeing how courteous the two were.

"Thank you, Grandma Cui."

Mu Shuangshuang smiled sweetly but still didn't touch the large bowl of silky chicken on the table.

Being invited was already such a special happiness, eating to her heart's content, Mu Shuangshuang would feel embarrassed.

Cui Family took chopsticks and picked up a chicken leg, placed it into Mu Shuangshuang's bowl, and said reproachfully, "What's with the politeness, child? Look how skinny you are!"

As she spoke, she squeezed Mu Shuangshuang's hand, which was lacking much meat, full of distress on her face.

Without Zhang Huai Shu and Cui Family's children around, plus truly liking Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, during each visit, she would shower Mu Shuangshuang with lots of care.

Mu Shuangshuang was also grateful.

"Fengzi too, it's the time to grow, this chicken leg is for you!"

Thus, the two chicken legs ended up in Fengzi's and Shuangshuang's bowls.

Zhang Huai Shu didn't say anything, just foolishly watched Cui Family and smiled.

This couple is the loving exemplar in the village. Zhang Huai Shu often goes out for visits, whereas Cui Family manages the household at home.

All the earnings are handed over, never fighting, this alone surpasses many in the village.

After drinking two bowls of soup, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng felt quite full. Despite Cui Family's insistence, they didn't drink anymore.

After bidding farewell to Zhang Huai Shu, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng didn't rush back but headed to the mountains to have a look.

These days, both were busy.

Lu Yuanfeng relied on hunting for a living, and at most, every two days, he had to check the mountains to see footprints, where large animals might be encountered; these he must know well.

Otherwise, he wouldn't be so confident on each mountain trip.

Familiarity with a place comes from a thousand walks, imprinting those places in the mind.

Mu Shuangshuang stayed at a place collecting wood ears, picked some wet ones, it had been autumn for quite a while, the wild vegetables in the mountains had vanished, and what's left to eat were wood ears and mushrooms.

Mu Shuangshuang used rattan to simply make a basket, filled it entirely, then waited for Lu Yuanfeng there.

Lu Yuanfeng walked alone on the mountains, the trees beneath his feet emitted cracking sounds.

During patrols, he would be especially thorough, leaving nothing out, even the slightest footprints.

After the time for three cups of tea passed, he had scoped out his usual haunts, everything seemed normal.

At this season, animals hadn't come out yet, wait for a while, their winter food stock exhausted, would be time to hunt.

After checking a few traps, Lu Yuanfeng found a grey-furred rabbit fallen into a trap, looking to be around two pounds.

Holding the rabbit, Lu Yuanfeng went to find Mu Shuangshuang.

Seeing Shuangshuang with a basket full of wood ears and mushrooms, Lu Yuanfeng was full of surprise.

Because it was so fast, he realized Shuangshuang had her own knack for finding mushrooms.

Unlike him, Lu Yuanfeng had never looked for mushrooms or wood ears when climbing the mountains, only hunting.

"How did I do, am I not extraordinary?" Mu Shuangshuang winked at Lu Yuanfeng shamelessly.

"Hmm!" Lu Yuanfeng nodded earnestly.

Mu Shuangshuang covered her mouth laughing secretly, thinking that at this moment if she claimed to be the most beautiful woman in the world, Lu Yuanfeng likely would nod too.

This is what's known as beauty being in the eye of the beholder.

Estimating she could be ugly beyond redeeming to others, Lu Yuanfeng would still find her beautiful.

With good mood all along the way, Mu Shuangshuang even hummed songs.

At Old Mu Family, she noticed someone was at the third branch's door, Mrs. Liu stood at her home's kitchen door, watching inside, where Yu Si Niang was cooking.

That look clearly showed intent.

But at least Mrs. Liu was still struggling internally.

Mu Shuangshuang handed the basket to Lu Yuanfeng and said, "Fengzi, I'm heading over to have a look."

Mu Shuangshuang directly approached Mrs. Liu and asked, "Fourth Aunt, what are you doing?"

