

Folly 741

Chapter 741: Found the Teaching Mentor (Part 1)

Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang certainly would not listen to Old Mrs. Mu's words and go to Lin Family Village to catch Mrs. Lin.

Whether in public or private, the matter with Mrs. Lin cannot be handled by their third branch.

Old Mrs. Mu kept babbling, and her words became more and more unpleasant.

Mu Dashan felt there was no point in staying here, so he simply said:

"Mother, Si Niang and I will not disturb Xiangxiang's rest any longer; we are heading back!"

"Scram, scram, hurry up and scram, you're an eyesore here!" Old Mrs. Mu glared at Mu Dashan and said coldly.

Mu Dashan said nothing, leading Yu Si Niang out of Mu Xiangxiang's room.

Just as they reached the courtyard, they saw Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian approaching, one behind the other.

Both had their heads covered in filthy grime, particularly Mu Dazhong, who had a dried patch of dirt on his head.

It looked as if it had been stuck there for a long time.

The brothers staggered as they walked, and as they got closer, a pungent smell of feces hit them.

Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang both covered their noses and stepped back.

This time, Mu Dashan had no intention of greeting the two brothers; he tugged on Yu Si Niang's clothing, signaling her to hurry home.

Before they got far, Mu Dazhong, nearly frozen stiff, suddenly pointed at Mu Dashan and said, "Old... Old Third, you... you..."

Mu Dazhong shivered for quite a while but couldn't complete a sentence.

Seeing him approaching, Mu Dashan made up his mind and pulled Yu Si Niang, running away quickly.

Mu Dazhong was furious, pointing in the direction Mu Dashan left, calling out for a long time but could hardly utter a word.

After a night and a day in the cold mountain wind, it was a stroke of bad luck that Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian didn't die.

They had no strength left to stop others from doing anything.

However, when Mu Dazhong glanced at Mu Danian, who was in similar condition, his mood improved a bit.

Suffering along with someone can bring some happiness to Mu Dazhong.

"Second, Fifth, where did you both wander off to? Your mother's been looking for you for ages, especially you, Second..." Mr. Mu walked out of the main house, saw the two brothers, and called them over.

Since he indeed had some matters to discuss with Mu Dazhong, Mr. Mu came closer, but upon nearing Mu Dazhong, any words he intended to speak vanished instantly.

"Second, what is all this filth on you? Clean yourself up right now. And Fifth, did you two fall into a dung pit?"

Why do you smell so awful?" Mr. Mu was extremely disgusted, speaking while retreating.

Mr. Mu's reaction was even stronger than that of Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang.

"Father, I..."

As Mu Dazhong started to speak, Mr. Mu quickly waved him off. "Enough, enough, don't say anything. Just leave quickly."

Treated as a nuisance by everyone today, Mu Dazhong was driven away from the mountains and the villagers acted the same, urging him to leave quickly.

There was even a hot-tempered woman who picked up a stick, saying she'd beat him to death if he didn't leave.

Mu Dazhong suffered greatly, and he planned to take revenge on the third branch later on when he recovered.

Back at home, Mu Dazhong called Mrs. Lin's name, calling for a long time, only to find she wasn't home at all.

Mu Dazhong recalled that Mrs. Lin had returned to her parents' home some days ago, and he hadn't been cared for in days either. Mu Dazhong felt this couldn't continue. If Mrs. Lin didn't come back soon, he'd have to do everything himself.

It's not worth it. You marry a wife so she can take care of you.

Now he had to heat the water and bathe himself; Mu Dazhong thought having a wife wasn't much different than not having one.

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On this trip, Mu Shuangshuang not only brought back Xue Zheng but also good news.

She casually asked if Xue Yi knew any gentleman willing to teach in the village because she wanted to open an academy so that students in the nearby villages could go to school.

Xue Yi recommended a scholar from a nearby village, Luohe Village, to Mu Shuangshuang.

Two months ago, Luo Juren's father died, and according to Da Ning Dynasty's rules, a student above a scholar, whose parents died, had to observe mourning for over three months.

The more filial ones would mourn even longer.

