

Folly 671

Chapter 671: Humiliation

Mr. Mu said to the scholar, "I am Mu Dabiao from Er Gui Village in Qingshan Town.

My wife Liu Guixiang is jealous and talkative, making the whole family a mess. Now I want to divorce her."

Mr. Mu's words undoubtedly stirred up a storm in the hearts of everyone in the Old Mu Family.

Among the rules of the seven grounds for divorce, one is for a woman to be jealous, and another for being talkative.

As long as one of these grounds is met, a woman can be kicked out with nothing from her husband's family.

With both grounds taken, there's even less reason to keep her.

"How dare you, Mu Dabiao! I've borne children for you and worked hard to manage the whole household, and you... you actually..." Old Mrs. Mu shouted, jumping in rage, but toward the end, she became scared.

Old Mrs. Mu married Mr. Mu at fifteen, and now it's almost been forty years; she has never returned to her family during this time.

When relatives from her family came to borrow rice or grain, she drove them away several times. If she goes back now, her family would surely kick her out.

No, she cannot be divorced.

Just then, several sons of the Old Mu Family stepped forward to intervene.

"Mother, if Father wants you to pay, just give him the money. First-class Residence is not a small place, if this gets out, our Old Mu Family's reputation will be ruined.

You should consider Big Brother's reputation too, our Big Brother is a scholar, many people know him," Mu Danian said.

"Mother, look, Dad has already asked someone to write the divorce letter, just hand over the money," Mu Dazhong urged as well.

Yu Si Niang, who came out with Shuangshuang, never expected things to escalate to the point of divorce.

She was like an ant on a hot pan, anxious beyond measure.

The two arguing in front of her are her husband's father and mother.

They are her daughter and son's grandparents, ignoring all else, they are close kin connected by blood.

"Shuangshuang, find a way to persuade your grandfather, your grandmother can't be divorced."

"Mother, this matter will be decided by my grandfather, you needn't worry."

Mu Shuangshuang was clear about the situation; Old Mrs. Mu hadn't acted sensibly for quite some time, if Mr. Mu really wanted her divorced, he would have done it long ago, not waited until now.

Since a divorce won't happen, she felt it was better to just watch the drama unfold.

Yu Si Niang could not stand by doing nothing, she sighed and went to Mr. Mu, saying:

"Father, it's not easy for Mother either; all these years, she's suffered and endured hardships, now that Big Brother has become a scholar, she finally has hope. If you really divorce her, what will she do in the future?"

Being divorced is extremely humiliating and distressing.

When Old Mrs. Mu forced Mu Dashan to divorce her, Yu Si Niang was deeply distressed; in the same situation, she still felt the pain for Old Mrs. Mu.

Mrs. Lin watched the drama from the side, not uttering a word, for she wished Old Mrs. Mu to be divorced.

If Old Mrs. Mu were divorced, she would become the one managing things for the Old Mu Family and would personally ruin Mu Xiangxiang's marriage.

At this moment, the issues in the Old Mu Family revealed everyone's true nature like a demon-revealing mirror, easily showing who was human and who was ghost.

Appropriately, the divorce letter was ready; the scholar handed it to Mr. Mu, saying, "Mr. Mu, the divorce letter costs one penny, just put your fingerprint here and give the letter to whoever you want."

Divorce in ancient times was just that simple.

Once the divorce letter was written, they could go to the government later to register it, and the matter would be settled.

Mr. Mu took the divorce letter, but before he could put his fingerprint on it, Old Mrs. Mu rushed forward, grabbed the letter, and tore it to pieces, pleading at the same time.

"Father Xiangxiang, you can't divorce me, I know I was wrong, I... can't I just give the money?"

As Old Mrs. Mu spoke, she took out two taels of silver from her pocket.

Mu Shuangshuang had never seen Old Mrs. Mu so humiliated.

But Mr. Mu's tactic of forcing her to the edge truly worked well.

It completely subdued Old Mrs. Mu.

Silently, Mr. Mu took the two taels of silver, gave it to the attendant, and after coming out, Old Mrs. Mu paid for the scholar's penny, standing aside, waiting for Mr. Mu who was still not calm.

Almost forty years of marriage weren't easily ended just like that; Mr. Mu understood well who Old Mrs. Mu was, she was arrogant because she was used to it, that's why she behaved so recklessly.

"Father Xiangxiang, in the future, if you ask me to go east, I dare not go west. If you tell me to work, I won't say a word. Can we just move past today's issues?"

I left my family as a teenager; my siblings back home are now grandparents. They could never take me back. You'd be pushing me to my death by driving me away..."

Old Mrs. Mu cried pitifully.

None of the other Old Mu Family members had seen her showing weakness like this, so they all came over to dissuade her.

Mrs. Lin, who originally wanted to watch the chaos, realized that the old woman might not get divorced at this rate.

She quickly came over to curry favor.

"Father, my mother actually didn't do anything wrong. Her actions were understandable.

Which restaurant charges leftovers like this one? It's this black shop asking for extra. Mother wasn't refusing to pay, just didn't want to pay extra.

I believe the meanest part was Shuang.

She knows the people in this restaurant but didn't help us waive the meal cost, clearly not treating us as family."

Nothing to say, Mrs. Lin was an expert at throwing dirt on others.

Even the tiniest thing could be blamed on the third branch.

Mu Shuangshuang felt very fortunate she came out, otherwise, she might have been slandered without even knowing it.

"Second Aunt, don't make it sound like I own the restaurant. I do know the people there.

But I only deliver cold noodles to them, not even considered part of the staff, why should I ask them to let people eat for free?"

Mu Shuangshuang was speechless; only Mrs. Lin could think of such flimsy reasons.

Fortunately, Mr. Mu wasn't someone devoid of common sense.

It would be a wonder if he believed what Mrs. Lin said.

"Second daughter-in-law, you're one of those who likes to stir up trouble at home. If you don't straighten up, you'll be divorced too."

Mrs. Lin, scared, covered her mouth, recoiling several steps back and unable to speak for a while.

"Alright, I know exactly what happened today. No one should speak nonsense that I won't believe.

This is the last time; if anyone dares destroy our unity again, I'll personally throw them out."

Mr. Mu was truly angry this time; the family was full of trivial problems.

The wife acted without discretion, and the daughter-in-law spoke without thinking.

If this continued, it would be unbearable!

Everyone present looked displeased. Mr. Mu often got mad, but rarely so seriously.

This time was the real deal.

"Grandfather, it's getting late. Shuangshuang and Aunt Xiao Yun still want to buy some things, so we should go now.

If you're not in a hurry to head back, you could join us for a walk!"

Mu Shuangshuang stepped forward to address Mr. Mu, who was still simmering in anger.

Chapter 672: New House Rules

Mr. Mu shook his head and said to Mu Shuangshuang, "I'm an old man, I won't follow you. You, your mother, and Xiao Han, go and come back early."

"Thank you, Grandpa, we'll get going then."

Mu Shuangshuang politely bid farewell, and a few people headed towards the most bustling market in Qingshan Town...

Seeing this, Mrs. Lin was afraid the old man would take them back, so she quickly stepped up.

"Dad, Gou Dan is this big now, it's his first outing. His father and I want to show him the world, stroll around the streets."

Mrs. Lin finished speaking and gestured at Mu Dazhong.

Mu Dazhong immediately nodded knowingly. "Yeah, Dad, as Brother said, reading ten thousand books is not as good as traveling ten thousand miles. I plan to train Gou Dan to walk more from an early age; maybe one day he'll become like Brother."

Upon hearing Mu Dazhong's aspirations, Mr. Mu's anger subsided significantly, and he even felt a sense of comfort.

However, Old Mrs. Mu came out to spoil the mood.

"Humph, that starved ghost reincarnated wants to be like your brother. Even if he walks one hundred thousand miles, it's useless."

Old Mrs. Mu snorted coldly, her face icy cold, as if able to scrape off layers of ice.

Mrs. Lin was so frightened she shivered slightly, not daring to say a single word, only able to silently plead with Mr. Mu.

Mr. Mu sternly scolded Old Mrs. Mu: "Shut up, today's matter is not over. It's none of your business to come out and make trouble."

Old Mrs. Mu remained silent but continued to glare at Mrs. Lin, seemingly warning her not to play tricks.

"Second family, if you want to shop, go ahead. Your mother and I have nothing to do, now we'll go back to the village. You certainly can't keep the ox cart; after you have fun, you'll have to walk back."

Mr. Mu would not go shopping. Firstly, he, as an old man, couldn't bear the face to go shopping with a bunch of women and children.

Secondly, having spent two taels of silver for lunch today, spending even a copper coin would be unbearable for Mr. Mu.

