

Folly 661

Chapter 661: Candied Hawthorns Scattered All Over the Ground (Part 1)

"Grandma, your words are wrong. More than half of the money from Old Mu Family's Third Branch was earned by Shuangshuang.

Shuangshuang decides who can use it, and if Shuangshuang doesn't give it to someone, they won't get a single penny from her."

Mu Shuangshuang spoke bluntly, not afraid at all of Old Mrs. Mu picking a fight.

Old Mrs. Mu was irritated by Mu Shuangshuang's arrogant attitude and the fact that she showed no respect.

"You brat, are you criticizing me, this old lady?" Old Mrs. Mu questioned.

"Grandma, you spoke ill of my mother first, it's you who dirtied her name. Shuangshuang only spoke the truth.

My mother and my fourth aunt are the most hardworking among the daughters-in-law, rising with the sun and resting at sunset.

Not being praised is one thing, but they shouldn't have to bear undue criticism. Why should they?"

"Rebellious, rebellious, you brat! How dare you talk back? Let's see if I won't tear apart your mouth with my hands!"

Old Mrs. Mu jumped off the ox cart, pulled up her sleeves, making a move as if to hit Mu Shuangshuang.

Seeing this, Lu Yuanfeng slapped the ox with the whip—

The ox quickly pulled the cart towards the town.

Old Mrs. Mu chased after it on her small feet but couldn't catch up, so she pointed at the cart gradually disappearing with Mu Shuangshuang on it, cursing loudly without care.

The other members of the Mu Family watched in shock.

Old Mrs. Mu's level isn't something ordinary folks can compare to; she cursed at the village entrance for the duration of two cups of tea without repeating a single curse word.

"Enough, today's Xiangxiang's big day, be well-behaved and don't bring bad luck to Xiangxiang."

Only then did Old Mrs. Mu stop, though still fuming internally, she loudly cursed once more.

"That damn brat, best if she falls into a ditch and dies."

Once her emotions calmed, Old Mrs. Mu turned around.

She glanced at the ox cart that wouldn't take any more passengers.

Simply pointing, she ordered Mrs. Lin and Mrs. Liu: "You lazy women get down and walk, Qing and Gou Dan, you walk too."

"So young yet only know how to enjoy life; back in my day, I was fishing in the frozen pond!"

Old Mrs. Mu tried to gather everyone squeezed together on the cart down.

This way, she could get on the cart herself again.

"Mom, I haven't long recovered from my miscarriage." Mrs. Lin shouted in discontent.

Mrs. Lin did not want to walk to town at all.

It's a distance of over ten li; it's exhausting.

"Miscarriage this, it's been so long; why? Still think you're a sow needing to lie in a pen?

I reckon you're spoiled; back then, I birthed the eldest and Xiangxiang, and got up right after.

Third daughter-in-law and fourth daughter-in-law didn't even bother, birthing in the morning and washing everyone's clothes in the afternoon, and you're considered precious? You think you're great? Keep whining and go back."

Once Old Mrs. Mu ordered Mrs. Lin to walk, Mrs. Lin changed her expression immediately.

Appearing obedient, she said, "Haha, mom, I was joking. It's Xiangxiang's big day; how could I, the second sister-in-law, not go? I'll walk, walking is fine, isn't it?"

Old Mrs. Mu snorted coldly, then she got back on the ox cart.

In this way, the ones who really got to ride the ox cart were Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu.

Mu Xiangxiang, Mu Dazhong, and Mu Danian, while Mu Dajiang refused to ride and insisted on walking with Mrs. Liu.

The group trickled to town, and by the time they arrived, it was quite late.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng with two women and some children first went to Xue Yi's restaurant.

Because the restaurant's shopkeeper claimed illness leave, they got delayed.

It was during this time that the whole of the Mu Family reached the street.

Everyone looked curiously at the townspeople coming and going and the peddlers carrying goods.

For Gou Dan, this was the first time in town, and his eyes were drawn to the candied haws in the peddler's hands.

With his dark little hand pointing at the candied haws, he screamed: "Mom, candied haws, candied haws, Gou Dan wants to eat candied haws, Gou Dan wants to eat..."

Mrs. Lin rolled her eyes, suddenly scolding Gou Dan: "Eat what eat? I have no money in hand; ask whoever has money."

Gou Dan refused, sat on the ground, and bawled loudly.

"No, no, Gou Dan wants to eat candied haws, Gou Dan wants to eat candied haws..."

Gou Dan's crying attracted quite a few onlookers.

More people pointed fingers at the large Mu Family, commenting.

Most criticized them for being unwilling to buy a child a stick of candied haws.

Mrs. Lin approached Old Mrs. Mu, saying: "Mom, Gou Dan is still a child, just wants to eat a little snack, why not buy a stick for him, maybe he'll stop crying."

As if cooperating with Mrs. Lin, at the mention of buying candied haws, Gou Dan quieted a bit.

"Eat, eat, eat. Always wanting to eat, where's the effort when there's work? Eyes staring at food, why don't you lick a thing from a latrine?"

Old Mrs. Mu scolded Mrs. Lin and Gou Dan thoroughly.

After being scolded, Gou Dan cried more fiercely.

Old Mrs. Mu decided not to buy him food, letting Gou Dan cry.

"The child wants to eat, just buy a stick, it's only a few coins." Mr. Mu didn't want the Mu Family to lose face, so he spoke up.

"Eat what? Not like a reincarnated starving ghost. If each was like this little brat, crying for food, Mu Family would be broke."

Nobody expected Gou Dan to take advantage of Old Mrs. Mu's verbal gap, and rush toward the peddler selling candied haws.

The old peddler fell when Gou Dan collided with him, and the candied haws in his hand scattered.

Gou Dan picked one from the ground and blissfully munched on it.

The ground was a mess, and the peddler groaned on the ground.

The Mu Family stared in shock until the peddler pointed at them, saying, "Hey, you... compensate for my candied haws, how... how will this be fixed?"

Old Mrs. Mu's face turned from red to white, then became pale.

She stepped forward, grabbed Gou Dan's hand, snatched the candied haw, and slapped his face.

"You damned brat, look at what you've done, are you a hungry ghost reincarnated? You..."

Even Old Mrs. Mu, who's unbeatable at cursing, found herself at a loss.

Gou Dan cried even harder.

The surrounding crowd's criticisms grew louder.

"Hey, what kind of family is this, to have such a cruel heart.

A child wants candied haws, not giving is one thing, but hitting them.

Not like a grandma, too vicious..."

"What are you all yelling about? Haven't you heard not to interfere with others' affairs? This old lady will do as she pleases; can't stand it, get out!"

Old Mrs. Mu lashed out at the onlookers.

With this, even fewer stood by the Mu Family.

Chapter 662: Encounter at the Restaurant

"Old lady, your grandson overturned all the tanghulu from the old man who sells them. Shouldn't you compensate him?"

A young man stood up to seek justice, questioning Old Mrs. Mu.

"If you want compensation, go find my grandson. I don't have money!"

Old Mrs. Mu made it clear she didn't want to spend money.

The old man sitting on the ground hugging his leg started to cry bitterly upon hearing her words.

"What shall I do? I have the old to feed above and the young below. My whole family waits for the tanghulu I sell every day to make ends meet. Now the tanghulu is gone, and I'm injured, too. Where is the justice..."

The man saw this and continued:

"Old hag, do you think this is your village where you can get away with a mistake by claiming you have no money?"

"I'm telling you, matters in our town can be dealt with by the government. By then, your whole family can end up in the county jail eating prison food."

The people around also felt Old Mrs. Mu was unreasonable.

"Let's not waste time talking to this old lady, let's report to the authorities."

"Exactly, our Qingshan Town has always been peaceful. It's only after this family came that it's become chaotic. In my opinion, we should find out who caused this and ban them from coming to town!"

The more the crowd spoke, the more agitated they became. Mr. Mu, worried about Dade's reputation, took the initiative to step out.

"Everyone, please don't be upset. These matters were caused by my ignorant wife; we're willing to... compensate."

When Mr. Mu said this, he wasn't in a very good mood.

The day didn't start well.

First, there was a quarrel at the village entrance with Shuang.

Then, there was another quarrel with the townspeople.

If things continue like this, the Old Mu Family might become infamous in town.

"Compensate? Compensate for what? It wasn't us who ruined it; the one who broke it should pay!" said Old Mrs. Mu stubbornly.

Mr. Mu felt his face burning with shame.

"Enough, let the men talk, and stop interrupting. If you keep nagging, get lost!" Mr. Mu shouted sternly.