Luo Juren decided to mourn for three years, during which he could not wear silk, go to bustling places in town, and had to live a life of simplicity and occasionally visit his father's grave.

This Luo Juren was exactly the kind of teacher Mu Shuangshuang was looking for in terms of timing.

In three years, she would definitely save enough money to buy a house in the county, so by then, she wouldn't have to worry about Yuanbao and Xiao Han having no place to study.

Moreover, Mu Shuangshuang got a letter written by Xue Yi. Though she didn't know what was in it, since Xue Yi recommended him, his character must be trustworthy.

This time, Mu Shuangshuang was confident she could handle setting up the school well.

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The next day, Mu Shuangshuang took Lu Yuanfeng and a few kids from home, plus two small animals, and went to Luohe Village.

Luohe Village was a small fishing village, primarily focused on fishing. They did have fields, but mostly gravelly ground, not quite suitable for rice cultivation.

Fortunately, Lu Yuanfeng was familiar with the nearby villages and found his way to Luohe Village easily.

The family's condition was the same as most scholar's families, not particularly good, and he had a heavier burden with the pillar of the house gone. Not only did he need to save for his journey to the capital for exams, but also prepare food for his elderly mother.

Mu Shuangshuang handed Xue Yi's letter and stated her conditions, to which Luo Juren agreed immediately without a word.

After conversing with Luo Juren a bit, from his eloquence, Mu Shuangshuang found Luo Juren much better than Chen Sheng, whom she met at Chen Family Village previously.

That Chen Sheng made unreasonable demands, asking for one tael of silver per child, not knowing whether he regretted it now.

"Luo Juren, we can also draw up a contract between us. If you find any issues, feel free to speak up," Mu Shuangshuang said.

"No need for a contract. Since Mr. Xue recommended me, I'll help no matter what, even if you don't pay me."

Luo Juren was a student sponsored by Xue Yi. When Luo Juren went to Qianzhou for exams, he didn't spend a cent himself; Xue Yi funded it all.

Now, since he can't leave Qingshan Town for three years, teaching in Er Gui Village was actually a good thing for him.

"Then Shuangshuang thanks Luo Juren. The school matters will be left entirely to Shuangshuang, focusing everything on teaching and learning." Mu Shuangshuang said.

Luo Juren also confided in Mu Shuangshuang, saying, "When it comes to essays, I have no problem, but I might not be very competent in arithmetic. I can handle general arithmetic issues, but not the more advanced ones."

"Alright, I'll look for an arithmetic teacher. If I find one, we'll hire another teacher," Mu Shuangshuang said.

Chapter 742: This is a Big Deal

Mu Shuangshuang finalized the matter of Luo Juren teaching in Er Gui Village.

Meanwhile, Chen Sheng from Chen Family Village was still confidently believing that Mu Shuangshuang would come back to him for teaching.

Once Mu Shuangshuang returned, Chen Sheng could ask her for a large sum of money.

Because of this notion, Chen Sheng bragged in front of the villagers that he would earn thirty taels of silver in three years, get married, pass the scholar exam, and take his whole family to live in the county.

People in the village just thought Chen Sheng had read himself silly and was blowing hot air.

No one believed a down-and-out scholar who hadn't passed the exam could accumulate big money.

Or take his family to live in the county.

But Chen Sheng remained daydreaming until someone in the village started talking about the daughter of the Old Mu Family's Third Branch in Er Gui Village, opening a school in Er Gui Village where village children could attend, and the tuition wasn't expensive.

Only then did Chen Sheng realize Mu Shuangshuang had chosen someone else to be the teacher, abandoning him.

But that's a story for later.

After Mu Shuangshuang secured a teacher for the academy, she had no more worries and discussed with Lu Yuanfeng.

The academy needed to be organized before the end of the year, so after the new year when spring arrived, the academy could operate.

Once the academy was on track, the remaining work could be watched over by Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang.

In Mu Shuangshuang's view, the academy was merely composed of several parts: the academy itself, teachers, students, and the staff handling meals.

These tasks didn't necessarily require Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng to handle, so opening the academy wasn't a troublesome matter for them.

On the contrary, it was convenient for themselves while benefiting others.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng shared their idea of opening an academy with Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang.