With Mr. Mu's permission, Mu Dazhong and Mrs. Lin nodded quickly, anyway they had a tael of silver given by Qin Shijie. They could just rent a carriage back afterward.

"Thank you, Dad. We'll go shopping now." Mrs. Lin nodded obediently.

At this moment, a well-fed Mu Xiangxiang burped, walked to Old Mrs. Mu, and tugged her sleeve.

"Mom, let's visit Big Sister's house. She has lots of delicious food, we can go and eat. Plus, it's been years since you went to her house, there have been great changes at Big Sister's place."

Old Mrs. Mu felt tempted, but the decision was up to her husband.

"Father Xiangxiang, how about we visit Xianxian's? Nowadays, even Old Mu's status is different, Cui Family should curry favor with us."

Mu Dade passed the scholar exam, making the Mu Family's status indeed higher than the Cui Family.

Back then, Mr. Mu borrowed money from the Cui Family for Mu Dade's travel expenses but got none, which made Mr. Mu lose face.

This incident had always been a thorn in Mr. Mu's heart.

Even though money was borrowed later, there was still a hurdle in Mr. Mu's heart he couldn't get past.

After thinking about it, Mr. Mu decided to go take a look.

"Second, Fifth, are you going or not?" Mr. Mu suddenly called out to Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian, who had walked a few steps.

Mu Dazhong said, "Dad, I promised Gou Dan to go shopping, I can't break my word. Also, Big Sister never liked me, I'd rather not go."

"Dad, I'm not going either. Big Sister doesn't like me, I don't want to go and suffer." Mu Danian answered.

For the first time, the thoughts of the two big men were so consistent.

Mr. Mu originally didn't want to force them, but Old Mrs. Mu stepped forward, reaching out to them.

"Humph, two little bastards, hand over the silver given by the Qin son-in-law."

The two men's faces changed instantly.

"Mom, what are you saying? What silver? We don't know anything about it." Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian spoke simultaneously.

"Stop talking nonsense. Whether there's silver or not, I'm aware. If you don't hand it over, I'll beat you to death." Old Mrs. Mu said angrily.

Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian looked at each other, neither willing to relinquish the silver.

A tael of silver is no small sum, they wouldn't give it up for anything.

Mrs. Lin glared at Old Mrs. Mu, afraid she'd take the silver, not even warmed to yet.

Ultimately, it was Mu Danian who sought help from Mr. Mu.

"Dad, your sons are grown, we can't keep our pockets empty, besides we are soon to enjoy life with Brother. We can't maintain the same lifestyle as in the village.

We must keep some silver to maintain our dignity, so when people know we are Brother's siblings, they won't think Brother is shabby."

"Indeed, Dad, look, how many of the kids at home have bought clothes, eaten snacks?

Why did Gou Dan look like that at the sugar-coated haws vendor today? Isn't it just because as his father, I couldn't spare even a penny, and he was salivating?"

Mu Dazhong spoke, then surprisingly sat on the ground and began to cry.

In the street, the crowd grew bigger, especially seeing a grown man crying like a fool, attracting passersby's attention, and causing them to point at the Mu Family.

Mr. Mu felt a pang of sympathy.

His sons had never had anything but fabric close to fabric, flesh close to flesh.

Money was always managed by Xiangxiang's mother, never within their reach.

Even buying a sugar-coated haws was beyond them.

"Keep the silver yourselves, you need to buy things, buy them. A tael of silver is enough to acquire quite a few things. Once back, we'll set a new family rule."

Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian were stunned, each suspecting they'd heard wrong.

"Dad, are you really not lying?" Mu Dazhong asked, excitedly.

Old Mrs. Mu was almost beside herself with urgency.

"Father Xiangxiang, you're muddled, why give them money?" Old Mrs. Mu asked.

"Enough, I know what I'm doing. You don't need to say any more." Mr. Mu interrupted Old Mrs. Mu.

"Ah, you'll surely regret it. These few little bastards, you can't give them money." Old Mrs. Mu said.

But things had reached the point of no return. The two, Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian, afraid Old Mrs. Mu would come to snatch, hid the silver and ran away.

Realizing what happened, Old Mrs. Mu angrily stomped her feet.

Cursing the two sons as blockheads.

"Enough, what I decide, no one can change. Either follow me to Xianxian's or go back on your own."

Mr. Mu couldn't stand Old Mrs. Mu shouting curses in town, always feeling it was especially humiliating, especially if his eldest's classmates saw; the eldest's face would be lost.

Old Mrs. Mu drooped her head, like a defeated rooster, feeling defeated as she followed Mr. Mu to the Cui Family.

Chapter 673: Intelligent but Not Cunning

At the market

Mu Shuangshuang and Yu Si Niang stopped at a place selling women's silk flowers and handkerchiefs, as well as women's jewelry.

The peddler's basket was filled with pretty, fresh items.

A crowd of young women and wives surrounded the peddler, all asking about the prices.

Mu Shuangshuang picked a hairpin and compared it against Yu Si Niang's head.

"Mom, what do you think of this hairpin?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

Yu Si Niang naturally shook her head.

"Shuangshuang, Mom doesn't like these flashy things, let's not buy them. You buy whatever you like for yourself; Mom's okay."

Yu Si Niang didn't even look at the hairpin, immediately saying she didn't like it.

Not for any reason other than not wanting to spend the money.

Mu Shuangshuang ignored her and turned to ask Lu Yuanfeng.

"Fengzi, does this hairpin look good on my mom?"

"It looks good. This blue hairpin really compliments Aunt Si's skin."

Lu Yuanfeng answered truthfully.

The orchid on the hairpin in Mu Shuangshuang's hand looked delicate, yet it contained a sense of resilience.

Lu Yuanfeng genuinely thought it suited Yu Si Niang.

"Then let's buy it!" Mu Shuangshuang said, followed by asking the peddler about the price.

"How much is this hairpin?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Hehe, not expensive, twelve coins." The peddler replied with a grin.

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't the peddler's first customer, but her choice was definitely the best.

When the peddler procured his goods, he mixed good and bad quality items, but each one had a different quality; Mu Shuangshuang picked the best batch.

"So expensive, Shuangshuang, let's not buy it." Yu Si Niang grabbed Mu Shuangshuang's hand, unwilling to buy.

"Mom, going shopping is all about spending money and buying things, and this hairpin really suits you. Even if you take it back and show it to Dad, he'd definitely find it beautiful too."

While speaking, Mu Shuangshuang found another hairpin with a similar style but in gold color from the peddler's basket.

She said to the peddler, "Uncle, how about fifteen coins for two hairpins if I always do business with you in the future?"

"Little girl, this is high-quality goods; the hairpin is twelve coins each. How can I sell you two for fifteen coins? Your bargaining is too sharp, no, no." The peddler shook his head like a rattle drum.

"Uncle, I'm also doing business in town, so I know the cost of these items, and I wouldn't dare to undercut your price.

Moreover, a few days ago, I saw someone else selling the same items at only six coins a piece.

As soon as his goods came out, they were all bought, but you probably didn't know?" Mu Shuangshuang stared into the peddler's eyes and asked.

The peddler's face changed slightly, and he asked, "Are you talking about that short, chubby guy who speaks with a lisp?"

Mu Shuangshuang naturally nodded, "Yes, that's the one. I was going to buy it, but I left in a rush that day and didn't bring money."

The peddler stomped his foot in anger.

"Ah, I told you that Ding guy's goods are unreliable, and he dared to deceive me." The peddler cursed angrily, but he soon realized Mu Shuangshuang was present and chose not to say more.

The peddler quickly put on a smile and said to Mu Shuangshuang, "Little girl, looking at you as a filial child, I'll give you face today, fifteen coins for two hairpins."

After saying this, the peddler handed the hairpins to Mu Shuangshuang, who also fulfilled her promise and paid for the hairpins.

Yu Si Niang and Zhao Yun, who were watching from the side, were left speechless.

They had been shopping in town for so many years; where could you find hairpins for seven and a half coins each?

How did this Shuang manage to get him to sell the hairpins with just a few words?

Just as they were amazed, Mu Shuangshuang gave one hairpin to Zhao Yun and the other to Yu Si Niang.

Giving one to Yu Si Niang was understandable, but Zhao Yun couldn't comprehend why she was given one.

She looked astonished, "Shuang, why are you giving me one? I..."

"Aunt Xiao Yun, Shuangshuang is showing appreciation to you. You've always taken care of our third branch, shared your food and supplies, whatever you had, you sent our way. Now that Shuangshuang has the ability, it's time you enjoyed it too."

Zhao Yun was full of emotion and was at a loss for words of gratitude.