Mrs. Liu hadn't expected Mu Shuangshuang to appear, was startled.

She patted her own chest and said, "Your grandma asked me to invite your mom to help cook; your uncle's back with a few classmates, during noon your grandma bought two old hens from next door Wang Family, said they're for your uncle."

"My grandma asked my mom to cook? But we at the third branch have separated households and moreover, we also need to eat, no time to head over there."

Mu Shuangshuang was baffled.

This Old Mrs. Mu really feels uneasy without pestering their home!

Always keeping an eye on the third branch, even after separating households for so long, still wanting her mom's help.

Thinking their third branch is a public road, coming whenever they please?

Mrs. Liu was also quite troubled.

Yet recalling the occasions when Shuangshuang helped her, she straightforwardly spelled everything out.

"Your uncle mentioned to your grandfather that your mom's cooking is delicious, today's guests need to be treated with the best dishes.

Besides, your grandfather has now become your uncle, your uncle..."

Mrs. Liu told Mu Shuangshuang about Mu Dade's instruction for everyone to call Mr. Mu uncle.

Mu Shuangshuang was utterly shocked.

The uncle's actions truly weren't humane.

As they say, a dog doesn't detest a poor home, a child doesn't dislike an ugly mother.

But what he did, having the whole family call Mr. Mu uncle.

Wondering what was this all about, with Mu Shuangshuang's clever mind, she guessed Mr. Mu is used to thrift.

Handling things, prefers wearing shabby clothes.

This time surely got unexpectedly seen by uncle's classmates, afraid of losing face, thus unwilling to acknowledge him.

After some analysis, Mu Shuangshuang only wanted to see Mr. Mu's reaction.

He worked hard, sacrificed the whole family sending Mu Dade to study, finally hoping Mu Dade achieved scholarly honor, originally imagining vindication, but turns out he didn't acknowledge him.

But Mu Shuangshuang always felt this was just the beginning.

The higher Mu Dade climbed, the worse the rest of the Old Mu Family would fall.

"Shuangshuang, sometimes your mom doesn't..."

The task Old Mrs. Mu assigned, Mrs. Liu dared not defy, and also Old Mrs. Mu still awaiting Yu Si Niang, if she returned empty-handed, surely would be beaten.

"Fourth Aunt, my mom doesn't have time to cook over there! Yet Shuangshuang doesn't want to trouble you, just tell my grandma Shuangshuang chased you off, she knows it won't put you in a bind."

Mu Shuangshuang considered Mrs. Liu's escape, making it fair for Mrs. Liu.

Mrs. Liu pondered, thanked Mu Shuangshuang, and returned to Old Mu Family's side.

Although still feeling a bit uneasy, recalling Shuangshuang's suggestion, Mrs. Liu gained some confidence.

"Mom, we're back." Mu Shuangshuang called to Yu Si Niang inside the kitchen.

Yu Si Niang was pouring rapeseed oil into the pot and heard her daughter's voice, without turning back she replied, "Shuangshuang, I just heard your fourth aunt's voice, did she come?"

Chapter 638: All Mine (Part 1)

"She came, but I sent Aunt Four away. Big Brother came back today, and the main house is in chaos. I bet it's still a mess over there.

Mom, you don't need to go there and join the ruckus in the future, lest you get bossed around to do this and that!"

Mu Shuangshuang spoke bluntly because she really didn't want Yu Si Niang to get caught up by someone like Mu Dade.

After all, if this person spoke a few nice words, most people couldn't resist.

People who, like her, are determined not to deal with the Old Mu Family are few and far between!

Yu Si Niang understood her daughter's intention, she nodded. "I know.

There's one last dish in the pot, and I've cooked the rice in another pot. Once this dish is done, we can eat."

Mu Shuangshuang glanced at the last dish Yu Si Niang was preparing: a bowl of sour long beans with minced meat.

It's one of the essential appetizing dishes for farmers when they're working.

