

Folly 641

Chapter 641: Nosebleed Overflowing

Everyone was stunned, it was the first time they had seen Mu Dashan lose his temper and get physical like this.

In the past, everyone knew Mu Dashan as someone who always spoke kindly and did good deeds. Even if one of his brothers made a mistake, he would just endure it and let it pass.

But this time, Mu Dazhong had harmed his own daughter. He had even said things that could take his daughter's life.

Mu Dashan was both angry and anxious, yet his grip did not lessen.

When his palm got tired, he switched to using his fist.

He punched Mu Dazhong directly on the nose, causing Mu Dazhong to scream out in pain, and blood immediately gushed from his nose.

Mrs. Lin went crazy, screaming and shouting uncontrollably, finally alerting the people at the Old Mu Family's side.

But it wasn't Mu Dade and his classmates because they were all relaxing and having fun in the Old Mu Family's wing room and couldn't care to notice what was happening here.

The ones who rushed over were Mr. Mu, Old Mrs. Mu, and a few people from the fourth branch.

Mr. Mu walked at the front, noticing Mu Dazhong with blood streaming from his nose, and then looking at his always honest and diligent son, who had reddish eyes and was sitting heavily on his second son.

Mr. Mu panicked immediately.

"What's going on here? Someone explain this to me clearly!"

Mu Shuangshuang thought for a moment and stepped forward to explain, "Grandpa, the origin of this matter is that my second uncle stole the villagers' rice, including ours."

Yesterday, in the afternoon, Shuangshuang went to work and noticed someone had tampered with our rice bundles. Although it was done stealthily, traces could still be seen.

Shuangshuang knew that a thief had visited. Originally, we planned to catch this thief at night, but no one showed up.

This noon, Fengzi and I staked out again, and caught my second uncle and second aunt stealing rice from the fields, visiting almost every field in the village..."

After hearing this, Mr. Mu was so surprised his mouth twisted.

What he feared most his whole life was that someone in his family would go astray and do something sneaky or underhanded.

Although the Old Mu Family wasn't wealthy, they would never do something so disgraceful.

"Second, you're confused, aren't you? You even dared to steal things from the villagers. Are you not afraid of losing your life?" Mr. Mu scolded.

Mu Dazhong naturally shook his head, "Dad, I didn't do it. It's the nasty girl from the third branch framing me. She wants me to be scolded and looked down upon. Dad, you're my real dad; you can't believe what an outsider says."

"You just shut up!" Mr. Mu shouted.

He understood what kind of character his son had, lazy and idle by nature.

He had been wondering why he had suddenly become so diligent, always going out to work after lunch and staying in the fields until very late, and it turned out it was all for stealing rice.

Old Mrs. Mu was more direct. She rushed up to Mrs. Lin and gave her two slaps on the face.

"You slut, did you corrupt my son? You little wench, since marrying you, my good son has gone bad. I should divorce you."

While she slapped, her hands fiercely pinched the flesh on Mrs. Lin's body, causing Mrs. Lin to scream and wail in agony.

"Mother, it wasn't me, it wasn't me..."

Screams almost like a pig being slaughtered echoed throughout the Old Mu Family.

Mu Shuangshuang watched from the side without any intention of intervening. The Old Mu Family needed to be straightened out.

All they ever did was steal or sneak around.

But the root of the problem lay with the elders.

Old Mrs. Mu often took things from the third branch without asking, taking as much as she wanted as long as she could get her hands on it.

In the end, if there were lessons to be taught, Old Mrs. Mu should be taught alongside them.

After a thunderous round of beatings, both Mu Dazhong and Mrs. Lin had snot and tears streaming down their faces.

But this matter was not over yet. Mr. Mu walked up to Mu Shuangshuang, and his face bore an apologetic expression.

Mr. Mu was already quite advanced in years, but now he had to discuss matters with a young girl, feeling embarrassed but having no other choice.

"Shuang, can grandpa ask you to do something?" Mr. Mu said.

"What is it?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Can you keep your second uncle's matter a secret and not tell anyone else? I, as the head of the Old Mu Family, wish to handle this myself."

In his heart, Mr. Mu was scared. If the news of the second son's theft spread, the eldest son's reputation would also suffer greatly.

And his prospects for government office would be even less likely.

In a significant matter like this, Mr. Mu considered the big house of the Old Mu Family.

"Shuangshuang, grandpa won't let you keep this secret without compensation. I'll give the third branch fifty pounds of hulled rice and buy your family a hen, how does that sound?"

Fifty pounds of rice would cost more than four hundred coins in town, plus an old hen would cost dozens more. Mr. Mu was indeed bleeding out here.

But Mu Shuangshuang was not particularly happy.

Mr. Mu's solution was nothing more than giving a beating and then allowing Mu Dazhong to continue his misdeeds.

The real problem still lingered.

"Grandpa, I can stay out of this matter, but I want to say something: sometimes indulging doesn't equal protection! A small hole can sink a great ship, and if some issues are not properly addressed, eventually it will lead to big problems."

Mu Shuangshuang said this not to help the Old Mu Family, but out of fear that the third branch might be implicated.

In the Da Ning Dynasty, some crimes carried collective punishment, and whether they were part of a separated family or not, anyone with the same family name could not escape punishment once trouble arose.

Mr. Mu fell into deep thought but ultimately the desire to protect Mu Dade's official position took precedence over his inner thoughts.

He believed that as long as he kept a close watch on his sons, nothing would happen to the Old Mu Family.

But when disaster eventually struck and the Old Mu Family found themselves in dire straits, Mr. Mu finally realized with regret that Shuang had warned him long ago.

Mr. Mu led Mu Dazhong and Mrs. Lin back to the Old Mu Family, entrusting Mu Shuangshuang with the task of dealing with the stolen rice from the abandoned house.

The rice belonged to the villagers, so naturally, Mu Shuangshuang intended to return it to them. Unable to determine whose rice was stolen, she could only wait for nightfall to deliver it to the village chief for a resolution.

After Mr. Mu left, the third branch's courtyard quieted down again, but Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang's emotions had not yet settled.

Especially Mu Dashan. He sighed repeatedly, unable to understand how his second brother could resort to theft.

There's a saying that stealing a needle is as bad as stealing rice, let alone something as significant as stealing rice.

"Shuang, Shuang's mother, and Fengzi, let's distance ourselves from the other branches in the future. Some things, once entangled, are difficult to extricate from.

Even if we return the stolen things, the damage to integrity remains. Our third branch can be poor and not earn much money, but we cannot resort to immoral actions."

Mu Shuangshuang nodded in agreement with Mu Dashan's words.

What makes us human is knowing restraint and understanding that immoral actions are unacceptable.

To earn money, we rely on our own hands, working with shovels and hoes.

If we seek fame and fortune, then we must study tirelessly and earn our achievements.

Ultimately, anything acquired through improper means will return to its rightful owner; it's only a matter of time.

Chapter 642: Let It Die Out Naturally (Part 1)

Old Mu Family——

Mr. Mu was smoking his pipe in the main room, while Old Mrs. Mu stood beside him attending to him.

The second son and his wife were currently locked in the storeroom by Mr. Mu.

Before the eldest son's scholar friend left, Mr. Mu wouldn't release the second branch to deal with the matter.

But even so, Old Mrs. Mu couldn't help but ask a few more questions.

"Old man, how do you plan to deal with the second family's issue later?"

At the moment, Old Mrs. Mu was not making a fuss, seemingly genuinely concerned for the second branch.

Mr. Mu sighed deeply, "What can we do? We can't really send them to the village chief and have him hand it over to the government, can we? The Old Mu Family is not what it used to be; we can't afford to lose face like this."

Old Mrs. Mu fell silent, seemingly agreeing with Mr. Mu's sentiments.

Actually, protecting the family reputation wasn't something the old man was doing for the first time; the last time, Mu Zhenzhen had stolen money from Liu Wangcai's family, and Mr. Mu protected Mu Zhenzhen.

However, at that time, Liu Wangcai's family had no evidence, so the matter died down.

But this time, the second son was caught red-handed, and what he stole was the grain most valued by the entire village. Once discovered, the Old Mu Family was bound to face another great calamity.

If Mr. Mu didn't step in today, the reputation of the Old Mu Family would inevitably be ruined by Mu Dazhong.

"Ultimately, it's all that worthless girl from the third branch's fault. If it weren't for her stirring up trouble, how would the second son become like this?"