The things she'd done were all because she felt she should.

Because her son Da Long's life was saved by Si Niang.

But now Shuang was genuinely thinking of her...

"By the way, Shuangshuang, why did the peddler agree to sell you two hairpins for fifteen coins?" Zhao Yun remembered her confusion and couldn't help but ask.

Mu Shuangshuang first turned to look behind, finding herself far from the peddler now.

She then whispered, "Because I know there are only two peddlers on this street, and they both sell items at the same price.

In other words, they're very likely acquainted and have agreed on certain things, like how much to sell items or whether to discount them.

This way, no matter how expensive things seem, you'll still feel it's normal when you see them."

It's essentially industry monopoly.

Mu Shuangshuang was worried the others present might not understand, so she tried to explain simply.

Zhao Yun started to grasp the idea.

"So, you mean those things aren't really that expensive, but because the two vendors know each other, they can increase the price."

"Exactly!" Mu Shuangshuang nodded.

"But why did you say someone else sells it for six coins each?" Zhao Yun asked again.

"Because trust is relative! When you hike up your prices, naturally fewer will buy. Sometimes when others slightly decrease their prices, although not the intended price, it's higher than their cost, to sell or not?"

According to the agreement, it's not to be sold, but if someone sells, aren't they missing another chance to earn?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

This time, everyone truly understood.

Shuang won with a trust strategy.

The two peddlers occupied a street, but neither trusted the other entirely.

They could only keep it to themselves.

Shuang put it on the table, and the peddler didn't want others to occupy the market.

When it comes to women's items, the cheaper seller gets the business.

"Haha, my daughter is really smart." Yu Si Niang laughed heartily.

Zhao Yun laughed along with her.

"But won't this break the balance? Can the two continue?" Lu Yuanfeng asked.

"They can. Everyone is doing business and will eventually establish new trust regulations, and the price I gave, the peddler definitely has some to earn."

Mu Shuangshuang didn't want to cut off anyone's means of earning.

But she's also not one to suffer significant losses.

Just like living life, suffering is a blessing, but not suffering greatly, and definitely not making it a habit.

Lu Yuanfeng watched Shuangshuang with bright eyes.

He had always liked Shuangshuang's personality.

Smart, yet not sinister.

Warm, yet not inflexible.

Lu Yuanfeng felt he had found a treasure this lifetime.

Chapter 674: Rumors Arise

Continuing along the road, this time, it was four kids out buying food.

All along the way, the four kids were very obedient, including Da Long, who was out for the first time.

Mu Shuangshuang had little interaction with Da Long; when she usually went to Zhao Yun's house, he was always playing with stones on the ground. However, after this outing, with more interaction, she found the child quite clingy.

He would occasionally call Shuangshuang's name, or follow closely behind Yuanbao.

"Seems like there's nothing to eat," Mu Shuangshuang remarked.

At this time of year, there were quite a few people selling pancakes, fried food, and hot porridge on the street. However, these weren't the children's favorites.

The children loved things like candied hawthorn skewers. Fortunately, after going around twice, they finally found some.

Mu Shuangshuang spent seven coins and bought seven candied haws; Lu Yuanfeng didn't want any for himself.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't insist, knowing that Fengzi didn't like those sour and sweet things.

They wandered around for a long time, didn't buy much, but saw many places they didn't usually have the chance to visit.

As evening approached, it was time to head back when suddenly, Little Zhi stopped and said, pointing ahead, "Sister, I see Fifth Uncle."

Following Little Zhi's direction, Mu Shuangshuang almost got a fright.

Mu Danian stood at the brothel's entrance, holding a scantily dressed woman in one arm, his face full of wrinkles from smiling.

It seemed like Mu Danian was about to address some physical needs at the brothel.

But isn't this a bit too much?

Upon recalling that Mu Danian and Chen Hong had parted ways long ago, Mu Shuangshuang found it somewhat understandable.

To be honest, Mu Shuangshuang never understood why Chen Hong, a seemingly formidable person, lost to Old Mrs. Mu and was kicked out.

Mu Shuangshuang thought Chen Hong might have had something going on with her eldest uncle...

"Sister, is the woman next to Fifth Uncle my Fifth Aunt?" Little Zhi asked innocently. "Why are there two Fifth Aunts?"

As they spoke, Mu Danian was already kissing two of the brothel women...

Mu Shuangshuang suddenly felt like she had swallowed a fly, utterly disgusted.

"Little Zhi, quickly come over here; we won't go to that place," Mu Shuangshuang, worried that Mu Danian might do something inappropriate for Little Zhi's eyes, decided to take a detour.

Yu Si Niang and Zhao Yun both followed Mu Shuangshuang in changing direction, yet Little Zhi remained curious.

"Sister, why aren't you answering Little Zhi's question?" Little Zhi asked.

Mu Shuangshuang was in a dilemma; how to explain this to a child?

She couldn't exactly say that her Fifth Uncle was visiting a brothel, could she?

It was Lu Yuanfeng who crouched down and said to Little Zhi, "Little Zhi, that's not your Fifth Aunt, and as for why there are two, only your Fifth Uncle knows."

Mu Shuangshuang really wanted to laugh at this point because Lu Yuanfeng's explanation was so earnest.

Yet, he hadn't really explained anything.

Fortunately, Little Zhi didn't press further; she nodded as if she understood, acknowledging Lu Yuanfeng.

Mu Shuangshuang then led Yu Si Niang and Zhao Yun and the four kids toward the direction of the town's entrance.

Meanwhile, Lu Yuanfeng went back to First-class Residence to get the ox cart, and on the way, picked up Xue Zheng.

Old Mrs. Xue, staying true to her word, hadn't prepared anything for Xue Zheng except a small bamboo basket.

Old Mrs. Xue was born into a farming family and knew that a bamboo basket could be quite useful, and Xue Zheng could carry his belongings in it.

Old Mrs. Xue personally accompanied Xue Zheng to the town's entrance.

A big crowd gathered around, all there to see Xue Zheng off.

Old Mrs. Xue, her eyes red, although knowing her grandson would be fine, felt sad at the thought of him being away for so long.

"Zheng'er, follow Sister Shuangshuang assuredly. If you want to eat something, tell Sister Shuangshuang, she's a good person.

If you feel cold, be sure to tell Sister Shuangshuang; grandma has prepared cotton clothes and a small quilt for you.

When you go to Sister Shuangshuang's house, if you find working on the farm fun, grandma will plant a few acres in the backyard so we can do it ourselves..."

The more she talked, the more Old Mrs. Xue choked up.

Meanwhile, Xue Zheng, holding the bamboo basket containing his clothes, said nothing.

But Mu Shuangshuang could tell he was reluctant to part with Old Mrs. Xue.

Mu Shuangshuang stepped forward, holding Xue Zheng's hand, and addressed the old lady, "Don't worry, I'll take Xue Zheng for some fun.

We just finished the autumn harvest here, so there's not much to do, and even if we go to the mountains to play, we'll bring some friends along."

Old Mrs. Xue naturally trusted Shuangshuang.

"Girl, thank you so much. Once Zheng'er is settled, I'll..."

She was intending to offer some compensation to Mu Shuangshuang.

This matter, Old Mrs. Xue wanted Xue Zheng to experience life in the purest way possible and hadn't initially mentioned how to thank Mu Shuangshuang.

"Old Mrs. Xue, I'll go back to Er Gui Village with Xue Zheng first; if we delay, it will be dark and difficult to walk in the mountains."

Reluctantly, Old Mrs. Xue nodded.

Mu Shuangshuang led Xue Zheng onto the ox cart. It was a bit cramped when they came, but going back, since Shuangshuang had already handled everything she needed to.

Even with Xue Zheng on board, it still felt spacious.

Upon returning to the village, Mu Shuangshuang showed Xue Zheng her house and the Old Mu Family's courtyard. Xue Zheng knew her best, so during this entire period, wherever she went, she had to bring Xue Zheng along.

Mu Shuangshuang initially thought this would be a troublesome task but found Xue Zheng unexpectedly well-behaved; he followed her everywhere without needing reminders.

Mu Shuangshuang took a stroll, eventually arriving at a spot where the village's young wives liked to gather.

They were busy chatting, and Mu Shuangshuang joined in to listen, ending up with some juicy tidbits.

"Let me tell you something; the Old Mu Family's pale-faced daughter was supposed to marry into the Qin Family in town, you know what happened?"

This was a typical opening line that village women used to draw attention.

Mu Shuangshuang listened intently, quite entertained.

The woman continued, "The Qin Family is unlucky, they've had seven wives die on them. The kid's only in his early twenties and fiercely fated."