Smelling that sour scent in the air, Mu Shuangshuang felt her taste buds awaken, and her mouth began to water.

"Everyone, time to eat!" Shuangshuang cupped her hands around her mouth and shouted towards the yard.

Lu Yuanfeng was rummaging through the basket for wood ear mushrooms. He placed all the mushrooms Shuangshuang picked on a board to dry; once dried, they could be eaten.

"Alright, I'm coming! I'll go call Uncle Dashan first." Lu Yuanfeng responded.

Lu Yuanfeng went to Mu Dashan's room, called him as he was still working. Meanwhile, a few kids playing in the yard immediately went to eat food at the sound.

At the dining table, Mu Shuangshuang took it upon herself to spread gossip about the disgraceful things Mu Dade did, sharing with the few at the table.

Unexpectedly, the usually good-tempered Mu Dashan surprisingly got angry.

"How dare Big Brother treat Dad like that? Back then, the whole family ate poorly and tightened their belts to send him to school, to find him a wife.

Everyone worked day and night just for him to have a bright future.

Now he's successful, but he doesn't even acknowledge his own father, instead calls him 'Big Brother.' How could he think of that? Has his conscience been eaten by dogs?"

Recalling the days when everyone worked hard for Mu Dade's education made Mu Dashan feel uncomfortable.

His father saved all his life, hoping someone in the family could lead them out of poverty, and after waiting so long, his father became Big Brother.

Mu Dashan didn't understand what his big brother was thinking, but he knew his big brother was wrong in this matter.

Mu Shuangshuang said, "Dad, you don't need to be angry about this either. My grandpa's like Zhou Yu hitting Huang Gai, one man willing to hit, the other willing to take a beating. If he has a problem, he should go talk to Big Brother himself. If we stand up for him here, he might even get upset."

Just as Shuangshuang finished talking, Mu Dashan asked with a puzzled expression: "Shuangshuang, who is Zhou... Fish? Is there a fish by that name?"

Mu Shuangshuang suddenly realized she threw out an idiom.

No matter if Mu Dashan hadn't heard it before or for some other reason, Mu Shuangshuang patiently explained.

"Dad, Shuangshuang was just saying it casually. Shuangshuang means, if Grandpa doesn't agree, Big Brother can't do anything.

If Grandpa doesn't say anything, and you go and talk about it, it might just make Grandpa hold a grudge against you." Mu Shuangshuang spoke honestly.

"Shuangshuang's father, let's wait and see. There's no rush to bring it up now. If it turns out Dad really wishes to be the Big Brother like Shuangshuang said, there's nothing we can do. Don't you think?" Yu Si Niang also chimed in.

Mu Dashan sighed deeply. His daughter and wife were right; whatever he said wouldn't change a thing.

Especially now, when his big brother became a scholar. Surely, his father would elevate his big brother to the heavens.

Moreover, the third branch had already split away. When Big Brother needed money to take exams, the third branch didn't contribute, so anything said now could be misunderstood.

The third branch didn't need to rely on the first branch, nor cling to them.

However, despite these thoughts, the food on the table tasted like wax to Mu Dashan, lacking any flavor.

People's hearts are made of flesh, and although his father hadn't treated him well over the years, no matter how you see it, a father is still a father, inherently unchanged.

If Old Mr. Mu was being bullied, Mu Dashan would feel bad too. But there was nothing he could do except hope that his big brother had a conscience and wouldn't fail their father's expectations!

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After lunch, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng exchanged a glance, ready to go to the fields to catch the thief.

Mu Shuangshuang wanted to see what this little thief looked like.

It was just after lunch, a time when everyone was napping, so the field ridges were perfectly still and deserted.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng hid on their own plot, quietly waiting for the rice thief to show up.

The Old Mu Family

Old Mrs. Mu and Mrs. Liu prepared a large table full of dishes, with fried chicken and stewed chicken, and everyone from the Old Mu Family was delighted. They originally thought they'd get some hot chicken soup to savor.