The couple was so excited they were speechless.

Mu Dashan asked, "Shuangshuang, are you and Fengzi really planning to open an academy, right here in Er Gui Village?"

In Mu Dashan's eyes, opening an academy was as extraordinary as opening mountains, building roads, and constructing bridges.

The affairs of scholars, in Mu Dashan's view, were significant matters that couldn't be neglected.

"Yes!" Mu Shuangshuang nodded.

"Dad, didn't you mention last time that Xiao Han and Yuanbao had no academy to attend? Our third branch doesn't have a house in the town, and the kids are too young and frail to travel back and forth daily between the town and the village.

The only solution was to establish an academy nearby, and the teacher we've hired is a scholar."

"Shuangshuang, what did you say? You've hired a scholar to teach?"

Mu Dashan could hardly believe his ears, his elder brother was a scholar and well-known throughout the villages.

Sometimes, when encountering people from other villages, mentioning he was from Er Gui Village's Old Mu Family would earn him envy.

Now Shuangshuang was opening an academy and hiring a scholar, her accomplishment was truly impressive.

"Yes, the person was recommended by Xue Zheng's second uncle, he's from Luohe Village, and because his father passed away, he must observe mourning for three years, during which he can't leave the town.

This time, inviting him to teach neither violates his mourning principle nor leaves him unable to save up money to go to the capital, so it's mutually beneficial," Mu Shuangshuang explained.

"Have you decided where to build the academy?" Mu Dashan asked.

An academy referred to was actually a private school that could accommodate a dozen people.

In a typical peasant village, at most one or two boys would study, most peasant families couldn't afford the gift, let alone send their children to a private school.

"I've selected the place, it's over the abandoned house in the village."

Mu Dashan also thought it was a good location, although Wang Fugui and Xia Guagua had done something unmentionable there, even letting villagers see it.

But once the academy was built, no one would mention those dirty things anymore.

Instead, they'd talk about the good deeds of children studying, which was a form of purifying the place.

"Shuangshuang, I have something to discuss," Mu Dashan said.

"Please go ahead, Shuangshuang is listening."

"I wish to personally participate in building the academy. As for my physical condition, I asked Uncle Zhang this morning, he said I'm recovering well and can do some heavy work."

In his youth, Mu Dashan was involved in building houses, and although years had passed, those skills were etched in his mind.

If he led the construction of the academy, the quality of the school's buildings would surely be unquestionable.

"Alright! Since you've decided, Dad, the task is yours, come to us for anything you need," Mu Shuangshuang said.

With Mu Dashan managing the construction, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng could spare time to go hunting in the mountains.

Besides, the Huang Brothers helped Mu Shuangshuang last night, and she hadn't repaid the favor yet, now was an opportunity to do so while hunting.

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Mrs. Lin returned to Er Gui Village after lunch, carrying a bundle of firewood, with dirt covering her face and body.

It looked like she was heading to the Old Mu Family to apologize.

Step by step, Mrs. Lin walked toward the Old Mu Family, her calves trembling several times, making her want to turn back, but each time she thought of the big house in the capital.

A large courtyard, with servants aplenty and all kinds of beautiful clothes, Mrs. Lin endured.

Mrs. Lin comforted herself, at most she would receive a beating from the old woman, but once beaten, she could live a good life, no matter how she calculated, it was worth it.

When Mrs. Lin appeared in the courtyard of the Old Mu Family, Old Mrs. Mu happened to be taking out Mu Xiangxiang's quilt to sun.

The midday sun was perfect for sunning things.

Old Mrs. Mu used a mallet, hitting the quilt several times, releasing a large portion of the dust inside.

Suddenly, Old Mrs. Mu saw Mrs. Lin standing at the courtyard entrance, sneaky, peering inside.

Old Mrs. Mu's anger surged, she grabbed the mallet and charged forward, kicking Mrs. Lin to the ground.

The mallet in Old Mrs. Mu's hand began to swing, smashing onto Mrs. Lin, who let out screams akin to a pig being slaughtered.

"Mother, the wife comes to admit fault, you can't kill the wife, the wife will be beaten to death."

Mrs. Lin shouted and screamed.