Tsk tsk, you wouldn't believe it, but the Qin Family's place is ominous, needing someone lucky to suppress it."

"Wow, isn't Xiangxiang in trouble this time?"

Asked another woman from the village.

"Exactly, ever since the Old Mu Family's eldest son passed the exams, Mrs. Mu had her nose in the air, flaunting throughout the village that her daughter's marriage is the best.

But now karma hit, half a foot into the grave; who knows when Mu Xiangxiang will be in trouble."

The villagers mostly watched for entertainment. When Mu Dade first passed, everyone admired him, but gradually, they gathered no benefits, only feeding the Old Mu Family with their own resources, how could they not be upset?

Chapter 675: Lying to Old Mrs. Mu (Fourth Update)

"Let's go!" Mu Shuangshuang said to Xue Zheng.

Xue Zheng suddenly reached out, tightly grabbing Mu Shuangshuang, afraid she would leave him and run away.

His eyes didn't dare meet Mu Shuangshuang's gaze directly, but from her height advantage, she could still see a glimmer in his eyes, as if he had something to discuss with her.

"Xiao Zheng, may I call you that, little brother?" Mu Shuangshuang led Xue Zheng a bit farther from the gossiping women, squatted down, and looked at him sincerely.

Xue Zheng nodded without hesitation.

Mu Shuangshuang noticed that since leaving Qingshan Town, Xue Zheng had responded to her more.

Though most of the time, it was only nodding or shaking his head, indirectly indicating that Xue Zheng's problem originated in Qingshan Town.

"Xiao Zheng, once we arrive at Er Gui Village, everything will be handled by your sister. Your sister might not have any delicious meals, the only thing she can offer are simple meals from a farmer's family.

You've seen it, going once to the town takes an hour or two and it's ten plus miles.

As for fun, the only entertainment is following Brother Yuan Feng into the mountains for hunting or we can work together in the fields.

So, no matter if you are happy or unhappy during this time, you must discuss it with your sister, let her know, alright?" Mu Shuangshuang softly said to Xue Zheng.

Xue Zheng held Mu Shuangshuang's hand even tighter.

After a while, he finally nodded lightly.

Returning to the courtyard of the third branch, Xiao Han, Little Zhi, and Yuanbao were each doing their tasks, playing joyfully.

Seeing Xue Zheng, except for Xiao Han who was studying, Little Zhi and Yuanbao both gathered around.

Yuanbao had the loudest voice.

"I heard from Sister Shuangshuang that you were the kid caught by the human trafficker with Little Zhi and me last time? Don't be afraid, Little Zhi and I will protect you in the future."

Yuanbao patted his chest.

Yuanbao wanted to say these words on the ox cart, but Xue Zheng acted too unfriendly, making Yuanbao somewhat scared.

Now, seeing Mu Shuangshuang bring him in, Yuanbao decided to draw him into his camp and spoke bravely.

"Oh, you little chubby, your Brother Xiao Zheng is older than you. If there's someone protecting, it's Brother Xiao Zheng protecting you, how could it be you protecting him?"

Mu Shuangshuang reached out her hand, poked Yuanbao's chubby face, and laughed.

"I don't care, Yuanbao is going to protect everyone!"

Yuanbao's face tensed, looking strong and determined.

Xue Zheng looked at Yuanbao, froze for a moment, then suddenly pulled a very faint smile at the corner of his mouth.

But he quickly put it away, and no one noticed.

"I'm going to cook, we'll have dumplings for dinner, pork stuffing, quickly report how many you want to eat."

"I want eight, Little Zhi six, Xiao Han seven. Brother Xiao Zheng is older, but he's skinnier than me, so eat seven."

Yuanbao voluntarily listed everyone's dumpling count, perfectly matching the number Mu Shuangshuang had in mind.

Mu Shuangshuang nodded in satisfaction.

"Alright, you take care of Brother Xiao Zheng for me. He just arrived and doesn't know anything, don't bully him."

Mu Shuangshuang instructed Yuanbao and Little Zhi.

The two little children nodded repeatedly, watching Mu Shuangshuang head into the kitchen to work.

In the afternoon at the market, Yu Si Niang bought a pound of pure lean meat for thirteen cents, and a pound of five-flavor pork for sixteen cents.

The recent fluctuations in pork prices in town have become increasingly large; the price of five-flavor pork rose by one cent, lean meat dropped by one cent, and it seems like five-flavor pork will continue to rise.

Mu Shuangshuang felt she still had to raise pigs, so by next New Year, the family could slaughter them to eat.

The wild boar in the pigsty, with thick skin and rough meat, was fine being raised outside.

Entering the kitchen, Mu Shuangshuang cut half a pound of five-flavor pork, half a pound of lean meat, chopped them into mince, marinated them, started fermenting the dough, and rolled out the dumpling wrappers.

Fermenting the dough took some time, so Mu Shuangshuang tidied things up in the kitchen.

They had sent things to the town in the morning, and many things weren't put back in place in the kitchen, looking extremely messy.

After tidying the kitchen, the dough was almost ready.

With the dough ready, the tasks ahead posed no difficult challenges for Mu Shuangshuang.

She worked busily, joyfully bustling around.

In the span of two cups of tea, she had prepared a table full of dumplings, kept half aside for dinner tonight, and the other half saved to eat for breakfast tomorrow.

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On the other side of the third branch, Old Mu Family

Mr. Mu, Old Mrs. Mu, and Mu Xiangxiang returned to Er Gui Village well past nightfall; they had already eaten dinner, so there was no need to cook.

Old Mrs. Mu got off the ox cart and went straight to the second house to ask Mu Dazhong for the remaining money, but nobody from the second house had returned.

Then she went to the Fifth Mu Danian room, and even the door was locked, almost making Old Mrs. Mu die of anger.

Old Mrs. Mu was certain that one tael of silver must have been used up entirely.

Indeed, one tael of silver had been spent, with the second house using six hundred cents for new clothes for Mu Dazhong and Mrs. Lin.

The remaining four hundred cents were spent by Mu Dazhong on food, drinks, and entertainment with Gou Dan and Mu Qingqing, playing until the evening. After opening two guesthouses, less than twelve cents were left.

Renting a ox cart down was five cents, leaving seven cents for breakfast.

The second branch family considered their day complete and fulfilling.

Mu Danian had squandered his tael of silver in the brothel.

The following day, once the second branch and Mu Danian had sobered up, they felt a twinge of fear.

Returning like this, they were surely going to be scolded by Old Mrs. Mu.

The second branch family conspired amongst themselves, finally deciding to pretend to be miserable when they returned, claiming they had been robbed and beaten, spending an entire night walking to Er Gui Village.

Mu Danian, on the other hand, placed the blame on Chen Hong, alleging that Chen Hong swindled all his money.

Both households harbored their own thoughts.

Straight to Er Gui Village.

After the sun had risen by one-and-a-half hours, those who had wasted an entire afternoon plus night in town finally returned.

The second house family's clothes had been torn by themselves, appearing tattered and worn. When they had left, their hair had been neat and clean, but now it was a mess.

As soon as they entered the courtyard, Mu Dazhong began wailing.

"Mother, your son is unfilial..." Mu Dazhong entered and kneeled on the ground, crying.

Old Mrs. Mu heard the crying, hastily rushed into the courtyard.

When she saw the second house's posture, Old Mrs. Mu loudly scolded Mu Dazhong.

"You damned thing, wailing like someone died! The old lady is not dead yet, close your mouth!"

Mu Dazhong trembled, his heart tightened, but to avoid being scolded, he covered his face with tears and snot.

"Mother, I'm sorry to you, yesterday that one tael of silver was robbed..."

Before Mu Dazhong finished his sentence, Old Mrs. Mu rushed up and slapped him, making Mu Dazhong see stars.

"You lazy, wicked thing, daring to lie and deceive this old lady, you better clarify where that one tael of silver went today, or I'll skin you alive."

Chapter 676: Little Aunt Vomited Blood

"Mom, I'm innocent, look at my clothes, they're all torn. Am I lying?"

Mu Dazhong deliberately put on a pitiful look.

Mrs. Lin nodded along.

"Mom, you weren't aware of what happened yesterday. Those villains wanted to take mine and Qingqing's life. It was Dazhong who heroically saved us; otherwise, you wouldn't see us here."

"You're full of shit, you wretched woman, spewing nonsense, why don't you just die? I'm telling you, if you don't give me back the money, I'll dig you all to death with a hoe."

Old Mrs. Mu cursed while stamping her feet.

Her wrinkled forehead was bulging with veins.

It was clear she was in a furious state.

Mu Dazhong was almost scared witless, kneeling on the ground, not daring to make a sound.