But little did they know, Mu Dade wouldn't let these people near the table, not even giving a spot to Old Mr. Mu. Only the first branch members and a few of Mu Dade's classmates ate at the table.

The others didn't even get a chicken feather.

Fearing a rebellion, Mu Dade made a hollow promise, saying that once his classmates were gone, he'd take everyone to town for a good meal.

Yet that's nothing compared to the real thing right in front of their eyes.

The other members of the Old Mu Family were naturally displeased, each clamoring for the good food, demanding to be let at the table, and saying other similar things.

"What are you all yammering about? I didn't even eat, so all of you wait until your Big Brother sees off his classmates before you speak."

Old Mrs. Mu was mesmerized by Mu Dade's sweet talk. Whatever Mu Dade said, she believed. Anyone saying bad about Mu Dade would be scolded fiercely by her.

"Mom, clearly Big Brother is up to something. We're all family, so why don't we have the right to eat together?" Mu Danian complained full of discontent.

He came back early just to see Big Brother, after all.

And also to meet Big Brother's friends, who might be useful in the future.

"Mom, aren't those two hens plump? There's no reason for us not to eat them, right?" Mrs. Lin chimed in.

She's not foolish; there aren't any hens left in the Old Mu Family. These two chickens were snatched from the Old Wang Family.

If not eaten today, who knows when the chance would come again.

"Eat, eat, eat! You only know how to eat! Where's your enthusiasm when it comes to work? Missing one meal wouldn't kill you, would it? Will you lose a piece of flesh?" Old Mrs. Mu glared fiercely, and Mrs. Lin was immediately scared away, not daring to speak another word.

"Mom, you shouldn't say that. You might not care since you didn't eat, but Xiangxiang ate, and I saw you giving her two big drumsticks earlier."

Mu Dazhong fearlessly shouted.

"You wretched thing! She's your younger sister, and you can't even stomach her eating a meal? I'll tell you, that chicken was paid for by this old woman, and the food is mine too. If you want to eat, go earn it yourself!"

Old Mrs. Mu mustered all her strength and scolded Mu Dazhong fiercely.

Chapter 639: Caught the Thief

"Mom, you must be joking, aren't you? The money I earn still ends up being handed over to you in the end," Mu Dazhong said with a somewhat awkward smile to Old Mrs. Mu.

"Don't try to play pretend with me, old woman. Do I not know what kind of person you are? I, this old woman, am making it clear here today: if you make money, I, this old woman, won't take a single penny."

Old Mrs. Mu stood with her hands on her hips, looking tauntingly at Mu Dazhong.

The second son is Old Mrs. Mu's son; she knows very well what he's like.

Besides being lazy and gluttonous, this man can't do anything else.

"Fine, you said it, don't regret it!" Mu Dazhong said angrily as he stormed outside, with Mrs. Lin following behind him. The two of them tacitly walked toward the field path.

On the road, both tried to avoid being seen.

Because once some things are seen, trouble might follow, much like the situation with the third branch's family back then when they were just going for a walk with their spouse, and the incident with Wang Fugui was blamed on them.

Mu Dazhong was naturally as cautious as he could be.

When they reached their own rice field, Mu Dazhong carried the burden, secretly taking a bit of rice from each family's field.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, hearing the noise, peeked out and saw Mu Dazhong and Mrs. Lin swaying as they approached.

The rice in Mu Dazhong's load was about half-full.

Mu Shuangshuang suddenly realized, the thief was indeed someone from her own family!

Mu Shuangshuang signaled to Lu Yuanfeng with a glance, asking when he would take action.

Lu Yuanfeng gestured to wait a little longer.

To catch the thief and have evidence, they still had to wait for Mu Dazhong to reach their own field and grab a handful of rice.

Mu Shuangshuang decided to wait a bit longer.

Mu Dazhong carried the burden, stealing a few more handfuls of rice from nearby fields, then carefully tidied up the bundles for others.

At the side, Mrs. Lin began to complain, "Daddy Gou Dan, stealing like this isn't a way to go, let's just take the rice piled on the slope, won't we?"