Although Old Mrs. Mu often scolded her own son, when it mattered, she still protected him.

A son is always a son; a granddaughter is not necessarily a granddaughter.

"Xiangxiang's mother, you can't say that. The second son stole something and was bound to be discovered sooner or later.

If discovered by our own family, we might just lose a few things, but if others find out, the Old Mu Family would be done for."

Mr. Mu was never confused about serious matters.

Today, they lost fifty kilograms of rice and an old hen, but for the Old Mu Family, it was a matter of saving the entire family.

"Don't talk to me about losing things. That worthless girl is like a leech. Everything in the house has been taken away by her. How could the third branch give birth to such a creature?"

Old Mrs. Mu's face was full of anger, and when she cursed, she didn't hold back.

"Alright, this has nothing to do with the third branch or Shuangshuang. It's the second son who went astray; don't go looking for trouble with the third branch and annoy people!" Mr. Mu said.

"The third branch, the third branch, it's always the third branch! Don't forget, the third branch took the initiative to ask for the separation back then. If you like them so much, then let them listen to you!

Now even a worthless girl from the third branch is opposing you.

If I were you, I wouldn't give anything to the third branch, let them fend for themselves." Old Mrs. Mu responded defiantly.

Old Mrs. Mu had looked down on the third branch for a long time.

So in her eyes, as long as the third branch was involved, it was their fault.

"I don't want to talk to you; you crazy woman don't understand anything!" Mr. Mu threw down these words and went outside.

Old Mrs. Mu chased after him, "You stubborn old man, explain to me how I don't understand! Am I wrong when I say the third branch is ungrateful?"

While scolding the third branch, Old Mrs. Mu questioned Mr. Mu fiercely.

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The next day, at the crack of dawn, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng had already prepared everything to go to town.

A bull cart, a few wooden barrels filled with cold noodles, and one wooden barrel with the mushrooms and some black fungus collected for Xue Zheng.

There was also a large cloth bag filled with popcorn.

Additionally, Mu Shuangshuang gathered fresh vegetables from her own garden; all these were to be sold in town.

By the time they reached town, the sun was already high in the sky; after not coming to town for a few days, it was much livelier.

The cries of the vendors seemed louder than before.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng delivered the goods straight to Xue Yi's restaurant, along with the popcorn, to the previous cooperation site.

After changing partners, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng's lifestyle remained unchanged; every few days, they would go to town to deliver goods to the new partners.

When money got into Mu Shuangshuang's hands, she felt much more settled.

But there were still many places to spend money; with the New Year approaching, there were a lot of festivals to prepare for, and Mu Shuangshuang felt the money in her wallet was insufficient.

She still had to discuss with Yu Si Niang about what to prepare for the New Year and allocate the silver in advance.

"Fengzi, let's go to the market first and sell those vegetables cheaply, then visit Xue Zheng, and afterwards check out the winter cloth, alright?" Mu Shuangshuang shared her plan with Lu Yuanfeng.

Lu Yuanfeng nodded in agreement.

After finishing their tasks, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng parked the bull cart at the Xue Family's entrance.

Xue Zheng had improved quite a bit recently, although he still wasn't very sociable; he at least had a response to eating.

The Housekeeper Xue directly took Mu Shuangshuang to the backyard; this time, Xue Zheng was not sitting idly in the courtyard but was in his room doing something.

The Xue family's servants dared not disturb him; Mu Shuangshuang carried a wooden barrel into Xue Zheng's room.

Xue Zheng was sitting by the window, with the cold wind from outside blowing in, chilly.

"Xue Zheng, I brought back the mushrooms I promised you last time." Mu Shuangshuang shook the wooden barrel while speaking to Xue Zheng.

Xue Zheng hesitated for a moment, then turned to look at Mu Shuangshuang.

This was a tacit understanding between them.

Mu Shuangshuang felt that Xue Zheng couldn't really be called autistic; at least sometimes, he was willing to respond to her.

"Let me tell you, a few days ago, your brother Yuanfeng and I went hunting in the mountains. Do you know what we ended up catching?" Mu Shuangshuang squinted at Xue Zheng.

This was the usual routine: Mu Shuangshuang would ask, then answer herself. If Xue Zheng was in a good mood, he would give a glance; if not, he would ignore her.

"We caught rabbits and pheasants." Mu Shuangshuang replied as usual, but unexpectedly, Xue Zheng also spoke.

"Are they... easy to catch?"

Mu Shuangshuang and Xue Zheng had been interacting for quite some time, and their usual state was her patiently dealing with him while Xue Zheng hardly responded.

But this time, it was too surprising.

Mu Shuangshuang was overjoyed.

"Of course, they're especially easy to catch. Do you want to come with me?" Mu Shuangshuang cautiously asked.

Given Xue Zheng's situation, Mu Shuangshuang felt he should interact more with peers.

She thought that with her three kids playing together frequently, they might be able to make him more cheerful.

Xue Zheng hesitated, looking at Mu Shuangshuang, seemingly unsure of himself.

"How about this, you go talk to your grandma about it. If she agrees, I'll take you along, okay?"

Chapter 643: Great Business Opportunity

The light in Xue Zheng's eyes dimmed again, it was obvious she didn't want to find Old Mrs. Xue.

Mu Shuangshuang might have guessed the reason.

"Xue Zheng, do you not like it here? Want to go back to the Capital?"

Xue Zheng is not very old, and in Qingshan Town, she's considered far from home, away from her parents.

From the moment the light left her eyes, Xue Zheng basically ignored Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't insist, she talked to him for a while, mostly about how handsome Lu Yuanfeng was at hunting.

Of course, most of the time, Mu Shuangshuang was just making things up.

When it was finally time to leave, Mu Shuangshuang left all the mushrooms in Xue Zheng's room, where he could see them.

Outside the room, she saw Lu Yuanfeng waiting for her.

Mu Shuangshuang ran up and talked to Lu Yuanfeng about Xue Zheng's situation, including some of her own thoughts.

Lu Yuanfeng was also very concerned about the child, he said, "I think it's not right for the old lady to keep Xue Zheng's parents in the dark like this.

This situation with Xue Zheng probably isn't new; maybe it's been there before at home, and nobody noticed.

If his parents cooperate, the issue might be alleviated significantly."

Lu Yuanfeng didn't know medicine, but he could guess some things about people and relationships.

And coincidentally, his guess was quite similar to Mu Shuangshuang's.

"I think the same, we should go talk to Old Mrs. Xue about this situation. This child is still young, he can't stay disconnected from the world forever."

Mu Shuangshuang found Housekeeper Xue and asked to be taken to the old lady.

The old lady was as before, not looking very well, but she forced a smile upon seeing Mu Shuangshuang.

"Old lady, I just went to see Xue Zheng, he spoke."

Just as Mu Shuangshuang finished her words, Old Mrs. Xue came over, grabbing Mu Shuangshuang's hand and asking, "Really? My Zheng'er really spoke? What did he say?"

Mu Shuangshuang explained the situation to the old lady and shared both Fengzi's and her own ideas.

"Old lady, you should write a letter to Xue Zheng's parents, asking if he was like this before. I feel like Xue Zheng's condition didn't develop overnight.

Also, you can't just indulge him like this, avoiding the outside world and not speaking to people. I think you should let him get familiar with the surrounding people, go out more, and slowly get used to it."

Old Mrs. Xue sighed.

"Girl, I understand what you're saying, but it's difficult to do. Zheng'er starts trembling all over once he leaves the courtyard; as his grandmother, it breaks my heart."

Old Mrs. Xue's thoughts were understood by Mu Shuangshuang.

She also wanted to help Xue Yi, but after all, she wasn't a doctor, much less a psychologist.

If the elders couldn't guide Xue Zheng properly, there wasn't much this outsider could do.

"Girl, I want to do something, but I don't know if you'd agree," Old Mrs. Xue suddenly said.

"Go ahead, I'm listening!" Mu Shuangshuang replied.

"I want Zheng'er to go with you to the countryside for a few days, your family has children, perhaps they can keep Zheng'er company."

"Old lady, are you sure? My home only has a large kang bed, the food and clothes can't compare to Xue Mansion, and if you come to my place, you can't bring servants, it's just a simple farmer's life."

What Mu Shuangshuang said was partly to avoid causing trouble for herself.

She was living well in Er Gui Village and didn't want a sudden intrusion of people to disturb her peaceful life.

Actually, this was a challenge for Old Mrs. Xue.