After scolding her, he then went forward to negotiate compensation with the old man.

The Old Mu Family ended up spending fifty coins to buy the old man's tanghulu.

Among which, thirty coins were for the tanghulu, and twenty coins were for the old man's medical expenses.

The Old Mu Family suffered a double loss both literally and figuratively.

They didn't get to eat the tanghulu and had to pay fifty coins in vain, money it would take a long time to earn.

That's why they all hung their heads, looking dispirited.

The only one in a good mood was Gou Dan, as Old Mrs. Mu gave him all the tanghulu that hadn't been damaged.

"You little rascal, you'd better finish all these tanghulu. If not, I'll beat you up."

Gou Dan grabbed ten tanghulu in one hand and began stuffing them into his mouth without concern for any dust.

Mu Qingqing watched from the side, unable to help swallowing, but her pride kept her from lowering herself to eat dirty things picked off the ground like Gou Dan.

"Mom, Gou Dan is just a kid; eating so many tanghulu is bad for his health," Mrs. Lin reminded from the side.

After all, it was her son. Mrs. Lin could bully and beat him herself, but she didn't want anyone else doing it, even if that person was Old Mrs. Mu.

"Not dead from eating, is he? Your account, I'll settle with you at home. Say one more word, and I'll send you back to Er Gui Village."

Mrs. Lin was so intimidated she barely dared to breathe, knowing if they weren't in town, Old Mrs. Mu would have flayed her.

Passing by a stall selling white sugar cakes, Mu Xiangxiang suddenly stopped: "Mom, I'm hungry, I want to eat white sugar cakes."

Old Mrs. Mu's face instantly cracked into a smile.

"Alright, alright, Mom will buy them for you right now."

Spending five coins, Old Mrs. Mu bought five white sugar cakes for Mu Xiangxiang, worried she wouldn't have enough. She even added:

"Xiangxiang, do you want some meat buns? The meat buns in town are really delicious; thin skin and lots of filling, so fragrant."

Mu Xiangxiang nodded eagerly, swallowing at the mention.

"Yes, Mom, I want ten meat buns."

The meat buns cost one coin each, and the vegetable buns were two for a coin. Ten meat buns meant ten coins.

Old Mrs. Mu didn't even blink as she got ten meat buns. That wasn't all.

The others could only watch as Mu Xiangxiang held onto the fragrant meat buns.

Gou Dan looked at the tanghulu in his hand and then at the meat buns in Mu Xiangxiang's hand. He cried out, "Mom, Gou Dan wants to eat meat buns."

"Eat your damn head! So much food in your hand and you still want what's in Xiangxiang's hand. If you cry again, I'll break your little legs!" Old Mrs. Mu scolded Gou Dan fiercely.

Gou Dan grew angry and threw all the tanghulu in his hand to the ground.

"I want to eat meat buns..."

Gou Dan cried out again, even louder. This time, Old Mrs. Mu was even angrier, jumping up to hit Gou Dan.

Mrs. Lin, frightened and pale, tugged Mu Dazhong's sleeve, shouting: "What are you standing there for? Our son is about to be beaten to death."

Mu Dazhong stepped forward, pulling Gou Dan away and shielding him in his arms.

Old Mrs. Mu's slap landed squarely on Mu Dazhong's face.

Five fingerprints instantly appeared on Mu Dazhong's cheek.

The Old Mu Family immediately descended into chaos.

"Quiet! Do you guys still want to eat at First-class Residence? If not, get lost!" Mr. Mu shouted loudly. He scanned the people present with his eyes, and only then did they quiet down.

The original plan last night was for Old Mrs. Mu and Mr. Mu and the main branch to go eat. The other branches disagreed but promised not to cause trouble, so Mr. Mu relented, and the whole family was to have a meal at one table nearby.

After much difficulty, they found First-class Residence, and everyone was excited beyond measure.

It seemed all the previous unpleasantness had disappeared.

It wasn't the time for lunch yet, but the Old Mu Family could order a pot of tea and drink there for the whole morning.

The restaurant's tea and snacks were free as long as they had lunch there.

Mrs. Lin had wanted to be the first to rush into First-class Residence. Unexpectedly, she saw a few people from the third branch sitting with Zhao Yun at a table by the entrance.

Especially Yu Si Niang, who had a delicious roast duck in front of her.

Without thinking, Mrs. Lin called out loudly, "Mom, the third daughter-in-law has come along to freeload a meal."

It wasn't the usual meal time, but there were still a few customers.

Hearing Mrs. Lin's remark, they all looked at Yu Si Niang with strange eyes as if she really was there to freeload.

Yu Si Niang's face turned blue, then white.

Shuangshuang and Fengzi were both in the back yard helping the chef; Yu Si Niang didn't have any help.

"Where are they?" Old Mrs. Mu rushed in upon hearing someone had come to freeload a meal.

She looked around and finally focused her gaze on Yu Si Niang's face.

Seeing the roast duck in front of Yu Si Niang, Old Mrs. Mu's expression was similar to Mrs. Lin's.

Chapter 663: Dare Not Bite

"Well, we haven't even gathered yet, and you've already ordered the dishes."

"Yu Si Niang, Yu Si Niang, I, the old lady, never noticed before that you had such a skill to freeload, even I am ashamed."

Old Mrs. Mu didn't clear up the facts and directly accused Yu Si Niang.

Yu Si Niang explained, "Mother, these are the dishes ordered by Shuangshuang, we..."

"I knew it was that sneaky girl. She really knows how to think, orders food in the name of our Mu Family for herself, that sneaky girl is heartless, she'll meet her end sooner or later."

Old Mrs. Mu's scolding was loud and forceful.

Mu Shuangshuang was still in the kitchen when she heard the scolding.

She put down her work, apologized to the chef at First-class Residence, and went out.

Zhao Yun was arguing fiercely with Yu Si Niang and Old Mrs. Mu, and no matter how the two of them explained, Old Mrs. Mu insisted that Yu Si Niang was freeloading her meal.

She even told Yu Si Niang to get out.

"Mother, I see Yu Si Niang has no boundaries, doing such disgraceful things." Mrs. Lin poured dirty water while staring at the roast duck in front of Yu Si Niang, drooling.

"Second Sister-in-law, you started this, this roast duck was clearly bought by Shuangshuang for me, Xiao Yun, and a few other kids," Yu Si Niang finally seized the opportunity to finish explaining.

"Stop it, don't think we don't know. You heard from Old Fourth's family that our Mu Family was coming to First-class Residence, you thought you'd get a good meal, so you brazenly came over.

Otherwise, why did you rush ahead at the village entrance? It's just to get here before us, order a good meal, and charge it to our Mu Family?"

Mrs. Lin spoke lies without even drafting them, as if she had seen it with her own eyes.

"You're not qualified to eat this roast duck!" Mrs. Lin stepped forward and swiftly snatched the roast duck.

Zhao Yun and Yu Si Niang tried to stop it but were too late.

Mrs. Lin's dirty hands had already touched the roast duck on the table.

"You're simply too much, how has Si Niang and Shuangshuang ever wronged you? To bully people like this?" Zhao Yun questioned loudly with red eyes.

"Zhao Yun, don't think because you're an outsider, I won't talk to you. I'm afraid this thing today was instigated by you behind Third Daughter-in-law?" Old Mrs. Mu said coldly, her triangular eyes emitting a venomous gaze.

"Aunt Mu, you're simply going too far..." Zhao Yun added.

"Grandma, what dirty water are you splashing on our third branch again? The roast duck my mother ordered was in Shuangshuang's personal name, and the bill has already been paid. Whatever you and the family decide to order is your freedom."

Mu Shuangshuang emerged from the kitchen, still wearing an apron, visibly indicating what she had been doing.

She caught sight of the roast duck in Mrs. Lin's hand and was instantly furious.

Mu Shuangshuang stepped forward and snatched the roast duck back from Mrs. Lin, angrily saying, "Second Aunt, what are you doing? Don't tell me Shuangshuang's roast duck grew legs and flew into your hands."

"You... you..." Mrs. Lin gritted her teeth angrily, having suffered losses so many times she feared Mu Shuangshuang.

She could only ask Old Mrs. Mu for help: "Mother, this sneaky girl snatched my roast duck."

"Second Aunt, are you blind? This is clearly from my mother's table."

Mu Shuangshuang still maintained politeness, as she didn't want to make a scene here.

First-class Residence is Xue Yi's domain, Mu Shuangshuang had been delivering things here for a while, and was generally familiar with the people from First-class Residence.