Farmers' rice is usually harvested first and piled into small stacks.

Not much rice is placed on the small stacks, as cutting rice is generally done while moving.

Mu Danian could only steal a little at a time from these stacks, which indeed takes time.

But stealing from the piles already piled as mountains on the slopes could yield more, though it's easier to get caught.

But wealth comes from danger; without this bit of courage, how could they make money?

"You're right, stealing bit by bit here isn't as good as pulling off a big haul. That way, we'll earn more silver, and it will all be ours."

Mu Dazhong's eyes scanned around and finally stopped on the neatly piled rice from Shuangshuang's family's slope.

"Gou Dan's mother, I know whose rice we should take! Look at that three-acre field; it used to be our second class field, even now, half of it belongs to the Old Mu Family.

It's rightful to take rice from here, but today, I noticed that the smelly girl from the third branch and the third son's wife are helping out.

They must have colluded; this field clearly was bought by that smelly girl; she's the real mastermind behind it!"

Mu Dazhong suddenly had a clear understanding and started analyzing carefully with Mrs. Lin:

"Back then, when elder brother needed money for the Autumn Examination, our first thought was to borrow from the third branch.

The third branch didn't lend, saying they had no money, but they were clearly still buying land in Tie Dao Village. In the end, we thought of selling the land to the third branch, so it would be easy to take back later.

But that smelly girl wouldn't agree. Everyone knows, the third branch is now dominated by that smelly girl; the third couple has no say at all.

I knew it; that smelly girl is full of bad ideas, even swindling her own family, it's despicable."

Mu Dazhong was cursing Mu Shuangshuang, not knowing that the person involved was hidden not far away on the slope, secretly watching Mu Dazhong's actions.

Mu Shuangshuang found it amusing, thinking, isn't it too late to find out now after all this time?

However, it's rare for the Old Mu Family to have a clever one, but this cleverness wasn't used correctly.

Looks like they're still planning to target the third branch.

Mu Shuangshuang decided this time, to scare Mu Dazhong to death.

Mrs. Lin was also full of anger.

The third branch suddenly became the richest people in the Old Mu Family, with houses and land, while the second branch had nothing.

Unless the third branch suffers losses, she, Mrs. Lin, would not swallow this anger.

"Daddy Gou Dan, let's take all the rice from the third branch and let them show off."

Mrs. Lin ran faster than anyone, reaching Shuangshuang's family's slope, lifted the tarp Lu Yuanfeng had placed, and shouted, "Daddy Gou Dan, come quickly!"

Mu Dazhong carried the burden and lightly dashed forward.

When he reached the slope, he put down the load, bent over, and was about to touch the rice from Shuangshuang's family.

Two clots of mud hit Mu Dazhong on the back of his head simultaneously.

"Ow, who was that?"

Mu Dazhong jumped in pain, immediately feeling someone around hitting him.

Realizing this, Mu Dazhong quickly lay down on the ground.

Mrs. Lin, oblivious to the situation, still didn't understand what Mu Dazhong was doing and asked ignorantly, "Daddy Gou Dan, what are you lying on the ground for? Hurry up and work, be careful if you're slow, someone might catch us."

Mu Dazhong almost had the urge to kill Mrs. Lin; stealing with someone like Mrs. Lin was beyond imagination.

"You foolish woman, someone's here!"

As soon as Mu Dazhong finished speaking, Mrs. Lin got startled; the ground was occupied by Mu Dazhong, leaving her no place to hide, so she had to jump into the small ditch beside them.

There was water in the ditch, but not much, instead, there was more mud.

With that jump, Mrs. Lin turned into a mud person.

Even so, Mrs. Lin dared not move.

The two timidly waited for that person to leave quickly, but after half a cup of tea's time, there was no movement at all.

Mu Dazhong mustered up his courage, got up, and looked around, finding no one.

He tried to steal more rice and found the same situation repeated.