Even more so for Mrs. Lin, as a daughter-in-law, a stranger in Old Mrs. Mu's eyes, she was kicked several times by the old lady once she finished stamping.

Her fingers were madly pinching the flesh on Mrs. Lin, causing her to cry out in pain.

Mu Qingqing, who was nearby, tried to help Mrs. Lin, but Old Mrs. Mu scratched a long red mark on her face with her nails. Holding her face, she cried uncontrollably on the side.

Little Gou Dan, seeing his mother being bullied, glared at Old Mrs. Mu and shouted loudly, "If you dare hit my mom, I'll fight you..."

Before he could get close to Old Mrs. Mu, he was slapped so hard by her that he couldn't speak properly.

No one in the Old Mu Family was a match for Old Mrs. Mu.

The yard was filled with the cries of the second branch of the Old Mu Family.

Mu Dazhong was full of confusion; he didn't understand. What he did seemed so reliable, yet even if his mother suspected him of lying, it shouldn't have led to such direct beating and scolding.

Just as Mu Dazhong was pondering, Mu Dalian came out of the house.

Seeing Mu Danian, Mu Dazhong realized he had crossed his mother's line.

Both were in shabby clothes with messy hair, but Mu Danian looked worse, with two palm prints on his face.

Both had the same idea.

Neither got any benefit.

Old Mrs. Mu, in her anger, pointed at Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian's noses, "You two little bastards, listen to me. I don't care if you steal, lie, or rob, if you don't gather two taels of silver for me...

Second, you divorce Mrs. Lin. Fifth, you won't get married, and you'll remain single for life."

After angrily scolding them, Old Mrs. Mu, when passing by Mu Danian, kicked him again.

Knocking Mu Danian down with all four limbs up, feeling slightly relieved, she went into the house. After a while, she came out with a bamboo basket, preparing to pick vegetables from the third branch's garden.

The vegetables in the third branch's garden were lush green; Old Mrs. Mu had long wanted to pick them but never had the time. Now that she lost two taels of silver, she must take advantage of others to make up for it.

Hearing the village women gossiping while holding the bamboo basket, Old Mrs. Mu would have usually rushed to the garden to get the vegetables, but hearing Mu Xiangxiang's name, she went over.

Just in time to hear about the Qin Family, and that they weren't good folks, rumors about how Qin Shijie had 'killed' eight wives, predicting trouble for Old Mu Family's Mu Xiangxiang, reached Old Mrs. Mu's ears, making her furious.

She directly grabbed the rumor-spreading woman, the Zheng Family's daughter-in-law, and scolded her, "Filthy woman, I know about the Qin Family better than you.

The Qin Family is wealthy and powerful; our Xiangxiang will live in luxury with them. Unlike your family's crooked lot, no man wants them, yet you still dream of marriage.

I spit on you. If anyone dares to spread gossip about our Xiangxiang, I'll end them!"

Old Mrs. Mu was full of vigor, spitting as she cursed.

The Zheng Family's daughter-in-law wasn't a pushover.

"Old woman, you're daydreaming here. If you don't believe it, go ask the matchmaker yourself about what the Qin Family is up to.

Don't pick a rotten pumpkin thinking it's a treasure. With someone like Mu Xiangxiang, she'll end up being 'cursed' by Qin Family's eldest sooner or later."

"You... you..." Old Mrs. Mu was livid.

At this moment, Mu Dajiang rushed over, panting, unable to even catch his breath before saying to Old Mrs. Mu, "Mom, something's wrong, little sister she..."

"What's wrong with Xiangxiang?" Old Mrs. Mu's face turned pale.

"Little sister, she's coughing blood..."

Old Mrs. Mu felt the world spinning, and if not for Mu Dajiang holding her, she'd have fallen flat on the ground.

Hearing the news, the Zheng Family's daughter-in-law burst into laughter.

"I told you, that Qin Family heir is a tough one; marrying into the Qin Family would be a death sentence unless you're blessed with fortune."

The villagers exchanged glances, feeling that there was no avoiding this outcome.

It seemed inevitable that there would be a death in the Old Mu Family.

"Looks like even passing the exam wouldn't bring fortune to Mu Xiangxiang. I bet, before the wedding, it'll all be over!"

Old Mrs. Mu followed Mu Dajiang back to the Old Mu Family homestead.

Mu Xiangxiang was still coughing up blood.

In the morning, Mu Xiangxiang had eaten five bowls of noodles, three buns, and two bowls of porridge.

With the second and fifth branch not around, Mu Xiangxiang ate their share.

After eating, she started inducing vomiting, going too deep, resulting in coughing blood after vomiting.

Sitting by the toilet, Mu Xiangxiang's eyes bulged like a goldfish, with the whites of her eyes more prominent than her pupils.

Old Mrs. Mu rushed forward, holding Mu Xiangxiang and started crying.

"Xiangxiang, what's wrong, tell your mom, mom will stand up for you. My poor child..."

Mu Xiangxiang painfully pointed at her throat.

"Hurts... hurts..." After saying two words, another wave of nausea hit.

The room was immediately filled with a sour stench.

The others backed away, but not Old Mrs. Mu, who held onto Mu Xiangxiang despite the smell.

"What are you all standing around for, call the doctor!" Old Mrs. Mu shouted.

Only then did the people come to their senses, and Mu Dajiang rushed out to call Zhang Huai Shu.

Mr. Mu was worried but didn't know what to do.

Mr. Mu recalled something Mu Shuangshuang had mentioned, that with the way Xiangxiang kept inducing vomiting, something was bound to happen.

Could this be the cause?

Mr. Mu quickly told Mu Dazhong to call Mu Shuangshuang from the third branch.

"Second, quickly go get Shuangshuang, tell her your little aunt is in trouble, and beg her to help."

Mu Dazhong was startled and shouted, "Dad, have you lost it? That brat's not a doctor, why call her?"

I say we use a home remedy, scoop some ash from the stove and mix it with water for Xiangxiang to drink. It'll cure anything!"

Mr. Mu was stunned and couldn't make a decision.

Old Mrs. Mu steeled herself and said, "What are you waiting for, go get the ash!"

Chapter 677: Something Big Happened

As soon as Old Mrs. Mu gave the order, not a single person in the Old Mu Family dared to do the task of going to the stove to scoop out the ashes.

Even the instigator Mu Dazhong didn't dare to step forward.

Anyone with a bit of sense would know that if Xiangxiang drank the ashes and recovered normally, they wouldn't get any benefit from it.

If something went wrong, their lives could be finished by the old lady.

"Are your ears deaf, or your legs broken? What's wrong, can't I command you anymore? She's your biological sister; if something happens to Xiangxiang, can your conscience bear it?"

Old Mrs. Mu yelled at the few who were standing still.

The few people did nothing except hunch their shoulders.

Old Mrs. Mu was fuming with anger, she glanced around the room, and finally could only vent her frustration on the most obedient Mrs. Liu.

"You from Old Fourth's house, you're usually the best at handling things. Hurry to the kitchen and get some ashes from the stove for Xiangxiang, mix it with water. Remember, it must be warm water, if I find out you use cold water for my Xiangxiang, I'll skin you alive."

"Mom..." Mrs. Liu opened her mouth, just about to explain, but was shouted at by Old Mrs. Mu.

"What nonsense are you trying to spin, hurry up!"

Mrs. Liu was timid, after being scolded, she swallowed her anger and could only do as Old Mrs. Mu said.

She left the main room, walked straight to the earth stove, and at the stove mouth, Mrs. Liu reached out her hand, scooped a handful of ashes inside, mixed it in half a cup of warm water, and carried it back to the main room.

By this time, Old Mrs. Mu was already impatient, cursing continuously.

"Old Fourth's wife, like a lazy donkey grinding, still not here, is she letting our Xiangxiang wait to die? Old Fourth's wife..."

Mu Dajiang, standing nearby, was dissatisfied with Old Mrs. Mu only ordering his wife to do things.

"Mom, why do you always ask Xiaxia's mom to work? There are so many people in this room, can't you ask someone else? Besides, she just went to the kitchen, how can she be so fast?"

Old Mrs. Mu spat at Mu Dajiang, swearing: "I didn't ask you, what are you blabbering about? So fond of your wife, why don't you tie her to your waistband and hide her? Bringing her out is so embarrassing."

"Mom, what are you saying? Why can't Xiaxia's mom see people? She..."

Mu Dajiang wanted to say something else, but Old Mrs. Mu picked up the water cup from the table next to her and fiercely smashed it onto Mu Dajiang's head.

With a bang, a hole was opened on top of Mu Dajiang's head, and blood gushed out instantly.