Unlike Jiu Si Xuan, Mu Shuangshuang mainly gave things to the Shopkeeper here.

Because the Shopkeeper wasn't around, Mu Shuangshuang had to wait for someone else dispatched by Xue Yi to come over and inspect the goods, which caused a delay.

Plus Xue Yi mentioned calling Xue Zheng for lunch and asked her to prepare a meal, offering her three hundred coins.

Mu Shuangshuang felt this was an opportunity to earn money, and three hundred coins was a sizable amount.

She accepted without hesitation.

Before cooking, worrying about her mother's and Zhao Yun's hunger, she ordered some things first.

That's basically how things went down, but Mu Shuangshuang didn't need to explain to anyone.

"You're the one who's talking nonsense, your mother used our Mu Family's money to order things, so that's naturally ours." Mrs. Lin said, hands on her hips to Mu Shuangshuang.

"Exactly, you sneaky girl, you're so bold. I said your mother wouldn't have the guts to deceive our Mu Family, it's you, you started it,

I know well what kind of conditions you third branch have, I'm the old lady here!" Old Mrs. Mu was relentless, insisting that Yu Si Niang showed up to freeload.

Mu Shuangshuang's temper flared up.

She directly called over the steward, here besides the Shopkeeper, and asked directly in front of Old Mrs. Mu: "Tell my grandma directly, was this roast duck paid for?"

The steward, of course, nodded.

"Old lady, this roast duck was paid for by Miss Shuangshuang, and Miss Shuangshuang is a friend of our restaurant. If you want to keep making trouble, First-class Residence doesn't welcome you, you can leave."

Old Mrs. Mu never thought Mu Shuangshuang was acquainted with the people at First-class Residence.

Nanny Li said that First-class Residence is a newly opened restaurant in town and currently the largest scale in town, average people can't afford to eat here.

"Mother, that sneaky girl has help, what are we going to do?" Mrs. Lin came over and asked Old Mrs. Mu.

"Get lost, it's your troublemaking wife who's always causing trouble. Without figuring things out, stirring up things here, don't eat lunch!"

Old Mrs. Mu pushed Mrs. Lin aside and gave her a stinking scolding again.

Other members of the Old Mu Family had already found a table, very close to Mu Shuangshuang's table, where they could see the dishes set on her table.

Mu Shuangshuang's hand was greasy with the roast duck, she hesitated whether to keep this roast duck.

Mrs. Lin often goes to the toilet without washing her hands.

Her finger joints are often black and dirty, looking at Mrs. Lin made Mu Shuangshuang lose her appetite.

Mrs. Lin seemed to know Mu Shuangshuang's thoughts, she came closer.

"Shuang girl, if you don't want to eat this roast duck, just give it to us then. Second Aunt just misunderstood you earlier."

The roast duck at First-class Residence is known to be delicious in this area.

The duck is just the right fatness, the skin roasted to a crispy golden color, looks especially enticing.

Mu Shuangshuang hesitated for a moment, the third branch definitely couldn't eat it.

But giving it to Mrs. Lin freely, she wasn't willing.

Coincidentally, at this time, the steward who left earlier returned.

He approached Mu Shuangshuang and said, "Miss Shuangshuang, give the roast duck in your hand to our shop staff. They're all men who don't mind if a woman's hand touched it.

I'll get you a new, clean one instead, how about it?"

Mu Shuangshuang had no objections, she handed the roast duck to the steward and thanked him.

"Thank you, Uncle Nian, Shuangshuang will go back to the kitchen and continue to work."

Chapter 664: Stealing the Spotlight from My Young Aunt

Soon, a new roast duck was brought to Yu Si Niang's table.

Maybe because the people at First-class Residence knew Mu Shuangshuang, Old Mrs. Mu decided not to bother Yu Si Niang.

Instead, she started instructing Mu Xiangxiang on a few things.

"Xiangxiang, when you meet the Qin Family later, remember to be reserved, okay? Try to eat less during the meal."

This was the first time Old Mrs. Mu tried to control Mu Xiangxiang's diet, which made Mu Xiangxiang a bit unhappy.

But she nodded as Old Mrs. Mu instructed.

"Oh, Mother, I got it, don't worry!" Mu Xiangxiang said impatiently.

Despite this, Old Mrs. Mu didn't get angry.

"It's a relief you understand, Xiangxiang. You're more sensible, unlike your second sister-in-law who acts like a starving ghost reincarnated.

Always diving into food without caring who's present, not only disgracing our Old Mu Family name, she didn't even manage to snatch enough meat, born with a peasant's fate."

Old Mrs. Mu seized the chance to criticize Mrs. Lin.

Mrs. Lin, right next to her, felt angry but dared not speak, trying to make herself as invisible as possible so Old Mrs. Mu wouldn't notice her.

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In the First-class Residence kitchen

Mu Shuangshuang was skillfully and attentively flipping the dishes in the iron wok.

Besides the necessary operations for the restaurant's business, the steward had assigned a master chef and two apprentices to assist Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang only needed to handle the stove, while one apprentice helped with the fire and the other was busy chopping and washing vegetables.

The master chef watched Mu Shuangshuang cook from the side.

"Please turn it down to low heat, I'm about to finish this dish." Mu Shuangshuang glanced at the lotus root slices in the wok and said.

"Miss Shuangshuang, what else do you need next? Just let us know, and we'll handle it." The master chef asked Mu Shuangshuang.

The apprentice managing the fire quickly adjusted it, reducing the flame in the stove.

Including the stir-fried lotus root slices, Mu Shuangshuang had already cooked eight dishes, two servings of each. However, according to Xue Yi's request, at least twelve dishes should be prepared, balanced between meat and vegetables, with vegetables as the main focus and meat as a supplement.

Old Mrs. Mu and Xue Zheng both preferred light dishes, her mother and Aunt Zhao Yun liked meat dishes, so Mu Shuangshuang had to make the judgment herself.

"I need flour, two cleaned chickens..."

Mu Shuangshuang listed a bunch of ingredients, all for making fried chicken, which she had made for Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan last time, both of whom found it delicious.

However, since it was just one chicken being fried, the couple was reluctant to eat much.

The master chef instructed the apprentice to prepare these, while Mu Shuangshuang continued cooking other dishes.

In the restaurant, the Old Mu Family waited impatiently for the Qin Family; even the ones who promised to come from the first household were nowhere to be seen. As the noon mealtime approached, Mu Dazhong started fretting, "Mother, could it be that the Qin Family heard about how our little sister eats more than a cow and decided not to want her? This waiting can't go on, we should order some food and fill our stomachs first!"

"Nonsense! Your little sister doesn't eat that much, no ivory comes out of a dog's mouth." Old Mrs. Mu looked displeased.

"Mother, stop defending our little sister. She had three bowls of noodles for breakfast, and upon arriving in town, several pieces of sugar cake and ten meat buns—neither I nor Fifth, both strong men, could eat that much. If that's not a cow, what is it?" Mu Dazhong asked.

"Don't try to argue with this old woman. Just because the Qin Family didn't show up, you're picking on your sister Xiangxiang. If you utter another word of nonsense, I'll tear your mouth apart." Old Mrs. Mu didn't care how her favoritism towards her daughter affected her other sons.

Mu Xiangxiang indeed ate a lot, but she wasn't allowed to be criticized.

"Mother, don't keep scolding my second brother. His words do make sense; the Qin Family promised to meet at this hour, but they haven't appeared. What does that indicate?"

It indicates the Qin Family doesn't regard our Old Mu Family well and doesn't want to become in-laws." Mu Danian said unhappily.

"Enough, say what you want to say later when we're home; there are so many people watching here, what does it look like?" Mr. Mu reminded them.

Then he added: "Your eldest brother and sister-in-law haven't come either; let's consider it as waiting for them. If the Qin Family truly doesn't show up, we'll go back and ask Nanny Li if something happened."

Mr. Mu spent his life farming, and values like keeping one's word were deeply ingrained in his mind.

Although sometimes he couldn't think quickly enough and wasn't decisive in managing family matters.

Just as Mu Dade hadn't come yet, four figures from the Old Mu Family's first household suddenly appeared at the entrance of First-class Residence.

Mu Dade walked in front, with Mrs. Jin beside him; both gave off an impression of wealth and importance as soon as they entered.

Mu Dade had never farmed, his fair skin made him indistinguishable from city dwellers, and Mrs. Jin, not to be outdone, wore town's finest cosmetics on her face.