Old Mrs. Mu threw away the mallet, clawed at Mrs. Lin's face with her nails, tearing off a piece of flesh from her face.

Blood gushed out.

Mrs. Lin was in excruciating pain.

"Help, murder..."

Old Mrs. Mu became more and more enthusiastic in her beating. "Wretch, for disgracing Xiangxiang, you tramp, it's all your fault, Xiangxiang is lying on the bed, this old woman will strangle you today, to avenge Xiangxiang!"

Old Mrs. Mu's fingers clamped around Mrs. Lin's neck, and with a forceful squeeze, Mrs. Lin's face turned as dark as pig liver.

Mrs. Lin felt uncomfortable all over.

The firewood behind her had been crushed into several pieces by Old Mrs. Mu, making her ache terribly.

Breathing became increasingly difficult.

Mrs. Lin felt she was about to die...

Chapter 743: Fighting with Family

Mrs. Lin began struggling desperately.

She didn't want to die; she hadn't lived in a big house or worn beautiful clothes. If someone had to die, let it be Old Mrs. Mu.

Suddenly, Mrs. Lin regained some strength. She lifted her foot and kicked Old Mrs. Mu in the stomach.

Old Mrs. Mu released Mrs. Lin's hand in pain, and Mrs. Lin quickly got up from the ground.

Now, Mrs. Lin no longer wanted to apologize to the old woman. The old woman clearly wanted her life. If she stupidly begged for forgiveness again, she'd be out of her mind.

Mrs. Lin sprinted towards the courtyard gate. Seeing this, Old Mrs. Mu ignored everything and grabbed Mrs. Lin's hair, pulling her backward.

Mrs. Lin's scalp tightened into a ball.

"Mother, you're going to pull all my hair out, let go, let go!"

Old Mrs. Mu exerted strength, and a handful of Mrs. Lin's hair was pulled out.

Mrs. Lin collided with Old Mrs. Mu, and the two women instantly grappled together.

This fight could be said to shake heaven and earth, making ghosts and gods cry.

Half of Mrs. Lin's hair was torn out by Old Mrs. Mu, and Old Mrs. Mu's stomach was kicked several times by Mrs. Lin.

Mrs. Lin's face was scratched by Old Mrs. Mu, leaving no unspoiled skin, and Old Mrs. Mu's neck was bitten by Mrs. Lin.

When Mr. Mu came out looking for Old Mrs. Mu, he saw Old Mrs. Mu and Mrs. Lin lying on the ground.

Both women were disheveled, but in Mr. Mu's eyes, Mrs. Lin looked worse, with no unspoiled skin on her face, half of it smeared with blood.

"Hey, what are you two doing? Xiangxiang is sick, do you two also want to lie in bed?"

"Old man, beat this bitch to death and avenge Xiangxiang," Old Mrs. Mu shouted.

"Mother, I know I was wrong. Xiangxiang's matter was my negligence. I promise I won't dare to do it anymore. I was wrong..."

Mrs. Lin cried while begging for mercy, seemingly genuinely remorseful.

But Old Mrs. Mu refused to forgive Mrs. Lin.

Even though she was too weak to get up, Old Mrs. Mu kept clamoring. "Old man, think about Xiangxiang lying in bed; this bitch is not easy to deal with."

Mr. Mu grew weary of the quarrel and only wanted harmony in the family.

"Old woman, let it be. The second daughter-in-law has already been punished; look at her face and the hair on the ground. At worst, do it for the sake of our second son and forgive her."

Hearing this, Old Mrs. Mu got up in anger, picked up a wooden stick from the ground, and struck Mrs. Lin on the head, making her faint.

In one swift move, Old Mrs. Mu hit hard, and Mrs. Lin, lying on the ground, had blood continuously gushing from her head, terrifying in appearance.

Old Mrs. Mu was startled.

In panic, she fainted too.

Mr. Mu sent Mu Dazhong to fetch Zhang Huai Shu, busy for half an hour before the matter was resolved.

Mrs. Lin didn't die, but she was in such a state that it was close. Her head was injured by Old Mrs. Mu, and for a while, she wouldn't be able to do heavy work.

She couldn't do laundry or cook.