When she was young, she worked the fields with her husband; she knew the hardships of that life. She could endure it herself, but if it involved her grandson, Old Mrs. Xue couldn't bear it.

The struggles and hesitations of Old Mrs. Xue were seen by Mu Shuangshuang.

She said, "Old lady, make sure you think it over before deciding. You know where Shuangshuang's village is, you can send someone to inform Shuangshuang when you've made up your mind, and she'll come over then."

Mu Shuangshuang gave Old Mrs. Xue ample time.

Old Mrs. Xue was deeply grateful, personally seeing Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng out of the Xue family gate, going back in only after they had walked a good distance away.

For now, the Xue family matters could be set aside. Mu Shuangshuang went with Lu Yuanfeng to the cloth shop.

There, she met Ah Ru, who had just sold a garment.

Upon seeing Mu Shuangshuang, Ah Ru quickly came over.

"Shuangshuang, you finally came. Do you know how long I've been waiting for you? I was almost going crazy, you never showed up."

"What happened?" Mu Shuangshuang blinked, full of confusion.

"I've been selling the clothing so well, almost thirty pieces, and there are some orders, with deposits already paid.

I even made some changes to the shop, come in and take a look, I'll get the ledger for you."

Mu Shuangshuang followed her into the shop, the layout had changed a lot, many ready-made garments were hanging in the store.

As soon as you walked in, you could see those finished garments.

Ah Ru's shop has always been small, and the clothes were all made by her and her mother.

But this time, Mu Shuangshuang found there was another shop assistant, probably because, as Ah Ru said, she was too busy to manage alone.

After a while, Ah Ru came out holding the ledger.

In total, there were thirty-two garments, and according to their original agreement of one-tenth, Mu Shuangshuang could get three taels and two coins of Silver.

"Shuangshuang, this is your share." Ah Ru handed over the prepared Silver to Mu Shuangshuang, then continued, "Shuangshuang, I have something to discuss with you."

"Go ahead!" Mu Shuangshuang said.

"I want to enlarge the shop's scale. With the money earned these days, plus what I already had, I want to buy a store in a busier place and then promote these ready-made clothes."

When Ah Ru talked about this, her face was slightly flushed.

Her eyes were full of anticipation.

In these days, with the help of the designs from Mu Shuangshuang, Ah Ru gradually gained some clientele, some of whom were quite reputable.

But almost the first thing they said when they came in was how inconvenient her shop location was, and she guessed she'd earn more if she moved to a better place.

Ah Ru's mother was a concubine at home, and her father hadn't taken care of them for a long time. If Ah Ru didn't possess some sewing skills, they might have starved to death already.

"Ah Ru, I think your idea is great, but good locations, as I've inquired, cost around a hundred Silver taels, do you have that much?"

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't foolish, though the cloth shop profits were high, as Ah Ru herself said, the location wasn't advantageous.

Plus, those buying cloth were mostly the poor, and the cloth didn't sell for a good price.

"That's why I wanted to ask if you would consider partnering with me, so we can pool our Silver.

I have fifty taels, and the shop I asked about costs a hundred taels to take over."

Mu Shuangshuang frowned a bit, Ah Ru only had fifty taels; she herself had more than that, but it was earmarked for opening a restaurant.

Food is fundamental to people, and catering businesses make money the fastest.

Chapter 644: People from Huang Family Village Have Arrived (Part 3)

"Ah Ru, I think it's best to wait and see. Doing business isn't just about securing a storefront.

Getting a shop is just the first step. After that, you need to hire people and decorate the store. Without at least ten to twenty taels, it simply won't work."

Mu Shuangshuang doesn't mind collaborating with Ah Ru to open a ready-to-wear shop.

In Qingshan Town, there are quite a few wealthy families with wives and concubines.

They can definitely afford to buy a few pieces of clothing.

But if you're not well-prepared, Mu Shuangshuang isn't willing to invest money easily.

Upon hearing Mu Shuangshuang's words, Ah Ru felt it made sense.

Indeed, she hasn't prepared many things, and opening a shop might be too early.

"So, Shuangshuang, do you have any good ideas to help me open the shop as soon as possible?" Ah Ru asked.

"I don't have any good ideas, but at the very least, you need to keep earning capital. The more capital you have, the more confidence you'll have when you open the shop."

And if the timing is right, Mu Shuangshuang might actually be able to contribute some effort.

The ready-to-wear business makes money too, although in Mu Shuangshuang's eyes, not as quickly as running a restaurant.

"Alright, then let's go with what Shuangshuang says. I'll work hard for the next two months and see what the situation is like after the New Year."

"Ah Ru, help me pick out two pieces of fabric for winter clothes, something warm, as I plan to fill them with cotton."

In ancient times, cotton clothing was made with only cotton or hemp scraps as filler, unlike modern times with various types of down jackets offering excellent warmth.

So Mu Shuangshuang could only make the clothes as thick as possible to keep her family from freezing.

"Just in time, we recently received two pieces of fabric with fleece. Come with me," Ah Ru said, grabbing Mu Shuangshuang's hand and pulling her along.

Mu Shuangshuang turned to Lu Yuanfeng and said, "Fengzi, come along and choose, see which color fabric you like."

Lu Yuanfeng nodded and followed Shuangshuang into Ah Ru's fabric store.

Since there were only two pieces of fabric, there wasn't much choice in colors. One was navy blue, intended for making men's clothes.

The other was for women, a light red. Perhaps due to the dyeing, the colors were slightly different from usual fabrics.

For instance, the navy blue had a hint of blue in it.

The cotton-padded clothes made from it should look particularly new.

"These two pieces of fabric are the best in the store, but they're quite expensive—two pieces cost one tael and eight qian of silver," Ah Ru said.

Ah Ru offered the fabric to Mu Shuangshuang at the original price, not taking advantage of her at all.

And her store only had those two pieces of such fabric.

Mu Shuangshuang paid the money and also asked for some leftover fabric pieces from Ah Ru. After some small talk, she suggested a few ideas for Ah Ru's ready-to-wear shop.

They also agreed that no matter what, she would contribute some money by then.

As for the specifics, it would wait until Ah Ru confirmed the shop opening time. Mu Shuangshuang would then see how much silver she had. If more, she'd contribute more; if less, she'd have to find another way.

Actually, Mu Shuangshuang wasn't too worried. If money really ran out, selling the recipe for cold noodles or popcorn could fetch a good price.

Of course, unless it was absolutely necessary, she wouldn't kill the goose that lays the golden egg.

"Ah Ru, it's getting late. Fengzi and I need to head back to the village. I'll come see you again next time."

"Alright, then I'll think more about these things you mentioned." Ah Ru nodded gently.

After leaving Ah Ru's fabric store, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng bought some food at the market and other items needed for winter.

They also took the opportunity to learn what was currently selling well and what was in short supply.

It's something Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng did every time they went to the market.

Understanding the market allows them to create products that the market likes.

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It wasn't until Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng returned to Er Gui Village that they learned everyone in the Old Mu Family was on strike again.

Scolded as he was, Mu Dazhong stopped going out to work. Mu Danian, not willing to suffer alone, risked being beaten to death by not stepping out at all.

As for the fourth branch, Mr. Mu had no face to make them work.

So they all simply stayed home, living idly.

"Sigh, I knew that rewards scheme wouldn't last long." Mu Shuangshuang sighed.

She was a bit frustrated, not just for anything else, but because she put her heart into the ideas she gave to Mr. Mu.

"Shuangshuang, you don't need to blame yourself. I guess even your grandfather couldn't manage it anymore, which is why everyone's just doing as they please."

Yu Si Niang, having stayed in the Old Mu Family for over a decade, knew the personalities of everyone in the family well, despite ignoring everything else.

After the third branch separated, other than the fourth branch, none of them could do any work.

"If my grandfather can't manage now, what about in the future? If my uncle really becomes an official and starts embezzling or doing bad things, will my grandfather still turn a blind eye?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

Yu Si Niang had nothing more to say because the decision was up to her father-in-law and only he could decide.

"Mom, the Old Mu Family is bound to fail. I just hope it won't drag the third branch down when that happens!"

Laziness is a fundamental sin. If an entire family indulges in it, the whole family can be ruined.

To put it bluntly, Mu Shuangshuang isn't concerned about what happens to the Old Mu Family; her greatest fear is being implicated.

The third branch can forgo the good times, but they can't suffer along with them.

"Shuangshuang, let's just talk about this here. If it reaches your grandparents, they'll definitely be upset."