Behind them were Mu Dandan and Mu Yingying, dressed in the most fashionable flowing-sleeved fairy skirts in Qingshan Town. The style was imported from the Capital and only a few ready-made clothing shops in town made such dresses.

And they were quite pricey.

But those in the Old Mu Family who stayed in the village didn't know this, they just saw the two girls and thought they looked exceptionally pretty.

Especially Mu Xiangxiang, she stared wide-eyed at Mu Dandan and Mu Yingying.

"Mother, are Dan and Ying deliberately dressed so nicely? Today's meeting is clearly mine; might Mr. Qin from the Qin Family end up liking the two of them?"

As soon as Mu Xiangxiang spoke, Old Mrs. Mu immediately scrutinized Mu Dandan and Mu Yingying.

Both girls wore particularly festive bright red outfits, eye-catching indeed, and with their ability to dress up, they looked especially youthful and pretty.

In a crowd, they'd definitely stand out at a glance.

Old Mrs. Mu felt immediately displeased.

Her daughter was here for matchmaking, to meet her future husband, yet the two granddaughters overshadowed and outdid her.

Old Mrs. Mu stepped forward and said to the two girls, "What kind of nonsense are you two doing? Today is your aunt's big day, not you two little vixens'!"

Mu Dandan and Mu Yingying looked aggrievedly at Mu Dade.

"Father, we said we shouldn't wear bright red today, see, Grandma's angry again."

Mu Dade's expression wasn't good, especially since Old Mrs. Mu was scolding his daughters in front of him.

"Mother, I told Dan and Ying to wear those clothes; they just met Landlord Zhou's son in town, and if there are no unexpected issues, there's a chance for our Dan and Zhou Family from town to form a match."

Mu Dade didn't tell the truth; he had seen the Zhou Family but wasn't interested.

He discussed with Mrs. Jin that they should at least match the girls to wealthy families from the county.

Families in town were too small; they weren't good matches.

Chapter 665: Young Uncle

With Mu Dade's explanation, the expression on Old Mrs. Mu's face finally improved a bit.

However, she still looked at Mu Dandan and Mu Yingying as if they were thieves.

Old Mrs. Mu told herself in her heart that if these two girls dared to seduce the future son-in-law, she would flay them.

With the arrival of the people from the main house, everyone from the Old Mu Family was now gathered, just waiting for the Qin Family.

Mr. Mu opened another table, seating himself, Old Mrs. Mu, and Mu Xiangxiang, along with the main house family, while everyone else was arranged at the other table.

Old Mrs. Mu, fearing that the Qin Family would arrive later and that the family would randomly order dishes, had already ordered them in advance.

Two vegetarian dishes, a mixed dish, and some clear soup, having even settled the bill.

Mrs. Lin looked disappointed, whispering to Mu Dazhong and Mu Dajiang.

"I thought we could eat something nice today, but it turns out to be all the usual stuff we have at home. I got excited for nothing. If I'd known, I wouldn't have come."

Her words fell right into Old Mrs. Mu's ears, who said unhappily, "If you don't like it, get out! Troublesome woman, I don't know how our second brother could be blind enough to fancy you."

Mrs. Lin was full of embarrassment, but she had to maintain her smile.

"Mom, I spoke without thinking, just pretend I was talking nonsense, don't be angry, I promise I won't say anything else, how about that?"

Old Mrs. Mu let out a cold snort from her nose, disdainfully giving Mrs. Lin a glance.

On Yu Si Niang's side, the freshly roasted duck was cut open by her. Before she could distribute it, Gou Dan came up to her.

"Aunt Si, Gou Dan wants some."

Being watched by a six-year-old, Yu Si Niang felt a bit embarrassed, even though Shuangshuang had instructed her not to give these things to the other members of the Old Mu Family.

But, Gou Dan was just a child, so it shouldn't be an issue, right?

Yu Si Niang cut off a duck leg and handed it to Gou Dan, "Good boy Gou Dan, eat the duck leg and go find your mom."

To her surprise, Gou Dan didn't take it.

He pointed at the table of roasted duck that hadn't been distributed to others yet, licking his lips hungrily.

"Gou Dan wants to eat the roasted duck."

Zhao Yun, standing beside, understood and reminded Yu Si Niang.

"Si Niang, forget it, this kid is too greedy; he wants the whole plate. Listen to Shuangshuang and don't give it."

"Well..." Yu Si Niang was full of surprise but still handed the duck leg to Gou Dan.

"Gou Dan, those are for Brother Xiao Han and others to eat. You're too young to eat that much," Yu Si Niang kindly explained.

But Gou Dan wouldn't listen; he jumped up to try and grab the entire plate of roasted duck, which was quickly snatched by Yuanbao and placed in front of Xiao Han.

"Xiao Han, let's listen to Sister Shuangshuang and not give it to unfamiliar people!"

After saying that, Yuanbao deliberately took the duck leg from Yu Si Niang, stuffed it into his mouth right in front of Gou Dan.

After taking a bite, he intentionally said loudly, "Mmm, it's so tasty, I almost swallowed my tongue, but I'm not giving any to you!"

Gou Dan first stared at Yuanbao in shock, then clenched his teeth, seemingly about to eat Yuanbao, and charged at him.

Yuanbao, although chubby, had good reflexes and dodged Gou Dan's charge in a swoosh.

Gou Dan's head bumped into a diner in the tavern who was eating, and the man hadn't noticed anything behind him; suddenly bumped, his head plunged into his meal.

When he lifted his head, his face and clothes were covered with rice and soup, looking extremely ridiculous.

Seeing the commotion, Yuanbao quickly sat down and continued eating the duck leg in his hand.

The culprit, Gou Dan, hadn't reacted yet and was grabbed by the furious diner, lifted by the collar.

"Whose child is this, trying to cause trouble? Why bring such a rambunctious kid out?" The diner yelled loudly.

Mrs. Lin stood up anxiously.

"What's going on? Why are you grabbing my son?"

No one from the Old Mu Family had witnessed the food-stealing incident earlier.

So at this point, they had no idea what was happening, but Mrs. Lin's protective nature made her speak for her son, Gou Dan.

"What do you mean? Your son went crazy and bumped my butt. Look at my face, is it still presentable?" The diner complained, pointing at the rice on his face, wanting justice.

"Are you sick? My son's so little; how could he bump you? Don't even think of using this to swindle me, I can report this to the authorities," Mrs. Lin retorted with her hand on her waist, cursing loudly.

"Hey, as a mother, your son did wrong, you're not disciplining him, and you still dare to scold me—it's outrageous! Apologize!" The diner insisted angrily.

"Apologize, for what? We didn't do anything wrong. You did this to yourself!"

At this moment, Mrs. Lin fully displayed her unreasonable nature.

Mu Dade glanced at the entirely unprincipled Mrs. Lin, feeling embarrassed.

"Mom, you'd better tell second sister-in-law to say less; it's not likely the face got like that on purpose."

"Fine, I'll go and properly reprimand this foolish woman!"

Old Mrs. Mu stepped forward, scolding Mrs. Lin harshly, and forced her to apologize and compensate; only then did the matter conclude.

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Everyone looked forward to the arrival, and the Qin Family finally came.

Nanny Li walked in front, followed by a young man around twenty, dressed in luxurious clothes, known as Young Master Qin, Qin Shijie.

With the young man was a flamboyantly dressed woman, identified as the Qin family's concubine.

Nanny Li walked with her head high, looking quite proud, and when she met the people of the Old Mu Family, she quickly changed to a flattering smile.

"Oh, Mr. Mu, Old Mrs. Mu, I'm so sorry to keep you waiting. Young Master Qin was handling business at home and got delayed a bit, I, Nanny Li, apologize on his behalf."

Nanny Li proactively apologized to Mr. Mu, which gradually eased the discontent in his heart.

Old Mrs. Mu nudged Mu Xiangxiang, signaling for her daughter to introduce herself first, lest Mu Dandan and Mu Yingying get ahead.

Mu Xiangxiang stood up, directing her gaze to Qin Shijie behind Nanny Li.

At just one glance, Mu Xiangxiang lost interest completely.

"Mom, I don't want this shorty, misfit, I want someone tall, strong, muscular, and good-looking."

Nanny Li quickly tried to smooth things over.

"Miss Xiangxiang, that's not how to speak; those are superficial attributes, just a worthless shell, can't be eaten. Our Mr. Qin is wealthy and powerful, you'd be living well with him, won't you?"

After hearing Nanny Li's words, Mr. Mu subtly furrowed his brow.