This time, Mu Dazhong got angry; he searched around to see what dared to mess with him.

But, besides the breeze in the autumn, and the swaying rice spikes in the distance, there was nothing else.

"Daddy Gou Dan, could it be that it's haunted?" Mrs. Lin asked, trembling.

Seeing ghosts during the day is quite eerie; even Mu Dazhong was a bit scared.

But he was a man; admitting fear of such things was too embarrassing for him.

"Nonsense, no such things in broad daylight, say that again and I'll divorce you, you useless woman."

Mrs. Lin, feeling wronged, climbed out of the mud pit.

Suddenly, Mu Dazhong gathered his courage and said to Mrs. Lin, "I'm hungry, let's hurry back and eat something good."

Mu Dazhong finished speaking and almost went berserk, dashing toward the village.

Mrs. Lin followed behind, her rear end running almost in pieces of explosion.

No one dared to look back, fearing they might see something they shouldn't.

Mu Shuangshuang raised her head from a pile of rice spikes and said to Lu Yuanfeng, "Fengzi, let's hurry and follow them, see where my second uncle hides the stolen goods!"

Chapter 640: Crisp Slap Sound

All the way, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng were afraid to alert the thief, so they dared not get too close.

When they finally followed Mu Dazhong to the familiar abandoned house in Er Gui Village, both Shuangshuang and Fengzi were particularly familiar with it, Mu Shuangshuang couldn't believe it.

Mu Dazhong had hidden the stolen rice in this old abandoned house.

Speaking of which, this place really had an unusually high crime rate.

Mu Danian and Chen Hong chose this place for their illicit affair. Wang Fugui and Xia Guagua did bad things here, and as soon as Mu Dazhong stole something, he immediately brought it here.

Had this place truly become a golden treasure land?

Watching as Mu Dazhong brought the rice in, Mrs. Lin hurriedly followed behind him.

"Fengzi, it's time for us to move in," Mu Shuangshuang winked at Lu Yuanfeng.

Lu Yuanfeng walked in the front, with Mu Shuangshuang following behind, the two swaggering in as they prepared to close the net.

Inside the house, Mu Dazhong looked at the pile of rice stacked like a small hill, thinking it had been a worthwhile trip. He just didn't know which immortal he had offended.

Mu Dazhong thought that he must go back and pray later.

"Daddy Gou Dan, we should head back quickly, this place gives me the creeps," urged Mrs. Lin as she wiped the mud off her face.

"Why are you so hasty? I haven't had my fill of looking at this rice. Do you think those guys can follow us here?"

Just as Mu Dazhong finished his sentence, Mu Shuangshuang lightly coughed, causing Mu Dazhong to be instantly terrified and beg for mercy.

"Spare me, spare me..."

Mrs. Lin, knowing nothing, saw her man kowtowing and begging and joined in, mouthing the same words as Mu Dazhong.

"Second Uncle, Second Aunt, what did you do to make you kneel before Shuangshuang and Fengzi?" Mu Shuangshuang teased with a smile.

Recognizing the familiar voice, Mu Dazhong looked up angrily, pointing at Mu Shuangshuang and cursing, "So it was you, you damn girl, you were the one following me just now?"

Mu Shuangshuang laughed heartily, Mu Dazhong was not stupid, at least not now.

"Second Uncle, you're just realizing now, but it's a bit too late, I already know you stole rice from the villagers."

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't one to stir up trouble, but Mu Dazhong repeatedly harmed the third branch's people.

Even though he was her dad's brother, he was more ruthless in his wrongdoings than anyone else.

She had never seen someone so bent on preferring outsiders, not even sparing his own family.

"You damn girl, don't think you can slander me. I'm warning you, I'm not falling for this," Mu Dazhong was almost driven mad.

To think he was spooked to death by this damn girl all along.

"Second Uncle, that's not how you should put it. Fengzi and I watched you steal rice from others and bring it here. If I call the villagers, how will you explain?"

You picked it up in the paddy fields? Don't forget, it's only the second day of autumn harvest, how many acres have been finished, enough for you to pick from like this?"