A few days ago, Yu Si Niang heard someone was gossiping about the Old Mu Family behind their backs.

Her mother learned about it and scolded the person in front of the whole village. Now, no one in the village dared to casually talk about the Old Mu Family.

"Mom, rest assured, what happens to the Old Mu Family has nothing to do with me. We'll focus on living our good days."

After speaking, Mu Shuangshuang reported the purchased fabrics and other items to Yu Si Niang and inquired about the approximate cost of preparing things for the New Year, ensuring to calculate everything clearly.

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After resting for half a day, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng started working in the fields again. Since Mu Dazhong didn't come out, the rice in the field wasn't depleted by noon or night.

It's likely that Mu Dazhong is the only one who could think of stealing grain.

Just as the sun rose, Mu Shuangshuang and Yu Si Niang had already been harvesting rice for quite some time.

But surprisingly, several more people suddenly appeared in the Old Mu Family's fields, which had been idle for a day.

Mu Shuangshuang recognized them and, after recalling, realized the people on the ridge were none other than Huang Bitao's three brothers.

Looking further, she found Huang Bitao herself.

Could it be that the Huang Family came to help?

Mu Shuangshuang was amazed. The Huang Family was genuinely admirable.

Huang Bitao had not yet married, but her brothers were already helping her future in-laws with the work.

And with this fresh blood in the Old Mu Family, work in the fields gradually caught up with that of other households.

Chapter 645: Insult

After a busy morning, the four members of the Huang Family helped the Old Mu Family harvest three acres of land, a task that the entire Old Mu Family couldn't finish in a whole day.

Mr. Mu couldn't stop smiling from ear to ear.

In these times, having labor from the maternal family meant people dared not underestimate a new bride, because labor equates to workers.

Such families are bound to earn money sooner or later.

The more Mr. Mu looked at this granddaughter-in-law, the more he liked her, especially knowing that Da Lang and this granddaughter-in-law were in the prosperous Wang's Mansion, made him like her even more.

"Bita, later take your brothers to the house for a meal. Tell me what you like, and I'll have Xia go back and inform her mother."

Huang Bita shook her head firmly.

"Mr. Mu, my brothers said they're fine with anything, our Huang Family isn't picky about food."

Speaking of which, coming to help the Old Mu Family was actually the idea of the Huang Family's eldest.

The Huang Family lacked money and land, so to prevent their sister from being bullied, they could only start from other aspects.

The three brothers discussed it and decided to postpone their own work to first help their sister's husband's family finish the farm work.

The Old Mu Family owed the Huang Family a favor and wouldn't dare treat their sister badly.

But not everyone in the Huang Family thought this way.

At least, several people in the Old Mu Family didn't like Huang Bita.

There was Mu Dazhong and Mrs. Lin from the second branch, as well as Mu Danian.

By noon, the Huang brothers and Huang Bitu weren't in a hurry to go back. They let the Old Mu Family go first, while they stayed to help harvest the fourth acre.

The Huang brothers were particularly hardworking and resilient, and Huang Bitu followed along, cutting rice stalk by stalk with a sickle.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng had finished their work, yet they didn't leave.

"Yuan Feng, I'll go check on Sister Huang. My older cousin isn't here, and I'm worried they'll suffer. You go back first, and if my mom hasn't cooked, tell her to make extra, and do more dishes too."

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng finished early today, but they didn't push themselves too hard with work.

"Alright!" Lu Yuanfeng didn't ask more, carrying an empty basket back to the third branch.

Mu Shuangshuang reached the Old Mu Family's farm slope and first spotted the third brother of the Huang Family, Huang Mo.

Having not seen each other for a long time, Huang Mo stared at Mu Shuangshuang for quite a while and suddenly pointed at her with surprise.

"Miss Shuangshuang, how come you're here?"

At this exclamation, the rest of the Huang Family saw Mu Shuangshuang too.

Huang Bitu approached affectionately.

"Shuangshuang, I didn't even see you just now."

Recently, Mu Dalang had been in town helping his master manage the flocks and doing other odd jobs.

He hadn't been coming home to stay at night.

Huang Bitu was unaware of his activities.

If he knew, he certainly wouldn't agree.

"I just got here. Sister Huang, how much have you harvested?"

Mu Shuangshuang knew the Huang Family was very diligent; everyone in the village said so. The three brothers were worth all the Old Mu Family people.

"Over three acres, in a little while, it'll be almost four acres."

Mu Shuangshuang knew that the Old Mu Family, plus the rented land, had about ten to twenty acres. If they let the Huang Family help like this, it would be quick.

But, was it worth it?

To say nothing of it, just that stingy Old Mrs. Mu alone, with the Huang Family not having returned yet, she certainly wouldn't leave any good things for them.

"Sister Huang, you all better hurry back to rest. This work isn't done all at once; you need to pace yourselves and rest enough."

There were things Mu Shuangshuang couldn't say directly to Huang Bitu, only urging her to hurry back.

But Huang Bitu shook her head.

"My brothers said since we're here, we should do more work for the Old Mu Family, so later the husband's family will look up to us."

Ah, Mu Shuangshuang sighed in her heart.

She didn't even know how to explain that the people of the Old Mu Family only cared if someone was respected based on their family's wealth and power.

They didn't care how much you worked.

Probably all that the Huang Family did was seen as currying favor with Mu Dade.

Mu Shuangshuang guessed right; the Old Mu Family

When Old Mrs. Mu heard there were four freeloaders, her mood soured immediately.

Especially hearing Mr. Mu say meat soup and good dishes were to be made for them, Old Mrs. Mu was even more displeased.

Her stuff was saved for Xiangxiang and the eldest; anyone else shouldn't even think about it.

"Fourth daughter-in-law, later cook a pot of wild vegetable porridge, and some pickled vegetables for the Huang Family to eat."

"That Huang Bitu isn't from a high background, used to eating this stuff. Give her meat, she won't be able to stomach it."

That's how stingy Old Mrs. Mu was.

If everyone ate together, maybe the Huang Family would get something decent.

If eating alone, they would get absolutely nothing.

After finishing work, the Huang Family headed to the Old Mu Family.

Mu Shuangshuang followed them, hesitating all the way whether to directly invite the Huang Family to eat at her place.

Not looking at anyone special, Mu Shuangshuang asked Fengzi to tell her mother to make more food, fearing that Old Mrs. Mu might act foolish and not feed the Huang Family.

"Shuangshuang, my three brothers and I will go to the Old Mu Family, and after work this afternoon, we'll come find you." Huang Bitu bid farewell to Mu Shuangshuang.

The three brothers were generous enough to say goodbye too.

The one exception was the third brother, Huang Mo, who stared at Mu Shuangshuang for quite some time.

Though he had met Shuangshuang only once, the image of her cooking remained in his mind.

Huang Mo watched longingly as Mu Shuangshuang left.

Today, he and Mu Shuangshuang exchanged a total of two sentences: one when Mu Shuangshuang came to the field and one when they parted.

"Sister, doesn't Miss Shuangshuang live at the Old Mu Family?" Huang Mo hesitated a long while before asking his sister about Shuangshuang.

"Mm, she is the daughter of Dalang's third uncle - she's particularly nice. Dalang says she does business in town, earning quite a bit.

The third branch used to share a courtyard with the Old Mu Family; later on, they allocated a plot in the corner for a kitchen and other things, and they're doing well then."

Huang Bitu pointed towards the direction of the third branch.

Huang Mo gazed at the lowly crude house of the third branch and the newly built kitchen adjacent. He stared for a long time.

The eldest brother of the Huang Family walked ahead, being the head of the family and leading in all matters.

Mr. Mu was already at the yard gate to welcome them, immediately instructing the fourth branch members to serve the dishes upon seeing the three brothers and Huang Bitu.

But when a bowl of wild vegetable porridge was brought to the table, Mr. Mu was dumbfounded.

"Fourth daughter-in-law, what's going on? Why is it porridge, and what about the rice?"

Mr. Mu thought his eyes were failing him. At noon, with the eldest here, the Old Mu Family had twice-cooked pork and braised fish.

Nothing was left from lunch, so Mr. Mu instructed Old Mrs. Mu to make some meat to properly host the hardworking Huang Family.

"Dad... this is what mom said - no meat, only wild vegetable porridge. I... I can't help it either!"

Chapter 646: Huang Family Wants to Break Off the Engagement

Mrs. Liu was full of grievances, the Huang Family rarely visits, and as the fourth aunt, she couldn't prepare anything.