Mr. Mu was shocked.

He pointed at Old Mrs. Mu and cursed: "Are you crazy? This is your son, how can you be so harsh?"

Old Mrs. Mu was initially a bit guilty when she saw the blood surging from Mu Dajiang's head, but after Mr. Mu's scolding, she didn't feel guilty at all, instead she justified.

"What if I hit him? What comes out of my intestines is mine to beat or kill, nobody can interfere."

Old Mrs. Mu's words thoroughly chilled Mu Dajiang's heart.

Just then, Mrs. Liu came in with a bowl of water, frightened when she saw the blood on Mu Dajiang's head, she shivered, almost dropping the bowl of warm water.

"What's wrong with Daddy Xiaxia? Why is he bleeding?" Mrs. Liu asked.

"Old Fourth's wife, what are you chattering about, hurry and bring the water to Xiangxiang."

"Mom, I just..." Mrs. Liu brought the water to Old Mrs. Mu's side, wanting to explain the matter.

Unexpectedly, as soon as Old Mrs. Mu received the water, she hit Mrs. Liu's stomach with her elbow, knocking her down to the ground directly.

Mrs. Liu clutched her stomach, moaning endlessly on the ground, tears flowed from the corners of her eyes, but she dared not cry, because Old Mrs. Mu's venomous gaze glared at her.

"Mom, my stomach hurts..."

Old Mrs. Mu not only showed no sympathy but scolded Mrs. Liu:

"Get lost, can't handle a small thing, still dare pretend in front of me, I barely used any force, how could it hurt you?"

Listening to Old Mrs. Mu's denial, Mu Dajiang's eyes turned red.

He glared at Old Mrs. Mu, pulled Mrs. Liu up, and silently left the main room.

Old Mrs. Mu watched their departing direction, snorted coldly: "If you have guts, don't come back, eating my food, drinking my water, still dare act tough in front of me, shameless thing, I spit on you."

After cursing Mrs. Liu and Mu Dajiang, Old Mrs. Mu turned around and put on a smile, softer than ever, towards Mu Xiangxiang, holding the black ash water to her mouth.

"Xiangxiang dear, quickly drink this water, and you won't cough blood."

Mu Xiangxiang was still coughing, but seeing that black stuff, she coughed even more violently.

She reached out to knock away the ash water in Old Mrs. Mu's hand, was grabbed by the wrist by Old Mrs. Mu.

"Xiangxiang, my dear sweetheart, listen to me, I won't harm you. In the past, whenever someone in the family coughed blood, they drank this water to stop the bleeding, if you don't believe me, at least believe your ancestors."

Old Mrs. Mu firmly believed the thing in her hand could save her daughter, so she strongly persuaded Mu Xiangxiang to drink the ash water.

Half-believing, Mu Xiangxiang was forced to drink the cup of ash water by Old Mrs. Mu into her throat.

The water with stove ashes had a rasping feeling on her throat, and a terrible taste.

Mu Xiangxiang felt as if her throat was being trampled by something, a nauseating sensation emerged.

"Ugh..."

A pile of filth was spat out from Mu Xiangxiang's mouth, all black stuff.

Not only dirty, but it stunk.

Everyone in the room stepped back, covering their noses, vomiting wildly against the wall.

Old Mrs. Mu was stunned.

"Xiangxiang, what's wrong? Don't scare me, speak up..."

As she pulled Mu Xiangxiang, she shouted.

Mu Xiangxiang was pulled tight, her head toppled forward, falling directly into that pile of filth.

"Ah..." Old Mrs. Mu screamed.

Mr. Mu rushed forward to tug Mu Xiangxiang.

Mu Xiangxiang lay in a pile of filth, eyes rolled back, face blue, even her hands hung straight down.

Mrs. Lin saw this, screamed out loud.

"It's bad, Xiangxiang is... dead!"

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Mu Shuangshuang early in the morning took Xue Zheng to Zhao Yun's cotton field to wander.

This season, cotton fields are the easiest place to hide rabbits.

Mu Shuangshuang planned to first familiarize Xue Zheng with the flatland, then head into the mountains.

The weather was a bit cold, Xue Zheng wore a thick jacket, with a red nose, following Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Shuangshuang.

As soon as Yuanbao and Little Zhi entered the cotton field, they disappeared like wild cats let loose.

Mu Shuangshuang whispered to Xue Zheng: "If we follow Brother Yuan Feng, we will definitely catch a wild rabbit."

You could see Lu Yuanfeng, carrying a bow and arrow, weaving in and out of the cotton field, covering a large area in a short time, but with no harvest.

Xue Zheng's eyes were wide open, completely different from his usual self.

Suddenly, Lu Yuanfeng in the lead stopped, pointing at a spot in the cotton field: "Shh! There's something there~"

Chapter 678: All the Women in the Village Came

Xue Zheng held tightly onto Mu Shuangshuang's hand, his small palm beginning to sweat.

His heart almost jumped into his throat.

His gaze followed Lu Yuanfeng's movements.

Mu Shuangshuang did the same; rabbits are one of the most cunning animals, try not to startle them, otherwise they'll surely run away.

Lu Yuanfeng slowly approached the target.

It was a nest of rabbits, a gray mother rabbit feeding her babies, so engrossed that she didn't notice Lu Yuanfeng getting close.

Lu Yuanfeng swung the cloak in his hand forward, his body quickly lunging ahead, sweeping the entire nest including the mother rabbit into the cloak.

"Shuangshuang, I've caught them..." Lu Yuanfeng said softly to the people further away.

Mu Shuangshuang hurriedly pulled Xue Zheng forward.

In the black cloak, something was moving back and forth, Mu Shuangshuang crouched down and handed Xue Zheng's bamboo basket over.

Lu Yuanfeng grabbed the mother rabbit, placing the baby rabbits one by one into the basket, a total of six rabbits, small and seemingly born not long ago.

Mu Shuangshuang watched the baby rabbits for a while, then covered the basket with a cloth.

"Should we catch more?" Mu Shuangshuang asked Xue Zheng.

Xue Zheng was completely focused on the rabbits, his eyes fixated on Mu Shuangshuang's basket.

He didn't even hear what Mu Shuangshuang said.

Mu Shuangshuang couldn't help but want to laugh; it was rare to see a bit of childish innocence in Xue Zheng's eyes, it seems he truly enjoys this simple rural life.

"Fengzi, how about we go back and set up a home for the rabbits, what do you think?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

Lu Yuanfeng naturally nodded.

"I have an unused bamboo cage at home, I can bring it to your place."

"No need, Fengzi, the rabbits won't be kept at my house. Not only the rabbits, even Xue Zheng might have to stay at your place."

Xue Zheng stayed at Mu Shuangshuang's house last night, sharing a kang bed with Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang.

However, Yu Si Niang said Xue Zheng was a guest, it would be best to find him a more comfortable place.

Mu Shuangshuang thought it over and decided to place Xue Zheng at Lu Yuanfeng's home.

Yuanbao and Lu Yuanfeng share a room, Xue Zheng would sleep in Yuanbao's room.

Upon hearing Mu Shuangshuang say he would sleep at Lu Yuanfeng's place, Xue Zheng suddenly reached out, hugged Mu Shuangshuang's arm, refusing to let go, and moreover, Mu Shuangshuang noticed the light in Xue Zheng's eyes gradually dimmed.

Mu Shuangshuang felt a pang in her heart; she realized that she had been too abrupt with this decision, so she could only try to explain to Xue Zheng.

"Xiao Zheng, sis isn't abandoning you, it's just that there are only two rooms at home, and I am a girl, you don't want to sleep with me."

Last night, Mu Shuangshuang had asked Xue Zheng, who unexpectedly felt so embarrassed.

"But sleeping on the kang bed with my parents, you wouldn't be comfortable either. We're not here for just one or two days, but for a longer period."

It's impossible for you not to sleep every night, the only option is to stay with Brother Yuanfeng at his place.

You're not opposed to being with Brother Yuanfeng, right? You also want to play with Brother Yuanbao, right?"

Mu Shuangshuang's face showed nothing but sincerity.

Initially, she thought her sleeping space was big enough, adding Xue Zheng wouldn't be a problem, but she never imagined that Xue Zheng would not want to share a room with her.

Actually, it's not really reluctance; Xue Zheng is older than Yuanbao and Xiao Han, already eight years old, perhaps he understands things more than they do.

Xue Zheng hesitated for a moment and then nodded after a while.

"You come with me to stay at Brother Yuanfeng's house."

This was the first sentence Xue Zheng spoke to anyone other than Mu Shuangshuang, and by saying it out loud, he presented Mu Shuangshuang with a dilemma.