Mr. Mu still preferred Matchmaker Sun for matchmaking, as although she talked a lot, she always did things reliably.

Chapter 666: The Generous Qin Family

This Nanny Li is boastful, with a cunning appearance, giving people an unreliable feeling.

Last time, my wife happened to fight with Matchmaker Sun and injured her, so now Matchmaker Sun isn't willing to arrange marriages for the Old Mu Family.

Old Mr. Mu can't bring himself to ask, so he can only watch as his wife looks for unreliable people.

"Aunt Qin, Mr. Qin, this is the family I've found for you. This is Old Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu from Er Gui Village, and beside them is Miss Xiangxiang, whom I've found as a wife for Young Master Qin."

Nanny Li's first task was to introduce the Old Mu Family to the Qin Family.

Old Mr. Mu stood up, glanced at Mr. Qin Shijie, and finally understood why his daughter didn't want this Qin Shijie.

This Qin Shijie had a flat nose, squinty eyes, and a short frame.

Old Mr. Mu immediately felt some disdain.

How could his daughter marry someone like this?

As if understanding Old Mr. Mu's thoughts, Aunt Qin found a seat, sat down, and spoke proactively.

"Old sir, although our Shijie isn't as handsome as Pan An and lacks height, our Qin Family is wealthy. If Miss Xiangxiang marries into our family, she will be our young mistress.

She won't need to worry about meals, clothes, or anything. Whatever she wants, our Qin Family will buy it for her, but she must marry into our family first."

Aunt Qin's words sounded like she was selling her daughter, but it was the truth nonetheless.

Old Mrs. Mu didn't mind looks.

Back when she married Old Mr. Mu, it was because he was good-looking.

But after marrying him, she spent her life doing hard labor. If not for her wit and having a good son, she might have stayed that way forever.

"Xiangxiang, what do you think?" Old Mrs. Mu asked Mu Xiangxiang.

"Mom, I don't want to marry him. Look at him, even our winter melon is taller than him. No amount of money can make me do it!"

Mu Xiangxiang shouted loudly.

Hearing this, a shadow passed over Qin Shijie's eyes.

However, he quickly forced a smile.

"Sister Xiangxiang, spend more time with me, and you'll know how good I am. Uncle Mu, Aunt Mu, I sincerely want to marry Xiangxiang. If she marries me, the Qin Family's fortune will be hers."

"Moreover, I currently have academic status. Xiangxiang can become a scholar's wife anytime. If she wants to go to the Capital, I can take her."

To be honest, the terms Qin Shijie laid out were indeed substantial and enticing enough.

The Old Mu Family was immersed in the delight of such grand promises.

No one even questioned why someone with such good conditions, apart from appearance, insisted on choosing Mu Xiangxiang.

And why offer so many attractive conditions?

"I'm not going out with you. You look like a toad. I'd lose face going out with you."

Mu Xiangxiang struck Qin Shijie again.

Qin Shijie turned his gaze to Mu Dade and Mrs. Jin, who were also dressed well.

"This must be the newly promoted Mr. Mu Juren, I am Qin Shijie, I've admired you for a long time."

"I don't have a gift for meeting you; all I can offer is my jade, which I've had since childhood. I hope you like it."

Qin Shijie took the jade he'd been wearing off his clothes and handed it to Mu Dade.

The jade was pure in color and seemed like a good item.

Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian's eyes widened at the sight.

The two exchanged a glance and hurriedly approached.

"Shijie, I'm Xiangxiang's second brother. We are very close. When she was young, she loved to eat, and I wouldn't eat just to let her have more." Mu Dazhong blatantly lied.

"Yes, Shijie, I'm Xiangxiang's fifth brother. When she was little, she was very clingy. My mom once had her fortune told, saying she would be a wealthy family lady in the future." Mu Danian chimed in.

Though Qin Shijie was annoyed by these brothers trying to take advantage, hearing Mu Danian mention a wealthy fate eased his distaste a bit.

"Hello, Second Brother, Fifth Brother!" Qin Shijie greeted.

Mu Dazhong, in great spirits, waved his hand in front of Qin Shijie.

Implying that Qin Shijie should also give him a piece of jade.

But after waving for a while, Qin Shijie acted as if he didn't notice.

"Ahem!" Mu Dazhong cleared his throat to remind him again.

"Xiangxiang's second brother, what's wrong with your throat?" Qin Shijie feigned ignorance.

"Well, Shijie, you don't know your second brother's nature. He can't stand unfairness. Just now, you gave my big brother a jade piece. If you don't give him one, he'll..." Mu Danian chuckled.

Off to the side, Old Mr. Mu's face had darkened.

"Fifth, what nonsense are you spouting? Get back here!" Old Mr. Mu scolded under his breath.

"Dad, I'm just stating facts. We're all brothers; we shouldn't play favorites."

Embarrassed, Qin Shijie smiled and took two pieces of broken silver from his pocket, handing them to Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian.

"Brothers, Xiangxiang, I only have one piece of jade, which I've given to Big Brother. Would this silver suffice?" Qin Shijie asked.

Okay, certainly okay, and if more, even better!

Both Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian thought simultaneously.

Next to them, Mrs. Lin also wanted to get in on the action but was stopped by Old Mrs. Mu's sharp glance.

Old Mrs. Mu's gaze was always fierce, and this time, to suppress Mrs. Lin, she almost used her full force.

Mrs. Lin was utterly defeated, hiding at her table, not daring to move.

She could only watch helplessly as Qin Shijie was good to others but not to her, ending up with nothing.

"Old sir, what are your thoughts?" Aunt Qin fixed her gaze on Old Mr. Mu.

"Our thoughts on this matter are..."

Before Old Mr. Mu could finish, Old Mrs. Mu interrupted. "We have no objections. We'll proceed with the marriage in February as initially planned, but I want a bridal gift of fifty taels, thirty pieces of cured meat, and some wedding pastries.

Expenses for the banquet will be calculated separately. If there's anything else, I'll have Nanny Li discuss with you. Agreed?"

Aunt Qin and Qin Shijie exchanged a glance, and finally, Aunt Qin nodded.

"That's all fine, but let's be clear; if you dare back out of the marriage, our Qin Family will not let it go." Aunt Qin's words were a warning, full of hidden meanings.

Old Mr. Mu remained silent for a while.

Fifty taels as a bridal gift and thirty pieces of cured meat were no small sum for a rural family.

Generally, a family with three to five taels and wedding wine money would already be considered generous.

Just what kind of family is this Qin Family to be so generous?

"Mom, I'm not marrying him; you marry him if you like!" Mu Xiangxiang protested again.

"Silly girl, I'm doing this for your own good. Do you think that girl who married the hunter will have a good life? She'll be crying in the future, you'll see!"

Chapter 667: What Exactly Is the Qin Family's Status?

Old Mrs. Mu criticized Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng again, only talking about Lu Yuanfeng's faults.

But Mu Xiangxiang still disagreed.

She didn't want to marry such an ugly thing.

If that ugly thing became her husband, she'd rather not marry at all.

"Mother, if you force me to marry, I'll die in front of you." Mu Xiangxiang said excitedly.

Old Mrs. Mu was very anxious; her precious daughter didn't accept the marriage, what should she do?

Aunt Qin's face had already changed.

The Qin Family spent a lot of silver at the Old Mu Family.

At first, they sent five taels of silver, and later, various clothes. Why could Mu Xiangxiang simply refuse?

Qin Shijie was also angry. If Mu Xiangxiang wasn't useful to him, he would have slapped her long ago.

"Everyone, listen to me, Nanny Li, regarding the marriage between the Old Qin Family and the Old Mu Family, Old Mrs. Mu agreed, and we also received the money and gifts. Now, if we say no to the marriage, it's not really appropriate.

I know the old lady told the villagers that Miss Xiangxiang is getting married. If we go back on this now, no one would dare to propose to her again.

It would be better to follow the previous agreement, have Miss Xiangxiang marry Mr. Qin, and hold a good wedding, how about that?"

There was a slight implied threat in Nanny Li's words.

Old Mrs. Mu didn't hear it, but Mu Dade and Mrs. Jin did.

Especially Mrs. Jin, who was done with these tricks.

Mu Dade suddenly felt that the Qin Family was not simple and worried that Xiangxiang might suffer if she married them.

But Mu Dade didn't say anything because this matter wasn't his concern; if something really happened, it had nothing to do with him.

"Father Xiangxiang, I've told the villagers about this. If you disagree, they'll laugh at Xiangxiang." Old Mrs. Mu said, a bit anxiously recalling her earlier words.