"Nonsense, is your mother mad? Can't she see we have guests? Why serve these things to entertain guests?" Mr. Mu's face turned pale with anger.

"Mr. Mu, forget it, us brothers and Bitu usually don't eat well, something simple like this is fine." The Huang Family's eldest came out to smooth things over.

In fact, after working all morning, the Huang siblings were indeed hungry; at this point, even if it was just wild vegetable porridge, they could eat it.

But they still felt a bit uncomfortable in their hearts; it's not about having the best food, but since the Huang Family was here to help the Old Mu Family, the Mu Family should at least provide a decent meal.

Even ignoring that Bitu is to be the granddaughter-in-law of the Old Mu Family in the future, anyone who comes to help should receive the basic respect, even if no payment is given.

Mr. Mu's face turned even uglier; if the Huang siblings caused a scene, Mr. Mu could at least comfort himself by thinking these people don't know gratitude.

But now, with the Huang Family's eldest being considerate of Mr. Mu, how could Mr. Mu allow them to eat porridge.

"I'll go find Dalang's grandmother, you all wait for a moment."

With those words, Mr. Mu left the kitchen to find Old Mrs. Mu.

Old Mrs. Mu was currently directing Mrs. Lin to air out the blankets.

Mrs. Lin held a wooden stick, swinging it continuously while beating the blankets, turning back occasionally with a fawning smile towards Old Mrs. Mu.

"Mother, how do you think I did?"

Old Mrs. Mu snorted coldly, ignoring Mrs. Lin.

In Old Mrs. Mu's heart, her son had been led astray by Mrs. Lin, the lazy daughter-in-law.

Her once good son had now become someone who steals, and she didn't believe that Mrs. Lin hadn't been encouraging him.

"Mother, is there anything else I can do for you? Please rest, and I'll handle it."

Mrs. Lin continued to smile fawningly, making Old Mrs. Mu feel extremely uncomfortable with this second daughter-in-law.

"Get lost, if you want to work, go find it yourself. If I see you again, I'll have the second son divorce you and send you back to Lin Family Village."

Old Mrs. Mu had a bad temper and always spoke by shouting.

Following the sound, Mr. Mu found Old Mrs. Mu and began scolding her fiercely: "What's wrong with you? Didn't I tell you to make a good meal for the Huang siblings? After all, Bitu is supposed to be Dalang's fiancée, our Old Mu Family's in-law."

"What's wrong with me? Why don't you ask what's wrong with them? Three able-bodied people coming to my house to eat for free, my eldest may be a scholar, but he can't sustain them eating like this. Haven't you heard of eating away all your resources?"

"Eating away all your resources? Why don't you mention that the Huang brothers helped the Old Mu Family all morning, doing more than the second son and others could in a whole day?"

Mr. Mu was trembling with anger, genuinely wanting to reprimand Old Mrs. Mu.

"Nobody begged them to come; they came of their own accord. What's it got to do with me?" Old Mrs. Mu replied.

"You... you're simply unreasonable!" Mr. Mu shouted.

Old Mrs. Mu just turned her back and ignored Mr. Mu completely.

Seeing this, Mrs. Lin quickly hurried back to the kitchen.

Mrs. Lin knew her mother-in-law was unwilling to spare even one meal and intended to use this opportunity to drive the Huang Family away.

In the kitchen, the Huang brothers and Huang Bita didn't dare touch the wild vegetable porridge on the table, just staring at it, drooling.

"Big brother, are we really okay marrying Bita into the Old Mu Family?" The second Huang brother, being straightforward, spoke his mind.

The eldest Huang brother felt uncomfortable but held it in.

The third Huang brother, sharing his eldest brother's temperament, kept everything to himself.

"Second brother, don't speak carelessly. Bita is marrying Dalang and will live with Dalang, not the Old Mu Family," the eldest Huang brother tried to reassure his hot-tempered brother.

The eldest Huang brother had interacted with Mu Dalang several times and believed in Mu Dalang's character, trusting he would take good care of his sister Ah Bi.

"Who says she's not living with the Old Mu Family?" Mrs. Lin strode into the kitchen, continuing rudely:

"If Huang Bita marries Dalang, she'll be Dalang's wife, making her my daughter-in-law since I'm Lin Xiaozao. As her mother-in-law, I can treat Huang Bita however I want."

"If I tell her to go east, she won't dare go west. What I say she must do, otherwise I'll have my son Dalang divorce her."

"Your Huang Family's intentions are clear to me, Lin Xiaozao. You merely covet the fact that Dalang's uncle is a scholar, hoping Bita can follow Dalang's uncle to the county. So the Huang Family can also rise to prominence."

"I've made myself clear: if Huang Bita enters my house, I won't let her follow them to the county."

Look at what you're eating, wild vegetable porridge, something even pigs wouldn't eat, but my mother made you eat it. Do you know why?

Because your Huang Family isn't worthy. Eating terrible things at home, why should you eat well and drink well in our house?"

"Enough!" The eldest Huang brother shouted loudly, then continued: "Our Huang Family is a small household, but we never intended to reach beyond our station with your Old Mu Family."

The reason we agreed to marry Bita into the Old Mu Family was that we valued Dalang's character."

"Character? What good is character without money? It's because your Huang Family is shameless, clinging to my Dalang, and turning what was originally for that scoundrel Fifth into my Lin Xiaozao's daughter-in-law."

My Lin Xiaozao's son will marry no one but someone from a noble family, the daughter of a landlord; I won't consent to anyone from a common village."

Mrs. Lin's words had now escalated to personal attacks.

The Huang brothers' teeth were grinding in anger, and Huang Bita's eyes were red, holding back her tears.

"Big brother, let's go, I won't marry him." Huang Bitu said.

"Big brother, look at this family you told me to endure? Ah Bi's personality would definitely suffer here; let's just call off the engagement and let the Old Mu Family keep what little they have for the rest of their lives." The second Huang brother angrily said.

Despite being poor, people have dignity, and being insulted like this was unbearable for the Huang brothers, or anyone.

The eldest Huang brother looked at his sister with reddened eyes and the faces of his two furious brothers, finally making a decision.

"Old Mu Family's second aunt, please inform Mr. Mu that our Huang Family cannot afford to associate with your Old Mu Family.

Everything we've sent before, including the two dairy goats, we will return. The engagement between the Huang Family and the Mu Family is over."

Hearing this, Mrs. Lin was furious.

"What dairy goats? Your Huang Family never took anything from our Old Mu Family?"

The matter of the dairy goats was something that Mu Dalang hadn't said was his own doing, leading the Huang brothers to naturally think it was Mr. Mu's idea.

This was also another reason for coming over to help this time.

Chapter 647: Excessive Bullying

The Huang Brothers ignored Mrs. Lin, and the four of them walked together toward the gate of the Old Mu Family's courtyard.

Mrs. Lin chased after them, cursing loudly: "What nanny goat? Is it that little slut Huang Bitu seducing my son, making him buy it?"

"I've seen that Huang Bitu isn't anything good. She hasn't even entered the family yet and she's making my son buy this and that. How shameless!"

The second Huang Brother stopped in his tracks, surged forward, ready to slap the loud-mouthed Mrs. Lin to death.

But he was held back by Huang Bitu.

"Second Brother, forget it. Let's go back. I won't marry into this family. I'll spend my life taking care of you guys."

Tears poured out as she spoke, falling to the dirt and vanishing quickly.

"Ah Bi, let me go. I want to beat this foul-mouthed woman to death. Anyway, you're not going to be the daughter-in-law of the Old Mu Family, you don't have to suffer this indignity."

The words of the second Huang Brother infuriated Mrs. Lin.

"You brat, how dare you insult me? You even want to hit me, you're really out of line! Someone, help, the in-laws' son is hitting the in-laws' mother, it's outrageous!"

Mrs. Lin shouted curses at the Huang Family, determined not to let them have it easy.

"You... How dare you spew such lies, I'll make you pay."

The second Huang Brother jumped up, about to kick Mrs. Lin, but the first Huang Brother quickly pulled him back.

Nobody knew why the most honest of the Huang Brothers, Huang Mo, rushed forward and slapped Mrs. Lin across the face.

With a "slap", Mrs. Lin was knocked to the ground.

She was stunned for a moment and then began to wail loudly.