Mu Shuangshuang's face reddened, she sneaked a glance at Lu Yuanfeng and found he was just as embarrassed with a red face.

It seems they both had the same thought.

"Xiao Zheng, Brother Yuanfeng and I are older, there are differences between boys and girls, we can't... can't share the same room."

Mu Shuangshuang was now regretting to the point of wanting to kick herself, just a moment ago she had said Xue Zheng was more sensible than typical kids.

But now his bewildered look showed he absolutely didn't understand at all.

"Shuangshuang, how about I build another kang bed in your room, and you swap rooms with Uncle Dashan and them?"

Lu Yuanfeng suggested this because Mu Shuangshuang's room, though converted from a storage room, is half larger than the room of Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang.

Mu Shuangshuang has always slept in her own room, while the rest followed Mu Dashan and his wife squeezed into one room.

Now if they swap rooms, everyone would be much more comfortable.

"Okay, let's do that, but I still want to build a new house myself."

Mu Shuangshuang had this plan in mind because her own place was indeed too small, five people in the third branch, two rooms, all crammed together suffocatingly.

Plus, Little Zhi and Xiao Han are growing up, they both need their own rooms, no longer can everyone live in one room.

"Fengzi, help me figure out how much it would cost to build a house myself?"

Lu Yuanfeng thought for a moment and said, "It'd cost at least five to six taels of silver, and that's not including anything. If you add furniture and decorations and such, I'm guessing it would be around seven to eight taels."

Typical rural houses are usually renovated, very few people build a new house from scratch.

Because constructing the foundation and such requires considerable time and hiring workers.

Seven to eight taels, Mu Shuangshuang calculated inwardly, she didn't have enough silver for the restaurant yet, and if she used it on the house, her plans for the restaurant would have to be postponed.

Doing business is a cycle.

No capital, means you can only do small trades and accumulate slowly.

Once you have enough capital, you can do bigger trades and earn more money.

"Forget it, let's set this aside for now, I reckon it won't happen anytime soon."

Then, the three of them walked towards the Third Branch of the Mu Family.

As they reached the courtyard gate, Mu Shuangshuang noticed a crowd of onlookers outside the Old Mu Family's courtyard, each one staring into the Mu Family's house.

It seemed like there was big news inside.

Mu Shuangshuang saw Zhao Yun was there too, so she walked over and asked.

"Aunt Xiao Yun, what happened? What's going on?"

"Oh dear, you startled me." Zhao Yun patted her chest.

She had been watching the commotion so intently, she hadn't expected Mu Shuangshuang to appear suddenly.

"Sorry, Aunt Xiao Yun, Shuangshuang didn't mean to scare you."

"No worries, no worries, Shuangshuang, let me tell you, your aunt isn't doing well!" Zhao Yun suddenly lowered her voice and whispered to Mu Shuangshuang.

"What? My aunt..."

"Yes, I've heard she vomited blood everywhere, your second aunt is still shouting about your aunt having died, just a moment ago."

Everyone was extremely gossipy, each wishing they had wings to fly in and see what exactly was happening inside the Old Mu Family's house.

"Shuang, hurry in and see if your aunt really passed, so we can make preparations." Someone said to Mu Shuangshuang.

Chapter 679: The Last Time

Seeing Mu Shuangshuang not moving, the group of women began to urge her again.

"Shuang, don't just stand there, hurry up and tell us what happened. We're all waiting to see your aunt's joke."

The woman in front spoke rather harshly.

Mu Shuangshuang was somewhat displeased.

No matter how bad Mu Xiangxiang was, she was still her aunt. For an outsider to hope her aunt dies soon, and for Mu Shuangshuang to joke along with them, now that would really be heartless.

She turned and entered the courtyard of the third branch, ignoring the crowd of onlookers.

Those people immediately felt it was boring, continually calling it dull.

But deep down, they still hoped something would happen in the Old Mu Family.

As the saying goes, Old Mu Family has already taken too much advantage; if they take more, others can't survive.

So everyone was eagerly hoping that this time, Mu Xiangxiang wouldn't die but would at least suffer a lot.

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Just upon entering the yard, Mu Dashan came up to her.

The man's face didn't look good; he also knew about Mu Xiangxiang's situation.

But these weren't his main concerns.

His biggest worry was about Old Fourth Mu Dajiang's heavily injured forehead.

And Old Fourth's wife, clutching her belly, still wailing endlessly.

Mu Shuangshuang asked, "Dad, are you worried about my aunt? If you really want to take a look, just go. Grandma shouldn't have time to attend to other people's affairs now."

"No, Shuang, I heard from your fourth uncle about Xiangxiang's issue. She ate five bowls of noodles, three buns, two bowls of porridge this morning and vomited blood after sticking her finger down her throat, just as you suggested, because she ate too much and her body couldn't handle it."

Mu Shuangshuang asked again, "Fourth Uncle? How come Fourth Uncle told you all this?"

"Ah, that's what I wanted to tell you. Your fourth uncle was hit by your grandma, has a huge gash on his head that's still bleeding; I couldn't stop the bleeding even with stove ashes.

And your fourth aunt, when she was bringing stove ashes for your aunt, moved a bit slowly and got her belly hit hard by your grandma. It's still aching now. What on earth is going on here?"

Mu Dashan was almost turning gray-headed with worry.

Old Fourth Mu Dajiang was his brother, always the one who listened to him the most, unlike other branches that might have thoughts of harming the third branch, but the fourth branch absolutely wouldn't.

And the fourth branch was truly pitiful.

Whenever Mu Dashan looked at the fourth branch, he could see the shadow of the third branch.

He recalled back when the family hadn't split, the third branch was also bullied terribly...

"Dad, have you called Grandpa Zhang? Fourth Uncle's condition needs to be bandaged soon, and my fourth aunt, if the pain continues like this, won't she hurt her internal organs?"

"I sent your mother to call him, just afraid that your grandpa might have sent someone to call Uncle Zhang too, in case they collide, it would be troublesome again." Mu Dashan said worriedly.

"Dad, don't worry. My fourth uncle and fourth aunt are here, and my cousin Da Lang isn't around. Who at home is willing to call a doctor for my aunt?"

After some thought, Mu Dashan agreed, and didn't dwell on it anymore.

Mu Shuangshuang handed the basket she was holding to Xue Zheng and whispered to him and Lu Yuanfeng, "Fengzi, Xiao Zheng, something happened at home. I guess I don't have time to entertain you now. Once everything's settled here, I'll come find you, okay?"

Lu Yuanfeng nodded.

Xue Zheng did as well.

Mu Shuangshuang felt extremely relieved inside. Xue Zheng was making progress day by day. Perhaps after some more time, he might be willing to talk to others.

Lu Yuanfeng took Xue Zheng away, and Mu Shuangshuang entered Mu Dashan's room.

Inside, Mrs. Liu was still weeping, and beside her, Mu Xiaxia and Xiao Chu were also wailing loudly.

Mu Dajiang, holding a fabric wrap with stove ashes, looked shaky, his face frighteningly pale.

His eyes were glaring, and the whites were almost rolling over.

Mu Shuangshuang felt uncomfortable watching and decided to personally check if Zhang Huai Shu had come.

Just as she reached the courtyard entrance, she saw Zhang Huai Shu carrying a medicine box.

"Grandpa Zhang, over here..." Mu Shuangshuang called softly.

Zhang Huai Shu entered the house and applied hemostatic powder to Mu Dajiang, then bandaged him up.

Mu Dajiang's issue was essentially resolved, as the main problem was the unstoppable bleeding.

Mrs. Liu was a bit more complicated. Zhang Huai Shu took her pulse and asked about her situation.

After a while, he suddenly said, "It might have injured her spleen and kidneys. She should avoid working for a few days, rest well at home, and I'll prescribe some medicine to be decocted and taken."

Mu Dajiang's persistently pale face suddenly flushed red as he asked, "How much will all this medicine cost?"

The fourth branch had no income, and their only savings were from selling fish they caught last time, which only left them with eight coins now.

Perhaps not even enough for one dose of medicine.

"Old Fourth, we'll cover the medical costs for you; you just need to recover, don't worry about anything. Third Brother will take care of you."

Mu Shuangshuang also nodded along, "Fourth Uncle, right now the most important thing is to get better, take the medicine Grandpa Zhang prescribes on time and in proper amounts."

"Third Brother... Shuang, thank you both!"

A big burly man had his eyes reddened just from a couple of sentences from Mu Shuangshuang and Mu Dashan.

He indeed looked very pitiful.

Mu Shuangshuang paid the consultation fee, and just as Zhang Huai Shu was about to leave, Mu Dashan stopped him.