Zhang Huai Shu was utterly speechless, thinking that if there had been an outsider involved, he might have come today only to find two corpses.

"Old Mrs. Mu's body has no major issues, but the second son's wife needs rest. Her body should avoid water contact, and she shouldn't move her head unnecessarily, or she might easily become dumb."

Zhang Huai Shu explained the condition, collected his fee, and left the Old Mu Family's courtyard.

Mu Dazhong looked at Mrs. Lin on the bed with a face full of impatience.

Last night he hoped this woman would come back to wash his feet and pour water for him.

Now this woman herself had to lie in bed, and he might have to take care of her. Had he known, he wouldn't have wanted her to return at all.

"Daddy Gou Dan, come here quickly!" Mrs. Lin called, already awake but her head still aching.

Looking at the quiet room, Mrs. Lin felt relieved that she had survived this ordeal.

"What do you want me to do? It's like this; say a few less words." Mu Dazhong complained impatiently, fearing Mrs. Lin would ask him to handle bodily waste.

"No, Daddy Gou Dan, listen. I came back because of the business opportunity with my big brother..."

Mrs. Lin explained fully to Mu Dazhong her discussion with her brother regarding the business.

Her brother was interested in a piece of land with a gold mine, though acquiring it wouldn't be easy as it required both time and money.

Moreover, a family lived on that land, and her brother wanted Mu Dazhong to help resolve the issue.

"So, as big brother's suggestion, once that family is dealt with, I'll be in business with him?" Mu Dazhong couldn't believe his ears.

This wasn't just a business opportunity; it was like money falling into his lap.

"Yes, my big brother also said that as long as you follow him, you'd earn money every month, several hundred coins."

For rural laborers earning about ten coins a day, barely three hundred coins a month, Mu Dazhong doing nothing yet earning several hundred coins sounded too good to refuse.

"I'll go find big brother now; staying here is just wasting time," Mu Dazhong said.

After speaking, Mu Dazhong packed his things to head straight to Mrs. Lin's family, Lin Family Village, while the weather was hot at noon, to discuss making money in the future.

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In the following days, the weather grew colder, and Xue Yi's restaurant in town no longer had guests ordering cold noodles.

Everyone going out for meals wanted steaming hot soup or noodles.

Mu Shuangshuang also adapted to the market, no longer delivering cold noodles and popcorn to town.

Winter's cold winds blew fiercely, seemingly ready to take people away at any moment, and Mu Shuangshuang hardly dared to go outside.

Meanwhile, Lu Yuanfeng frequented the mountains more often, and Mu Shuangshuang guessed he was preparing to guard the mountains for hunting.

Mu Shuangshuang discussed with Lu Yuanfeng about bringing the Huang Brothers for this guard.

If they caught large prey, they'd split according to contribution, while small prey belonged to whoever caught it.

In the underworld, there are rules, and among hunters, there is their own code.

Another day, goose feather-like snowflakes began to fall from the sky, and Lu Yuanfeng took out all the tools from home.

He said this was the best time to hunt as heavy snow arrived suddenly and could seal the mountains.

At that time, animals lacking stored winter food would come out to hunt, and hunters just followed the tracks in the snow to pursue the prey.

Lu Yuanfeng re-sharpened each arrowhead on his bow specifically for when the snow was a few inches deep, ready to catch prey in the mountains.

The snow fell for three full days, and Mu Shuangshuang dared not leave her house because the cold was bone-chilling, making her shiver constantly.

Fortunately, Yu Si Niang had prepared winter cotton clothes for everyone in advance.

Everyone wore thick cotton jackets to alleviate the cold, but once in the mountains, the warmth of such clothing was far from adequate.

Chapter 744: The Little Aunt's Dowry

Early in the morning, Mu Shuangshuang pushed open the door, and what she saw was a world covered in white snow.

The snow on the ground looked like it was a few inches thick, as Lu Yuanfeng had said. Stepping on it, it creaked underfoot.

This was the first snow Mu Shuangshuang had seen since arriving in this time and place. The snow-covered world looked especially beautiful.

She wore a cotton jacket and wrapped herself in a cloak, walking in the snow.