"Oh my, oh my goodness! I can't go on, I can't go on, I'm Lin Xiaozao and this is the first time I've seen a younger generation hit the elder. What's going on here..."

"The Huang Brothers are beating people! Someone, help, it's terrible! Father, Mother, look at the Huang Brothers' fine deeds..."

Mrs. Lin's voice was truly too loud and everyone around the Old Mu Family could hear it. Mr. Mu came rushing out.

"Second daughter-in-law, what's going on?"

Mrs. Lin didn't mention what she did, she just said: "Father, you need to stand up for your daughter-in-law, the Huang Family is too bullying.

They disdain fourth daughter's cooking as pig feed, refuse to eat and want to cancel the engagement with Da Lang. I didn't allow it, and they hit me..."

Mrs. Lin spoke as she pushed her reddened face forward for Mr. Mu to see.

The Huang Family was all stunned, never expecting Mrs. Lin to reverse white and black right in front of them.

The ugly face of Mrs. Lin made the eldest Huang Brother want to rush up and slap her twice.

"Mr. Mu, since you're here, we won't let the second aunt from the Mu Family relay the message, lest she smear feces on our Huang Family.

Your Old Mu Family is too high for our Huang Family to climb. The engagement between Da Lang and my sister Ah Bi is null and void. From now on, our Huang Family will have nothing to do with Old Mu Family."

The eldest Huang Brother expressed his thoughts and beckoned the Huang siblings to walk out of the courtyard.

Mr. Mu was still unclear about the issues when Mrs. Lin suddenly began rolling on the ground, capturing all of Mr. Mu's attention.

Out of the Old Mu Family's courtyard, Huang Bitu cried as she spoke:

"Eldest Brother, Second Brother, Third Brother, I'm sorry, it's Ah Bi's fault, Ah Bi shouldn't marry. The Old Mu Family isn't something we can climb."

Historically, prejudice against social class runs deep. Mrs. Lin believed her son, being a scholar's son with talents, should definitely marry someone matching their family's status.

Huang Bitu's family had nothing, relying on her brothers doing odd jobs, earning very little money.

Additionally, people around them frequently showed deliberate sympathy, deeply embedding inferiority within the Huang Family.

Mrs. Lin's words in the kitchen crushed the Huang siblings into the soil.

The Huang Family had no choice but to cancel the engagement.

But Mrs. Lin absolutely shouldn't have shifted all the blame onto the Huang Brothers.

"Ah Bi, that's not how you should say it. It's eldest brother who didn't think it through. Eldest brother shouldn't have let you mingle with people from the Old Mu Family. From now on, eldest brother will..."

The eldest Huang Brother wanted to say more, but Mu Shuangshuang called out to the Huang siblings.

"Brother Huang, come to my house to rest!"

She had heard the commotion earlier.

She realized that Old Mrs. Mu was unwilling to give anything good to the Huang Brothers and Huang Bitu to eat,

only she hadn't anticipated that Mrs. Lin would actually stir up trouble. She saw Huang Mo slap Mrs. Lin, but her only thought was that it was too light.

Mrs. Lin was the type who needed to be beaten into silence.

"Shuangshuang, we want to go back, I'm sorry." Huang Bitu wiped her tears and spoke to Mu Shuangshuang.

"Go back where? Our third branch has split from the Old Mu Family, we have nothing to do with them anymore. You're my friend, and I'm inviting my friends and their brothers for a meal, nothing wrong with that, right?"

Mu Shuangshuang finished speaking, pulling Huang Bitu toward her home.

On the way, Huang Bitu was still somewhat choked up.

Arriving at the third branch, a big table of dishes was already laid out in the kitchen.

All made by Yu Si Niang alone, the people from the third branch had already eaten.

Fengzi went up the mountain to check things out and might come back late in the afternoon to work.

"Sister Huang, our family has already eaten, you and the Huang Brothers eat as much as you like, don't be polite, I'll get you water to wash your face."

Mu Shuangshuang fetched a basin of water for the Huang Brothers and a basin specifically for Huang Bitu.

This simple small gesture warmed Huang Bitu's heart.

She genuinely liked Shuangshuang, such a meticulous girl, just like Da Lang said, even though she's young, she's smarter than anyone in the Old Mu Family.

"Miss Shuangshuang, chat with us for a while!" Huang Mo spoke up, starting to look around the kitchen as soon as he entered.

The kitchen of the third branch was the largest he had ever seen, filled with many things like jars and a stone mill.

There were also two cabinets, yet it looked tidy and even somewhat cozy.

Mu Shuangshuang glanced at Huang Mo, not thinking much about it, as she was the host and should be there attending to them.

"You all eat, I just finished eating, already full."

Mu Shuangshuang took a seat next to Huang Bitu.

"Shuangshuang, my... my engagement with Da Lang is over! I can't be your sister-in-law." Huang Bitu said.

"Sister Huang, honestly, not marrying into the Old Mu Family is truly a good thing." Mu Shuangshuang spoke truthfully.

On this matter, Mu Dalang had discussed it with her in the past.

The Old Mu Family never treated daughters-in-law as people, especially Old Mrs. Mu, who freely hit and scolded them as a matter of course.

In the Old Mu Family, as long as you're a daughter-in-law, you have no status.

If Huang Bitu married into the family, she'd surely suffer torment from both Old Mrs. Mu and Mrs. Lin.

But marriage is ultimately a matter between two people, to address this issue, Mu Dalang and Mu Shuangshuang had distinctly indicated that if necessary, he would divide the family, meaning to break away from the Old Mu Family and establish his own household.

Chapter 648: At Worst, Establish Your Own Faction

"Sister Huang, although Shuangshuang says that, she's not trying to persuade you to break up with my elder cousin.

She's just trying to prepare you mentally in advance. This is how the Old Mu Family is. Once you're married into the family, you will encounter these things.

What you saw today is just a small part of the many aspects of life in the Old Mu Family."

Mu Shuangshuang spoke slowly and calmly.

"Miss Shuangshuang, do you mean that if Ah Bi marries into the Old Mu Family, she'll have to face such difficulties with her mother-in-law and a harsh grandmother?" asked the Huang Family's second brother.

"Yes, but that's not all. Most women will face this because not everyone is kind and easy to get along with.

However, my elder cousin has thought about this issue and his answer to me was that he will do his best to protect Sister Huang."

"What if he can't protect her? Our family's situation is special, and Ah Bi doesn't know how to deal with such elders; she'll only suffer."

The Huang Family's elder brother poured out his worries to Mu Shuangshuang.

The three Huang brothers all love their sister dearly and can forgo any dowry, but want their sister to be happy.

"If he can't protect her, they'll separate and stand on their own! My elder cousin's determination is stronger than you can imagine."

The main issue in Huang Bitu and Mu Dalang's marriage stems from the Old Mu Family.

If it wasn't believed that their marriage would bring prosperity to Mu Dade, Old Mrs. Mu and Mr. Mu likely wouldn't agree.

Mrs. Lin is greedy and looks down on Huang Bitu's family background.

"Just because he's determined, does my sister have to marry him? Let me tell you, our Huang Family doesn't care." The second brother of the Huang Family shouted directly.

Mrs. Lin's words are still swirling in his mind.

"Second Brother, don't shout at Shuangshuang like that, she's not wrong." Huang Bitu reprimanded, glancing at the Huang Family's second brother.

Huang Mo also spoke up: "Second Brother, calm down, it's not Miss Shuangshuang's fault."

The attitude of the Huang Family's second brother finally softened.

"Sorry, Miss Shuangshuang, it's my attitude that's wrong." The second brother of the Huang Family apologized.

Mu Shuangshuang waved her hand, looking at the Huang siblings, she said, "I understand that your brothers don't want Sister Huang to suffer, and neither do I.

But marriage is not a trivial matter; no marriage is perfect, whether with anyone. Some are ugly, some are beautiful, some are rich, and some are poor.

But the rarest thing is mutual liking; if there's affection between the two, anything can be changed.

My mother is the third daughter-in-law of the Old Mu Family, she suffered many hardships and grievances, but she said that the luckiest thing in her life was meeting my father.

So, when considering breaking off the engagement, we shouldn't think about the Old Mu Family, but whether my elder cousin can bring Sister Huang happiness; that's most important."

After Mu Shuangshuang finished speaking, Huang Bita became silent, contemplating the words Mu Shuangshuang had said.

Indeed, deep down, Huang Bita liked Mu Dalang, and she wasn't afraid of hardships at the Old Mu Family; every daughter-in-law must serve her mother-in-law well and manage the household.