Mr. Mu's initial thoughts were the same as Mu Xiangxiang's.

He didn't want Mu Xiangxiang to be a wife to the Qin Family.

But now the situation was unavoidable.

His wife had gotten them into this mess. If they disagreed, they might be reported to the government.

But this wasn't something he could decide on his own.

"What does Xiangxiang want?" Mr. Mu asked.

"Father, I..." Mu Xiangxiang had just opened her mouth when Old Mrs. Mu covered it.

"Xiangxiang, do you want to have more food than you can eat every day? Do you want to look impressive in front of that little brat?" Old Mrs. Mu asked softly.

Mu Xiangxiang nodded with a muffled sound.

Having more to eat and seeing the third branch Mu Shuangshuang not end well were things Xiangxiang especially looked forward to.

"Then listen to mother, agree to this marriage. Mother won't harm you. When the betrothal gifts come, mother will give it all to you for a dowry."

Old Mrs. Mu never intended to keep the Qin Family's money for herself.

For her daughter to have face in her husband's family, relying on her natal family wasn't enough.

She also needed her own capabilities. The money she asked for could open a small shop for her daughter, so she could collect rent and always eat well.

Mu Xiangxiang hesitated for a long time before nodding.

The rest of the Old Mu Family discussed once again and finally decided on the marriage.

With the marriage set, they started ordering dishes for lunch.

The table for Mrs. Lin was booked by Old Mrs. Mu early on, so it was served first.

When the dishes came, their appealing presentation and distinctly colored ingredients made other Old Mu Family members eager to taste them.

But this joy didn't last long as Yu Si Niang's table was also starting to get served.

Roast duck, roast chicken, roast fish...

The aroma was enough to make one's mouth water. Mrs. Lin glanced at the food in front of Yu Si Niang, then at her own table.

No longer had any appetite.

It was simply more painful than death.

The final dish, Mapo tofu, was brought out by Mu Shuangshuang herself.

There were twelve dishes, enough for two adults and several children, but Mu Shuangshuang had deliberately controlled the portions not to be too much.

"Mother, Aunt Xiao Yun, Fengzi and I won't eat here for lunchtime; we'll go to a private room. Hurry and eat; don't wait for us."

Mu Xiangxiang purposely went out to explain this to avoid the others waiting for her and Fengzi to eat.

"Sister, why? We have such a big table of food; why won't you eat with us?" Little Zhi asked puzzled.

"Because sister promised someone that she'd accompany him for lunch. You kids need to eat more and exercise more to grow taller, understood?"

The kids nodded in unison.

When Mu Shuangshuang walked back, she glanced at the little brother-in-law Old Mrs. Mu bragged about to the whole village.

Tsk, tsk, tsk, even his looks were just barely passable.

Totally unworthy of Mu Xiangxiang, whose face was painted deathly pale.

But perhaps that's why the Qin Family sought Mu Xiangxiang.

Mu Shuangshuang entered the kitchen, where people were discussing the Qin Family.

"Did you hear what was said outside? The Qin Family is causing trouble again," a worker said.

"Yes, how many times has this been? That Young Master Qin seems destined to jinx his wives; few live past three months after marrying him, mysteriously dying after the wedding."

"Right, hasn't the Young Master Qin been unmarried for three years? Why is he marrying now?"

"Who knows, but the Qin Family isn't considered a big name in Qianzhou; maybe they make some money from two empty storefronts left by ancestors, probably not enough for Young Master Qin's trips to the brothel."

"..."

Mu Shuangshuang listened with great interest.

Honestly, the Old Mu Family was amusing.

Selling a daughter for money without caring what the family was like.

But since the Qin Family doesn't have much money, why pretend to be rich?

Just because Mu Xiangxiang caught his eye?

But there are many puzzling things in life, and Mu Shuangshuang didn't bother thinking too much about it.

Just then, Old Mrs. Xue arrived at the restaurant entrance with Xue Zheng.

Mu Shuangshuang came out to greet them personally.

As she approached the Xue family's sedan chair, Xue Zheng swiftly ran to her and hugged her leg.

He stared into Mu Shuangshuang's eyes, seemingly telling her he was scared.

"Xue Zheng, it's okay. Here with me, you're very safe. No one can hurt you!" Mu Shuangshuang comforted.

Xue Zheng followed Mu Shuangshuang to a private room on the second floor.

Yet they were seen by Mrs. Lin, and coincidentally, Xue Yi had also come upstairs.

"Mother, mother, that stinky girl is eating with a wild man, probably up to something indecent."

Mrs. Lin shouted loudly, disregarding the occasion.

Several people gave Mrs. Lin disapproving looks.

Aunt Qin, however, was quite interested and asked, "Do you know that girl from before?"

Old Mrs. Mu smiled and said to Aunt Qin, "She's my useless third son's eldest daughter. Since she was little, she couldn't do anything but eat greedily.

This time, she came to sponge off food and drinks. I chased her away before, never thought she'd go off to dine with a man, really has no manners."

Chapter 668: Do You Want to Exhaust Shuangshuang? (Part 1)

Old Mrs. Mu's fabricated story clearly couldn't hold up.

Because anyone with a brain would know that the person who had just walked with Mu Shuangshuang was the Xue Family's second son, Xue Yi.

Though Qingshan Town wasn't a bustling small town, it had certainly produced a few well-known individuals.

Xue Family's eldest son, Xue Houcheng, definitely counted as one, holding a significant position in the capital. Even the county magistrate might not dare to confront the Xue Family head-on.

For Old Mrs. Mu, a mere countryside woman, to dare to speak slanderously of Xue Family's second son, she clearly hadn't figured out the situation.

But neither Aunt Qin nor Qin Shijie exposed her lie, as all they cared about was Mu Xiangxiang and didn't mind what others did.

Because of Qin Shijie's silence, Old Mrs. Mu grew increasingly pleased with him.

Everyone began to prepare for dinner.

Mrs. Lin longingly watched as Qin Shijie and Aunt Qin ordered a ton of dishes, mostly large fish and meat dishes, with just the beef amounting to two jin.

These were things Mrs. Lin would absolutely not have access to at home.

Yet she dared not move forward, for fear of being scolded or beaten by Old Mrs. Mu.

Mrs. Lin averted her gaze, only to see the table where Yu Si Niang was dining. The golden fried chicken emitted an alluring aroma.

Mrs. Lin's tongue was almost hanging out, and when she looked back at her own table, seeing only two green vegetables, she instantly lost her appetite.

However, the family of the fourth room was eating with great relish, not thinking there was anything wrong with the food they had.

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In the private room prepared by Xue Yi

Mu Shuangshuang, Lu Yuanfeng, along with the Xue Family's Old Mrs. Xue, Xue Yi, and Xue Zheng, made up a table of five.

The dishes on the table were identical to those on Yu Si Niang's table, except for having a slightly smaller portion.

"Shuang, I heard from Xue Yi that you made all this food yourself? Specifically for Zheng'er?"

Old Mrs. Xue was in a good mood, her smile deepening the wrinkles on her face.

The reason was nothing other than her eldest grandson, Xue Zheng, being willing to come out.

Though he was only willing to be around Mu Shuangshuang,

it was still a significant progress. According to Shuangshuang, given gradual exposure to the outside world, he would soon get better.

"Yes, these are a mix of meat and vegetables. Madam, try the Mapo tofu and the soup; they're particularly delicious."

Mu Shuangshuang introduced the dishes while serving a bowl of soup to Xue Zheng.

"Drink it, after which we can have fried chicken, which is really good," Mu Shuangshuang said with a smile to Xue Zheng.

Xue Zheng didn't speak but picked up the bowl and began drinking the soup hastily.

Old Mrs. Xue also served herself and asked Mu Shuangshuang after just one sip.

"Shuang, what kind of soup is this, why is it so savory?"

"Madam, this is fresh flavor soup, made with three ingredients: kelp, meatballs, and mushrooms. It's very simple to make but tastes especially fresh."

Old Mrs. Xue nodded.

"You, girl, have such good cooking skills, much better than those lousy chefs in Ah Zheng's restaurant. If they all could cook like you, I, an old lady, wouldn't lack appetite."

Seeing this, Xue Yi quickly tried to flatter his mother, "Mom, how about I kick all those below out and let Miss Shuangshuang cook for our restaurant?"

"You're talking nonsense! Such a big restaurant kitchen to manage by Shuang alone, are you trying to work her to death?" Old Mrs. Xue scolded.