"Uncle Zhang, could you help us take a look at Shuang's aunt? Her situation is also very critical."

Mu Dashan was aware of Zhang Huai Shu's grudge with the Old Mu Family, one that even the entire Er Gui Village knew about.

Moreover, Old Mrs. Mu also offended Matchmaker Sun and Fu Wu.

If it weren't for Mu Dade becoming a scholar, the Old Mu Family's enemies would probably line up from the village's entrance to its end.

"Uncle Zhang, please just take a look, even though Xiangxiang is troublesome, she is still the sister of me and Third Brother. We, as sons, are willing to kneel down and apologize for what outrageous things our mother did in the past."

As he spoke, Mu Dajiang actually knelt down toward Zhang Huai Shu, and if Mu Shuangshuang hadn't quickly grabbed him, he probably would have knelt.

Zhang Huai Shu had watched Mu Dashan and Mu Dajiang grow up.

He knew these two were honest and loyal children.

Not a bit like that old terrier in the Old Mu Family, who was mean and sour in dealing with people.

Zhang Huai Shu sighed and said to the two men, "Fine, today I'll go for your sake, giving you two brothers some face this time.

But let me be clear. If your mom dares to lay a hand on this old man again, I definitely won't be courteous.

When someone in your Old Mu Family gets sick, I really won't treat them."

Zhang Huai Shu was principled and proud. If he said he wouldn't treat them, then he wouldn't, showing no favor at all.

"Thank you, Uncle Zhang. I'll go with you just in case anything happens." Mu Dashan said.

"I'll go take a look too. Mom hit me so hard just now; there's no guarantee she won't do the same to someone else. This time, I'll definitely catch my mom." Mu Dajiang also joined in.

Chapter 680: Eager to Have

A group of people, full of momentum, was heading towards the Old Mu Family.

But the Old Mu Family was in chaos at the moment, almost on the verge of exploding.

Mrs. Lin's shout that Xiangxiang was dead completely touched Old Mrs. Mu's bottom line.

She put down Mu Xiangxiang and angrily cursed Mrs. Lin with a piercing voice.

"Lin Xiaozao, you dog, how dare you curse Xiangxiang to die? Do you have any humanity left? Ungrateful wretch, why don't you go and die yourself?"

A torrent of curses almost made the roof of the Old Mu Family's house fly off.

Mu Shuangshuang quickly stopped Zhang Huai Shu and Mu Dashan, who were ready to rush into the central room.

"Dad, Fourth Uncle, let's wait a bit. My grandma is furious right now, whoever approaches will die."

But since they were walking fast before, Mu Shuangshuang could now see what was happening in the central room.

Mu Xiangxiang was lying on the ground, under her was a pool of dark stuff.

Old Mrs. Mu, after cursing Mrs. Lin, still felt unsatisfied and swung a stool, hitting Mrs. Lin.

Old Mrs. Mu rushed up, grabbed Mrs. Lin's hair and pulled like her life depended on it.

In one go, she pulled out a handful of hair.

Mrs. Lin's scalp was almost torn off.

She wailed endlessly and astonishingly reached out to fight back against Old Mrs. Mu.

Mrs. Lin was not easy to deal with. Though lazy, she often did heavy work like carrying pig food and cleaning the pigsty.

Fighting with Old Mrs. Mu, she didn't suffer any losses.

Old Mrs. Mu pulled her hair, she extended her dirty nails and scratched Old Mrs. Mu's face.

In a short moment, she tore off a good chunk of Old Mrs. Mu's skin.

When it came to fighting, Old Mrs. Mu was the undefeated champion.

Throughout the village, regardless of age or weight, Old Mrs. Mu had fought everyone and no one was her match.

"You shameless woman, dare to fight back, I'll kill you!"

Slap, slap, two more blows, leaving Mrs. Lin's face distorted.

The central room was in chaos, as Mu Xiangxiang lay on the floor, barely breathing.

Suddenly, Mr. Mu, somehow filled with energy, shouted, "Everyone stop, anyone still fighting will be kicked out of the Old Mu Family."

Mrs. Lin, hearing Mr. Mu, stopped, but was instantly tricked again by Old Mrs. Mu, who pulled another bunch of her hair.

Mrs. Lin covered her head, crouched on the ground sobbing, her hair scattered all over the floor.

Mr. Mu exerted some effort and finally brought the situation under control.

Mu Shuangshuang then directed Zhang Huai Shu to look.

Upon entering the house, Mu Shuangshuang and Zhang Huai Shu were overwhelmed by the foul stench, forcing them back a few steps.

Seeing Mu Xiangxiang rolling her eyes and foaming at the mouth, they were even more terrified.

"Old Zhang, are you here to save my daughter?" Mr. Mu discovered Zhang Huai Shu's presence and hurriedly approached.

Attempting to shake Zhang Huai Shu's hand, he was quietly pushed away.

"Enough, I'm not here for your daughter, I'm here because your third and fourth sons begged me.

Let's not discuss your daughter's matter. Find someone to clean her up and remove all the filth."

Since Old Mrs. Mu had finally stopped punishing Mrs. Lin, Mu Xiangxiang's head was covered in filth, completely unpresentable.

Mr. Mu was stuck for a moment and could only ask Old Mrs. Mu to take care of it.

"Xiangxiang, you quickly get water ready for Xiangxiang. Second and Fifth, carry her to her room, find a woman to change Xiangxiang's clothes."

Mr. Mu's eyes scanned around and finally landed on Mu Shuangshuang.

"Shuang, your aunt is in this state, can you help?"

Mu Shuangshuang was shocked.

This old man was truly interesting, with Mrs. Jin right next to Mu Xiangxiang, not asking her, but going far to ask her, a granddaughter?

Really amusing.

"Grandpa, Shuangshuang's hands aren't gentle. If I accidentally hurt Aunt, Granny might die from heartache," said Mu Shuangshuang.

Old Mrs. Mu pointed at Mrs. Lin's head and said, "Second daughter-in-law, this is all your fault, go heat the water, I'll take care of my daughter personally."

While directing Mrs. Lin, Old Mrs. Mu didn't forget to blame her, leaving Mrs. Lin feeling unjustly accused.

What did she do wrong?

Old Mrs. Mu said, "It's all because of you, the second and fifth sons. If it weren't for you staying in town for a night for one tael of silver, how would Shuangshuang have eaten all the breakfast herself? I won't settle the account for two taels of silver with you now."

Remember, I won't let you off easily."

Mrs. Lin was both angry and anxious but dared not show any dissatisfaction.

She went to the kitchen, without washing the pot, began to heat water for Mu Xiangxiang.

Feeling discontent, Mrs. Lin scooped a handful of white pepper from the jar and tossed it into the water, starting to boil it.

Boiling this water with pepper, even when heated, would be spicy.

Mrs. Lin was deep in thought, not noticing someone entering the kitchen.

Seeing someone, she was almost frightened to death.

"Mom, it's me, Qingqing!" Mu Qingqing appeared in the kitchen, whispering.

"You dead girl, scared me to death." Mrs. Lin patted her chest, still shaken.

Following Mrs. Lin's gaze, Mu Qingqing saw many white peppers floating in the pot, instantly brightening her mood.

But she soon spoke again.

"Mom, I want to marry Young Master Qin."

"What? That misshapen fruit? He's your uncle!"

Mrs. Lin suspected she heard wrong. Although Qin Shijie was rich, he was not worthy of her daughter.

She liked men who were rich, handsome, and came from good families.

"What about an uncle? If not married, nothing matters. Besides, didn't my brother steal Fifth Uncle's betrothed and get engaged to Miss Huang?"

Mu Qingqing thought differently from Mrs. Lin.

She considered it clever that Miss Huang was married into their family by her brother.

The best things were those snatched from others.

"Mom, I'm not joking with you. The Qin family is rich and willing to give my aunt such freedom.

If given as much freedom, I'd definitely open several shops and buy you and Dad gold to play with," said Mu Qingqing.

Mrs. Lin was a bit tempted.

The Qin family wasn't stingy, had they not given a tael of silver, the second family wouldn't have enjoyed a day.

Though it looked bad now, at least they had played, better than the fourth family who had nothing.

"Qingqing, this is hard to handle. We don't know if your aunt will die. If she does, talking to your grandma about replacing her is easy, but now..."

Mrs. Lin hadn't gone outside yet, so she wasn't aware of the rumors.

At this moment, she considered marrying off Mu Qingqing, especially to the Qin family, a sure win.

"Enough, Mom, the water is ready, fetch water for Aunt now, or Grandma might come asking soon."

Mrs. Lin was startled, hurriedly scooping the white pepper out of the pot...