She was upset that the Old Mu Family didn't respect her three brothers.

No matter how hard life is, Huang Bita isn't afraid; but she couldn't be selfish and let her brothers down just because of her marriage.

Seeing Huang Bitā's silence, Mu Shuangshuang knew her words had some impact.

Though these words shouldn't be spoken by her, an outsider.

"Alright, let's not think about this problem now; let's eat first, and after the meal Shuangshuang will take you to walk around the mountain and look at the things there."

Mu Shuangshuang urged everyone to start eating.

On the large table filled with dishes, the Huang siblings looked at the food but had no appetite and none of them moved their chopsticks.

Unable to bear it, Mu Shuangshuang spoke again, "Since you're here, enjoy the food and drink; don't dwell on unhappy things, and at worst, it's just a matter of breaking off the engagement, which isn't an unsolvable issue."

Mu Shuangshuang picked up her chopsticks and gave Huang Bitā a piece of braised meat, urging her to eat.

To be honest, seeing the Huang siblings like this made Mu Shuangshuang feel emotional.

The Old Mu Family really has shallow perspectives, always focusing on superficial things.

For example: Mu Dade's scholarly title, his potential future career as an official, and how the Old Mu Family might be different from other families.

But so what, with Mu Dade's mentality, they might not achieve the results they desire.

Once the meal was finished, the mood of the Huang brothers finally calmed down.

In the afternoon, they wouldn't be able to help the Old Mu Family with work, and Mu Shuangshuang didn't feel good just letting them go, so remembering Lu Yuanfeng was in the mountains, she took them to the mountains.

She brought along Little Black and Lai Mi, and some rabbit-catching tools and baskets.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't dare take them deep into the mountains, only around the mountainside.

Walking on the mountain paths, Mu Shuangshuang told them, "This mountain is called Niuwei Mountain because its shape is like the tail of a cow, rising higher towards the east.

Usually, villagers don't dare come up because people often went missing at the foot or in the mountains."

As soon as Mu Shuangshuang finished speaking, the Huang brothers surrounded Mu Shuangshuang and Huang Bitu, seemingly to protect them.

"Don't worry, there are no fierce beasts here, just some wild hens and rabbits. Just follow Little Black and Lai Mi."

As they often followed Lu Yuanfeng up the mountain, the two little animals were familiar with where to find wild hens and other small creatures.

Passing through a region with some mushrooms, Mu Shuangshuang stopped and let Huang Bitu pick some to take home.

Huang Bitu gratefully glanced at Mu Shuangshuang and began picking mushrooms.

The Huang brothers also joined in.

"Sister Huang, you can take these mushrooms home to make soup; it's particularly delicious. But you've picked too many and surely won't finish them, so you can use them to trade for other things in the village." said Mu Shuangshuang.

"Shuangshuang, are those two dairy goats really my elder cousin's gift to me?" Huang Bitu was still thinking about what Mrs. Lin had said.

"Yes! My elder cousin said there's not much nutritious food at your place, and since you're thin, he bought them to nourish you."

Mu Shuangshuang had heard Mrs. Lin complaining about the dairy goats, assuming the Huang Family had already spoken with Mrs. Lin.

Truthfully, Mu Shuangshuang really liked Huang Bitu.

Honest and straightforward, not taking advantage of others.

Mu Dalang marrying her is truly a blessing.

"But the second aunt of the Mu Family already knows, will she... scold Dalang?" asked Huang Bitu worriedly.

"Don't worry, my elder cousin isn't afraid of my aunt. If she finds out about my aunt's misdeeds, she'd definitely be angry. I reckon my elder cousin will return in a few days."

Mu Shuangshuang comforted Huang Bitu.

They wandered around the mountain a bit more, caught a rabbit, and collected some mushrooms.

Chapter 649: Mu Dalang Gets Angry

As they descended the mountain, dusk was approaching, the sunset painted the sky beautifully.

Mu Shuangshuang wanted them to stay for dinner, but the Huang brothers insisted on refusing, even Huang Bitu declined.

Holding Mu Shuangshuang's hand, Huang Bitu smiled with a face full of warmth.

"Shuangshuang, thank you today. No matter what happens between me and Da Lang, you will always be my lifelong friend, Ah Bi.

You can always find me whenever you visit Huang Family Village. My door is always open for you."

Huang Bitu made a promise.

"Sister Huang, since we're friends, let's not say thanks. Next time you come, don't stand on ceremony. Take this rabbit back."

Mu Shuangshuang handed the captured gray rabbit to Huang Bitu.

"Shuangshuang, that's exactly what I wanted to say. You don't need to give me everything.

Though my brothers can only do temporary work, the money they earn is enough for us to eat well. I just want to save the money for my brothers to get married."

Huang Bitu did not treat Mu Shuangshuang as an outsider and shared her innermost thoughts with her.

"I know! I'm not giving this to you because your family lacks it. This rabbit, Sister Huang and the three Huang brothers all worked hard for it, so it's rightfully yours.

Either you eat dinner here, and tonight we cook this rabbit, or you take it home."

By now, they had reached the village entrance, and it was impossible for the Huang siblings to return.

Huang Bitu hesitated for a moment and turned to look at her eldest brother.

Her eldest brother signaled for Huang Bitu to take the rabbit.

Only then did Huang Bitu accept the rabbit, expressing her thanks again.

In her heart, she planned to raise the rabbit at home. If it had baby rabbits, she would send them all to Shuangshuang.

After sending off the Huang brothers, Mu Shuangshuang hadn't returned to the village when she saw Mu Dalang walking towards the village entrance from afar.

Mu Shuangshuang ran over.

"Big cousin, Shuangshuang has something to tell you..."

Mu Shuangshuang briefly explained the situation to Mu Dalang.

Mu Dalang's face instantly turned pale.

"Shuangshuang, you're saying my grandma and mom did this kind of thing?" Mu Dalang asked.

"Big cousin, now isn't the time to dwell on that. Sister Huang is still nearby. If you chase after them now, you might catch up."

As soon as Mu Shuangshuang finished speaking, Mu Dalang sprinted towards Huang Family Village.

Soon, there was only a small silhouette left in the direction of Huang Family Village.

Mu Shuangshuang turned back to the village. She didn't want to work this afternoon, so she simply went home to cook.

She had soaked some green beans and rice in the morning, planning to make green bean rolls that evening. As soon as Mu Shuangshuang got home, she peeled the soaked green beans.

For making green bean rolls, only the bean meat is used, no shells can remain, or the rolls will be very coarse.

Mu Shuangshuang had just finished cleaning the stone mill when someone stood at the kitchen door — Mr. Mu, sweating profusely.

"Shuang, has Huang Bitu really broken off the marriage with our Old Mu Family's Da Lang?"

Mu Shuangshuang didn't want to respond to Mr. Mu at all. Parents like him are rarely seen.

Seeing Mu Shuangshuang silent, Mr. Mu asked again, "Shuang, come on, tell me, what's going on? Your big cousin must marry the Huang girl."

Mr. Mu's words only fueled Mu Shuangshuang's anger.

"Why does grandpa think Sister Huang must be with my Brother Da Lang? Was she sold to the Old Mu Family? Or does she owe the Old Mu Family anything?"

Mu Shuangshuang rolled her eyes in disapproval of Mr. Mu's actions.

"This..." Mr. Mu was entirely embarrassed. He couldn't possibly say it was because marrying the Huang girl was a favor to Wang Laoda, could he?

"Grandpa, if you can't even explain the reason yourself, then don't force it. The three Huang brothers helped with the work, a whole four acres of land, in one morning, without eating, drinking, or resting!

Grandpa, you tell me, who wouldn't treat them with a good meal?"

Mu Shuangshuang was really tired of complaining. The four workers from the Huang family, even if calculated at six coins per person for a morning's labor, would earn 24 coins.

With so much money, they could buy a pound of meat and a fish for a really good meal.

The most crucial part is, the Huang family members are capable of doing twice the work as others, in a single morning equating to a full day's work.

How stingy must one be to resort to serving wild vegetable porridge?

Mr. Mu's face burned with shame.

Trying to explain, he said, "Shuang, I really talked to your grandma about this, telling her to make something better for the Huang siblings.

But as old men, we can't keep an eye on the affairs in the back yard all the time.

Besides, your second aunt was beaten by the second Huang cousin, which makes it even more complicated."