Even Xue Zheng, who was drinking soup, looked up and glared at Xue Yi.

Xue Yi was filled with frustration, thinking he was just joking. Did even kids have to look down on him?

"Mom, I was just joking. If you don't like it, I won't say it again." Xue Yi responded.

"Now that's right!" Old Mrs. Xue rolled her eyes at Xue Yi, then turned with a kind demeanor towards Mu Shuangshuang.

"Shuang, after dinner, I'll have someone invite your mother and aunt up for some tea and snacks.

Besides, I have something for them. Since they rarely come, it wouldn't do not to meet."

Old Mrs. Xue wasn't unreasonable; bringing out Shuangshuang with her mother and aunt suggested that they wanted to buy things in town.

But since her son made such a large table of dishes and occupied the girl's time, causing them only to wait in the restaurant, she had to make some amends.

"Madam, you don't need to prepare anything. Today, Mr. Xue has paid me wages for this meal, and Shuang is not at a loss." Mu Shuangshuang declined anything from Old Mrs. Xue.

"Alright, don't mention him. He's stingy as hell. What he paid you probably isn't even as much as hiring a top chef for a day."

Mu Shuangshuang chuckled and buried her head into eating.

No sooner did Mu Shuangshuang lower her head, two pieces of fried chicken appeared in her bowl.

One from the left was Lu Yuanfeng, and the right was Xue Zheng.

Mu Shuangshuang could understand Fengzi. After all, she was meant to be his future wife, and fattening her up was his wish.

But Xue Zheng, this Little Douding, wasn't he unwilling to speak? Didn't he ignore people?

Mu Shuangshuang turned to look at Xue Zheng, but he met her question with silence.

"Never mind, since given, I'll eat it!" Mu Shuangshuang thought to herself.

Putting down her chopsticks, Mu Shuangshuang impolitely began eating the fried chicken. The golden exterior was crispy, and the inside was even tastier.

After a crunch or two, Xue Zheng, sitting next to her, suddenly dropped his gaze onto Mu Shuangshuang.

As he hesitated about whether to eat or not, Mu Shuangshuang freed up a hand and picked up her chopsticks to give Xue Zheng a piece of fried chicken.

"Mutual aid, you gave me yours, and I finished it all. What I pass to you, you must eat it all too!"

Xue Zheng was slightly startled, and his gaze at Mu Shuangshuang was somewhat flickering, making her think he might say something, like whether he liked it or not,

but he didn't. Xue Zheng picked up the chicken piece from the bowl and ate it alone, saying not a single word to Mu Shuangshuang.

Basically, the way Mu Shuangshuang and Xue Zheng interacted was like this. Although there was a lot of silence, it felt easy.

Sometimes, when Mu Shuangshuang did something, Xue Zheng was mostly cooperative.

He would eat what he was given, but still, he wasn't a man of many words.

Old Mrs. Xue had been observing Mu Shuangshuang and Xue Zheng for some time and now had an idea. Perhaps she should let her Zheng'er go out with Shuang, even if just to the countryside.

After the meal, Old Mrs. Xue sipped tea, chatting leisurely with Mu Shuangshuang, while eagerly awaiting the arrival of Yu Si Niang, Zhao Yun, and their kids.

Xue Zheng wasn't in the room at this moment; Xue Yi had arranged a separate room for him. This was also why Old Mrs. Xue felt at ease inviting Shuangshuang's mother.

Xue Zheng was timid and felt uncomfortable around strangers.

Since he wasn't here now, Old Mrs. Xue did whatever she wanted.

After two cups of tea, Yu Si Niang and Zhao Yun came in with their kids.

The two people, along with the four little kids behind them, were very reserved.

Chapter 669: Going to the Countryside

"Come on, Shuangshuang's mother, Aunt Shuangshuang, have a seat, both of you. Children, don't be shy, all this food is prepared for you, so open up and eat as much as you want."

Old Mrs. Xue enthusiastically stood up to greet the incoming guests.

Yu Si Niang and Zhao Yun both felt a bit overwhelmed.

The old lady before them dressed elegantly, clearly not someone from a common family.

The two of them regularly interacted with people of a similar background to themselves, seldom encountering such affluent families.

And yet, she was so courteous to them.

"Mother, this is the Old Mrs. Xue I told you about. Today's lunch was at her son, Mr. Xue's invitation."

Mu Shuangshuang had mentioned Old Mrs. Xue to Yu Si Niang.

Finally, the anxious feeling in Yu Si Niang's throat eased.

"Thank you, Old Mrs. Xue and Mr. Xue, for your care, and sorry for the trouble of inviting us," Yu Si Niang said politely.

Old Mrs. Xue nodded with satisfaction.

"I said earlier, a smart girl like Shuang must have someone teaching her. Turns out she takes after her mother. Let's not stand on ceremony, go ahead and eat."

Old Mrs. Xue had ordered tea, pastries, and fruits, which were quite plentiful.

The apples on the table were red and large. People from farming families mainly eat grains, rarely indulging in fruits and pastries.

The four children glanced at the fruits, clearly wanting to eat.

Mu Shuangshuang stood up and cut the washed apples into four, one piece for each child.

As for the adults, they could help themselves to whatever they wanted.

Old Mrs. Xue asked, "Si Niang, may I call you that?"

Yu Si Niang replied, "Of course, call me however you feel comfortable."

"Si Niang, I have another favor to ask of you today."

"Old Mrs. Xue, feel free to speak, if it's within Si Niang's ability, I'll do my best."

Reassured by Yu Si Niang's answer, Old Mrs. Xue nodded and laughed heartily.

"Here's the situation, I'm not sure if Shuangshuang mentioned about my grandson..." Old Mrs. Xue shared Xue Zheng's situation with Yu Si Niang.

After hearing it, Yu Si Niang felt quite distressed.

She was also a mother, with Xiao Han and Little Zhi being young. If anything happened to her two children, she wouldn't be able to survive.

"Old Mrs. Xue, about letting Xue Zheng stay at my place for a few days, I don't object. But does Xue Zheng want to come with us? The weather isn't warm, and it's easy for children to catch cold and fever if not cared for properly."

Yu Si Niang, though sympathetic, remained rational.

Having Xue Zheng go to the countryside alone, to a strange place, not to mention the issues with day-to-day food and living.

"There's no need to worry about that. Since I'm letting Zheng'er go, it's to help him adapt to life there and make some friends.

His living can be just like yours, no need to overly consider his feelings."

Previously, Old Mrs. Xue would have found it difficult to say such things.

But times were different now.

She wanted her grandson to get better, so she had to take the first step.

No matter the hardship, it's worth it.

"What about Shuangshuang's thoughts?" Yu Si Niang asked Mu Shuangshuang.

"We can give it a try. The sooner Xue Zheng's issues are resolved, the better. Besides, I have some rapport with him," Mu Shuangshuang replied confidently.

Mu Shuangshuang had considerable contact with Xue Zheng; the child wasn't as indifferent to the world as he seemed.

At least back when she took him to the mountains, the smile on his face wasn't fake.

Unfortunately, at the time, Xue Yi was too impatient. If he had let Xue Zheng play for a few more days, the situation might not have become so severe.

"Since you all have no objections, I'll mention this to Zheng'er later. I'll only have him bring two sets of warm clothes, no need for food, since he doesn't like eating bits and pieces," Old Mrs. Xue said cheerfully.

"Certainly, we're going back to the village in the evening; Old Mrs. Xue can take Xue Zheng back to the Xue Mansion to play for a while."

Mu Shuangshuang had plans to go shopping in the afternoon and couldn't take Xue Zheng. Given his current situation, it wasn't suitable for him to suddenly interact with so many people, so Mu Shuangshuang had Old Mrs. Xue take him back first.

After the conversation, everyone had laid bare their thoughts and concerns, and the pressure felt by everyone lessened.

Mu Shuangshuang followed Yu Si Niang and the others downstairs to find Fengzi.

When they reached the staircase on the first floor, Mu Shuangshuang saw Mrs. Lin had moved over to the table occupied by the Qin Family, where she was devouring food.

Nearby Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian were also gorging themselves, but none matched Mu Xiangxiang at full throttle.

"Slow down, save some for me," Mrs. Lin barked loudly.

The rest didn't care for her and just focused on eating.

Mu Xiangxiang simply grabbed a large sea bowl used for soup, dumping food into it, looking as though she was feeding a pig.

"Xiangxiang, haven't you already had ten meat buns and several sugar cakes? Why are you fighting with us?" Mu Dazhong couldn't compete with Mu Xiangxiang when it came to eating.