Mu Shuangshuang stared at Mu Dazhong, wanting to see just how thick-skinned the second branch really was.

"You..." Rebutted, Mu Dazhong couldn't come up with a solution.

Mrs. Lin's eyes darted around before she said in a fawning tone: "Shuangshuang, don't be like this, your Second Uncle and I just weren't thinking straight.

We saw that we might be going to the county soon with no income, and just thought of making some extra. If you like, we'll split it with you, how about that?"

Mrs. Lin's ploy of playing the family card was a frequent tactic of hers, but it didn't work on Mu Shuangshuang.

"Second Aunt, Shuangshuang is no fence. If you do wrong, you must face punishment, either go with me to see my grandpa, or go see the village chief."

Mu Shuangshuang was being polite, even giving Mu Dazhong a choice.

If they went to the village chief, everyone in Er Gui Village would know, and then Mu Dazhong wouldn't have the face to stay in the village.

"Shuangshuang, what did you say, if your grandpa finds out, he'll surely not let me and your Second Uncle live well, please, just take pity on us, let us go, we promise we'll never do such things again."

Mrs. Lin continued to plead, but Mu Shuangshuang paid her no mind.

"If you don't want to see my grandpa, then go see the village chief, I don't mind if our Er Gui Village loses a few people," stated Mu Shuangshuang.

"Alright, you damn girl, I've been nice and you're not listening, you really want me to get rough, don't you? I'm not going anywhere today, what can you do about it?"

Just as Mrs. Lin finished her sentence, Mu Shuangshuang stepped forward and, like catching a chicken, grabbed Mrs. Lin by the collar and lifted her up.

Lu Yuanfeng also stepped in to subdue Mu Dazhong.

Each person grabbed one, dragging them towards Old Mu's house.

As it was still midday break time, the four of them walked along, not encountering anyone familiar.

Mu Dazhong and Mrs. Lin tried several times to break free, only to be held tighter each time.

They dragged Mu Dazhong and Mrs. Lin directly to their own yard, and Mu Dazhong suddenly dared not shout, afraid of attracting neighbors to laugh at him.

Inside the house, Yu Si Niang came out upon hearing the commotion, and upon seeing Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng with their captives, she covered her mouth in shock.

"Shuangshuang, why are you grabbing your Second Aunt? What's going on here?"

Seeing Yu Si Niang, Mrs. Lin thought she saw hope and cried to her, "Si Niang, this time, you've got to help me..."

"Second Sister-in-law, what's wrong?" Yu Si Niang felt uncomfortable at Mrs. Lin's attitude.

Back when they fought, Mrs. Lin bullied Mu Shuangshuang the most fiercely, and even the original owner's death was caused by her.

It could be said, Mrs. Lin never had a good attitude towards Yu Si Niang.

"We were working in the fields, and Shuangshuang said nothing, just grabbed Daddy Gou Dan's and my collars and dragged us into the third branch's yard, saying she would tell on us to our dad. Quickly persuade Shuang to let us go!"

Mrs. Lin exaggerated her grievances, but what she said was far from the truth.

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't polite, grabbed Mrs. Lin and tossed her, making her fall flat on her face.

"Second Aunt, you dare to lie to my face? Do you think Shuangshuang is just for show? Or do you think my mother will believe you over me?"

"Damn girl, if our second branch falls, I won't let you off easily, just wait, I'll take your life sooner or later!" Mu Dazhong threatened, still acting superior.

"Whoever wants my daughter's life, I'll fight to the death with them," Mu Dashan burst out of the house, rushing to Mu Dazhong and giving him two slaps.

"You beast, how dare you bully my daughter, I'm only sick, not dead, is the third branch that easy to bully?"

Mu Dazhong was stunned by the beating, his face burning with pain before he could gather his wits.

Mu Dashan's hand continued slapping Mu Dazhong, the crisp sound echoing in the courtyard of Old Mu Family's third branch—