Mr. Mu explained his predicament to Mu Shuangshuang, and mentioned Mrs. Lin, trying to imply that the Huang family was also at fault.

To Mu Shuangshuang, it seemed like Mr. Mu was shirking his responsibilities.

"Grandpa, you are the head of the family, people should listen to what you say.

I'm not sure what my second aunt told you, but I want to say, if my second aunt got beaten, it's because she said something she shouldn't have, and she deserved it.

Yes, the Huang family is poor, not comparing to our Old Mu Family, but Sister Huang hasn't married in yet. To bully her in front of her brothers, could they bear it? If someone said something bad about your elder brother right in front of you, could you bear it?"

This time, Mu Shuangshuang didn't hold back with Mr. Mu.

She wasn't the kind of person who wouldn't speak out just because Mr. Mu was an elder.

On the contrary, the biggest problem with the Old Mu Family was Mr. Mu.

Mr. Mu's lack of authority led to chaos among his juniors.

Mr. Mu stood there, unsure what to do with his hands and feet.

Now, hearing Mu Shuangshuang's words, he felt even more uneasy.

All the troubles of the Old Mu Family weighed on Mr. Mu.

Mr. Mu wanted to make the Old Mu Family better, but no matter what he did, it was never right.

"Grandpa, my big cousin has already gone after the Huang siblings. The outcome is up to the news from him, but given today's event, he's likely to have a fit of anger.

Having his not-yet-married wife treated like that, anyone would feel heartbroken.

If you don't have anything else, please go back, Shuang wants to start making dinner. It's smoky here, men should stay out."

The last sentence was aimed at Mr. Mu's comment that he couldn't keep an eye on the backyard all the time.

Mr. Mu's face looked somewhat unpleasant as he glanced at Mu Shuangshuang and turned to leave the third branch's kitchen.

Mu Shuangshuang continued working without bothering about the way Mr. Mu looked at her before leaving.

Putting a little bit of peeled green beans into the mill, Mu Shuangshuang started grinding the green beans and rice...

Chapter 650: A Troublesome Matter (Part 1)

Mu Shuangshuang ground the mung beans and rice into a paste, then cleaned the stone mill, and began preparing the filling for the bean rolls.

Mu Shuangshuang usually just eats a little garlic leaf, adding some chili sauce is enough.

However, the situation recently was special, nutrition had to keep up, plus it wasn't the right season for garlic green leaves to grow.

Mu Shuangshuang decided to make the sauce herself.

Just so happens there were some dried mushrooms leftover from last time, Mu Shuangshuang crushed a few garlics, mixed them with onions, and minced them all together.

This time, the sauce was still mainly meat-based, Mu Shuangshuang also minced the meat and added salt to taste.

While waiting for the flavors to meld, Mu Shuangshuang started the fire to make the sauce, heating oil in the hot pan.

After sautéing the onions, ginger, and garlic in the pan, she added the minced meat to stir fry, then added the dried mushrooms. When it was almost cooked, she added some chili sauce and white wine.

The sauce for the bean rolls was finally ready.

Mu Shuangshuang placed the large pot of sauce in the cupboard, then looked outside in the courtyard, Yu Si Niang hadn't returned, nor had Lu Yuanfeng.

She wondered if Mu Dalang had caught up with Huang Bitao.

She hoped this matter wouldn't affect their engagement.

Her cousin could be said to be Old Mu Family's only sensible one, who was also very good to her.

Sighing, Mu Shuangshuang went to sit in Mu Dashan's room for a while.

Lately, Mu Dashan had been mostly staying at home doing some work, not going out much.

He made a lot of straw fans at home, all prepared to sell in town next summer.

Seeing Shuangshuang enter his room, Mu Dashan quickly put down his work to greet Shuangshuang.

"Shuangshuang, sit down, I'll pour you a cup of water," he said.

"Dad, I'm not thirsty, and don't keep working all the time, there's still plenty of time before next summer," Mu Shuangshuang replied.

The man thought for a moment, decided to listen to his daughter, took a break, and chatted with her.

The father and daughter hadn't had a heart-to-heart in a long time.

Mu Shuangshuang glanced around Mu Dashan's room, which was once shabby and even without windows, with hardly any sunlight coming in during the day.

Later, Lu Yuanfeng helped to open a hole and made a window, making the room much brighter.

As the third branch's family resources gradually improved, Mu Shuangshuang added some furniture, new cabinets, and two stools.

The room of Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang underwent drastic changes, it finally looked like a home.

"Shuangshuang, I talked with your mother yesterday, she said that without you and Fengzi, this home wouldn't stand.

Fengzi is willing to work, and you're diligent. With the two of you together, our third branch had such a big change."

Mu Dashan felt emotional.

The previous situation of the third branch is still vividly clear to Mu Dashan, and thinking about it now, it still feels like a miracle.

Precisely because of this, the rickety, broken wardrobe with a missing leg from the third branch was never discarded.

"Dad, a home is not built by just two people, my mother also worked hard, she goes out with me to do work, doing banquet business.

And you, dad, you're busy at home with so much work, when mom's not around, you tidy up the house, make straw fans, make bamboo baskets.

Xiao Han is working hard at studying, Little Zhi and Yuanbao take care of themselves well. It takes all these people together to make a home."

Mu Shuangshuang dared not claim credit for doing well herself.

Because she knew that no matter how well she did, it wouldn't mean anything without her family.

Listening to Shuangshuang's words, Mu Dashan felt even more that his daughter's generosity was something most men couldn't match.

"Shuangshuang, I feel with your broad mind, you'll sooner or later do great things with Fengzi."

Mu Dashan never confidently believed in anything, but he was unwavering in the belief that his daughter could succeed.

"Haha, then I'll be waiting. Dad, did mom tell you about what happened at grandpa and grandma's place at noon today?"

Mu Shuangshuang always feared Mu Dashan would get bored, so whenever there were peculiar things at Old Mu's, she would tell him.

At first, when he heard those bizarre things, the man would get frustrated, thinking the family went too far, but gradually, he stopped getting upset, as if he got used to the family's ways.

"Your mother said, at noon, she told me how your grandma and your second aunt treated the Huang Family.

Frankly, Shuangshuang, as I grow older, I am not as angry about these matters as I used to be.

My only regret is realizing it too late. If I had realized it earlier, your mother wouldn't have suffered so much.

Now the most pitiful is your cousin Dalang, so young, his wife hasn't even entered the door, and who knows how much hardship he'll have to endure, and even after marriage, passing through your grandma won't be easy either."

Long ago, Mu Dashan had told himself, no matter how successful Old Mu Family became, he wouldn't return there.

Even if as Shuangshuang's mother worried, the first branch oppressed the third branch, making life difficult, Mu Dashan wouldn't retrace his steps.

"Cousin Dalang is indeed pitiful. My second aunt doesn't like Sister Huang, and my fifth uncle always thinks about breaking off cousin Dalang's engagement, pushing him into a tight spot.

But on second thought, maybe it's a test from heaven for my cousin Dalang, once he and Sister Huang weather this storm, they can be together," Mu Shuangshuang comforted.

"Yes, good people will be rewarded, your cousin Dalang will eventually get what he wants. Shuangshuang, about Xiao Han and Yuanbao attending school, I asked some villagers who had the same idea a few days ago.

They said they could be sent together to the Hundred Herbs Hall in town, where the teacher specializes in teaching students with no foundation, fitting Xiao Han and Yuanbao well since they hadn't been exposed to reading and literacy before."

"Dad, you're amazing, observing worldly affairs from home, and I was just worrying about finding a school for Yuanbao and Xiao Han. But isn't the town over ten miles away, isn't that too far?"

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng usually pushed a wheelbarrow or sometimes took an ox cart, which took at least an hour to reach the town.

Two young kids with short arms and legs, going day after day, it's too much in the long run.

"Then should we have someone from our family pick and drop them off?" the man suggested.

Mu Shuangshuang immediately shook her head in refusal.

"That's not a long-term solution, picking them up for three or four miles is fine, but over ten miles back and forth for four trips a day, it'd wear out their legs."

"Then what should we do?" the man looked worried.

"When your uncle studied, he stayed directly at your aunt's home in town, which was convenient for going in and out, but we don't have reliable relatives in town, so does that mean the two children won't go to school?" Mu Dashan said.

Mu Shuangshuang was also contemplating this.

The initial plan was to have someone from the town take them, but no one from the village goes to the town daily, even those who earn a bit of cart fare from ox-driving only go during market days.