"Second Brother, I'm hungry, didn't you already eat earlier? Don't fight with me."

The few of them, lost in their scramble for food, left the restaurant's other guests astonished, with several leaving the First-class Residence without finishing their meal.

If the four weren't dressed in people's clothing and didn't look human, they might have been mistaken for pigs that had run away from a pigsty.

Mr. Mu's face was as dark as the bottom of a pot.

Old Mrs. Mu was furious because these three were fighting with Mu Xiangxiang for food.

Earlier, the Qin Family and Mr. Mu's family had just stepped out of the restaurant when Mu Dazhong and the others rushed over, grabbing their bowls and chopsticks to eat what was left on their table.

To put it nicely, it was avoiding waste; negatively, it was eating someone else's leftovers.

Qin Shijie and Aunt Qin didn't eat much, and Mu Xiangxiang, due to Old Mrs. Mu's reminder, held back.

While people left, she couldn't hold back any longer.

Several waiters went to find the steward to report the situation.

At this moment, the steward was in a conversation with Lu Yuanfeng about managing the restaurant. Whenever Mu Shuangshuang visited, she would bring some mountain goods for the shopkeeper. Sometimes it was game caught in the mountains, sometimes wild vegetables and mushrooms.

The steward had a favorable impression of Mu Shuangshuang, naturally leading to a good impression of Lu Yuanfeng.

"Did those people pay the bill?" The steward asked.

"No, originally someone was going to pay, but that old man said he'd pay later himself."

The employee answered truthfully.

"Then it's easy, let them eat and account for the meal separately later."

The steward instructed the employee.

Generally, restaurants don't charge for food, but those in the hall seemed to have been reborn from starvation.

Not only did they eat a lot, but they also scared off many of his guests.

After speaking, the steward turned to Lu Yuanfeng and said, "Fengzi, I've told you, the diner comes first, though there are exceptional cases. If those people had paid, we'd just kick them out."

If they haven't paid, separately charge for their food, we can't let people think First-class Residence is afraid of trouble."

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Lu Yuanfeng nodded.

The fact that even a steward would dare to oppose the diners shows this must be condoned.

Lu Yuanfeng noted this silently.

He checked the time and felt it was about right, said goodbye to the steward, and went out to find Mu Shuangshuang.

By now, Mu Dazhong and the rest of the Old Mu Family had finished their meal.

The four of them ate a whole tub of rice, Mu Xiangxiang ate more than the portions for three people.

The waiter at the restaurant asked Mr. Mu to settle the bill, which came to two taels of silver.

Mr. Mu was stunned.

Two taels of silver, that's enough for a farming family to eat for half a year.

A meal at First-class Residence costs this much?

"Dad, what kind of shady place is this that wants two taels of silver for a meal?" Mu Dazhong shouted loudly.

"Sir, that's not how it goes, our First-class Residence is the best tavern in Qingshan Town.

Whether it's the ingredients we use or our personnel selection, everything is the best. Considering that you and your companions ate a whole tub, these need to be counted."

The waiter sneered at Mu Dazhong, his words were sarcastic.

But since the waiters at First-class Residence were trained by Xue Yi when they started,

they were instructed not to directly tell any guest that they should leave if they're without money.

So the waiters remained rational.

"Humph, saying it's not a shady place, what tavern charges for rice? Don't think I'm some clueless old lady, I'm telling you, this is extortion, I'm going to the government to file a complaint."

Old Mrs. Mu felt she had a hold over First-class Residence, speaking loudly.

"Rice truly doesn't cost money, but that's for normal people. For those who eat a whole tub at a meal, we have the right to charge for the rice!" the waiter said calmly, as if used to such situations.

"Why don't you just rob people?" Old Mrs. Mu wouldn't give up, speaking as if she wanted to hit the waiter.

People say to be courteous before using force, but since the Old Mu people weren't respecting themselves, the First-class Residence folks didn't hold back either.

A group of strong men came out and directly escorted them out, leaving Mr. Mu to pay.

Mr. Mu's face was already grim, and now it looked even worse.

He never brought money when going out, all the family's money was managed by Old Mrs. Mu.

"Young man, the money in our home is with my wife, please let her in." Mr. Mu said with a flushed face.

The waiter glanced at Mr. Mu suspiciously, seemingly not believing that a grown man would go out without money.

But since that was what he said, the waiter went to the door to call Old Mrs. Mu to settle the bill.

Not only did Old Mrs. Mu refuse to enter, she spoke arrogantly, "This kind of shady store wants money? Dream on! Even if you don't let my old man out, I won't pay.

Not only will I not pay, but I'll also let my son continue eating in your tavern, bankrupting your place."

The waiter was so angry he almost rushed to hit someone.

Unable to get any advantage here, Old Mrs. Mu went to find Mr. Mu.

"Looking at your age, why do you like using such deceitful methods? Our First-class Residence doesn't allow free meals. If you act this way, we'll report to the authorities." the waiter said.

"I... I..." Mr. Mu felt too embarrassed, his speech faltered.

Just then, Mr. Mu saw Mu Shuangshuang and Yu Si Niang at the staircase watching the spectacle.

Mr. Mu felt he had caught a lifeline.

"Shuang, do you happen to have two taels of silver? Lend them to me for the tavern's meal bill, I'll return it once we leave."

Mu Shuangshuang didn't even think before shaking her head, "Grandpa, two taels of silver isn't a small amount, Shuang doesn't have it."

Mr. Mu was unaware that Mu Shuangshuang just didn't want to give him money, he felt disappointed.

If even his richest granddaughter said she didn't have it, who could he turn to?

"Si Niang, do you... have any?"

Mr. Mu saw Zhao Yun too, but Zhao Yun was an outsider, he couldn't swallow his pride to ask.

"Dad, Shuang is the one managing our home, we don't have money in hand. Why not call mom in to settle the bill? Dragging on like this isn't a solution."

Actually, the most embarrassed here was Mr. Mu.

Being so old, and treated like a monkey surrounded by spectators.

But this was still Old Mrs. Mu being unkind, knowing well her husband was inside, unwilling to part with money, ignoring her husband.

Mu Shuangshuang thought Old Mrs. Mu was becoming stranger by the day.

If it were earlier times, Mr. Mu's matters would be the utmost priority.

But since Mu Dade passed the scholar exams, even Old Mrs. Mu changed.

The Old Mu Family will surely have some incident sooner or later.

"Mom's personality isn't unknown to you, money is like her life. Asking her here would likely cause a scene known throughout the town."

This was the reason Mr. Mu didn't dare call for anyone in the tavern.

"Grandpa, I'll talk to the waiter and allow you to go outside, how about you ask grandma yourself?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

Deep down, Mu Shuangshuang didn't want to get involved in this matter, but Mr. Mu was her grandpa, and lingering in the tavern affecting business wasn't good.

"Is that possible?" Mr. Mu asked.

The waiter quickly replied: "Of course if Miss Shuangshuang speaks, old man, you go quickly."

This time, Mu Shuangshuang was surprised, she hadn't even spoken to the waiter.

The young waiter, slightly embarrassed, scratched his head.

"Miss Shuangshuang, many here know you and Fengzi from the tavern, I'm willing to give you this favor." the young waiter said.

Now, Mu Shuangshuang was the one feeling uneasy.

She hurriedly followed Mr. Mu's steps out of the tavern.

Lu Yuanfeng and the others followed closely behind.

After the meal, the street wasn't too crowded.

Mr. Mu pulled Old Mrs. Mu aside, asking her to take out the silver.

"Father Xiangxiang, let's just leave, you've already come out." Old Mrs. Mu tugged at Mr. Mu's sleeve.

"Are you mad? If this gets out, where will eldest son's dignity go?" Mr. Mu asked.

"I don't care, you wanted to be the big shot, why didn't we just let our son-in-law pay? You insisted on paying yourself."

Old Mrs. Mu still resented Mr. Mu's initiative to pay the bill.

"Is this my fault? If you hadn't demanded such a large dowry, I'd never have said such a thing."

"However you got yourself into this mess, you deal with it!"

"You shameless wretch, I still have some dignity left. If I don't pay today, I'll divorce you and send you back to your family." Mr. Mu was visibly upset.

This time, he wasn't joking.

This wife had become more and more reckless, his words were completely ignored.

Old Mrs. Mu was threatened many times, but she wasn't moved.

Mr. Mu glanced around, spotted someone writing letters by the roadside, and approached him directly:
"Young man, write me a divorce letter, I need it now!"