Suddenly, Little Zhi from Mu Dashan's room poked his head out, shouting excitedly at the sight of the snow on the ground.

"Sister, snow, so much snow! I want to find Brother Yuanbao and Brother Xiao Zheng to build a snowman. I also want Brother Xiao Han to play with me in the snow."

Because of Little Zhi's words, Mu Shuangshuang was also eager to try. She also wanted to make snowmen and have snowball fights with Little Zhi...

But today it probably wouldn't work; Fengzi would definitely want to go hunting in the mountains, and she had to go with him.

"Little Zhi, sister will go hunting in the mountains with Brother Yuanfeng later, so I can't build snowmen with you. But sister and Brother Yuanfeng will prepare tools for you to build snowmen. You kids can play in the snow by yourselves.

But you must remember to keep warm. If your clothes get wet, let mother light a fire, and don't catch a cold, understand?"

The third branch now lacked nothing for firewood. Before the snow, Lu Yuanfeng had helped gather a lot of firewood for the third branch, enough to last through the winter and even have some extra.

"Hmm! Little Zhi understands. Sister, will you and Brother Yuanfeng catch a tiger?" Little Zhi turned his head and asked.

"Probably not, we won't go deep into the forest. Why do you ask, Little Zhi?"

"Brother Yuanbao said a few days ago that there are man-eating tigers in the mountains. I'm worried sister might encounter one," Little Zhi said.

"Haha, don't worry, it won't happen. I'll go help mom in the kitchen first, you go rest for a while." Mu Shuangshuang said.

"Sister, I can't sleep. I'm going to call Brother Yuanbao and Brother Xiao Zheng to play. Little Zhi can't wait," Little Zhi said, wearing a floral cotton-padded jacket and getting ready to dash outside, but was caught by Mu Shuangshuang by the collar.

"You little fool, it's coldest in the morning. You're not even wearing a hat or gloves, and your shoes, you're wearing embroidered shoes.

If you step on the snow, it'll melt all over your shoes, won't it?" Mu Shuangshuang said as she picked Little Zhi up and carried him back into the house.

Little Zhi pouted, nodding with a look of disappointment.

"When can Little Zhi go out?" Little Zhi asked, looking at Mu Shuangshuang with expectant eyes.

"First, have breakfast, then later Brother Yuanfeng will come over with Yuanbao and the others. As for where to build the snowman, you can choose your own spot."

Saying that, Mu Shuangshuang headed towards the kitchen.

In the kitchen, Yu Si Niang had already been up early, busy making breakfast.

The family didn't have enough grain, and with the snow, it wasn't easy to shop.

So these days, breakfast was vegetable porridge with half a small sweet potato.

The porridge warmed the stomach, and the sweet potato filled it, so at least they weren't starving.

Entering the kitchen, Mu Shuangshuang cleared a space beside the earthen stove, forming a square circle with a few bricks.

In this circle, she placed some dry firewood, using pine needles to kindle the fire. Soon, a bright red fire was burning in the kitchen.

Yu Si Niang, watching her daughter busying around, stopped stirring the pot with the spatula.

"Shuangshuang, why don't you go back to sleep for a bit? It's the most comfortable time to sleep in your quilt in the morning."

"Mom, I'm not going to sleep anymore. Fengzi and the others will be coming over soon," Mu Shuangshuang said.

"Haha, it's just that a few days ago, you were getting up quite late. Why so early today? Oh, it must be because Fengzi is coming." Yu Si Niang teased Mu Shuangshuang with a smile.

"It's not that, I decided to get up on my own. It has nothing to do with Fengzi," Mu Shuangshuang insisted, her cheeks flushed with embarrassment.

Yu Si Niang didn't expose her, as long as her daughter was happy, that was enough.

"By the way, Shuangshuang, your grandpa came over yesterday afternoon. He said in a few days it will be the eighteenth, the day your little aunt gets engaged. We need to make some preparations." Yu Si Niang said cautiously.

This matter had Yu Si Niang a bit at a loss. If she were to go by her daughter's temperament, they wouldn't even go.

"Prepare what?" Mu Shuangshuang replied with annoyance.

"Just have a family meal, and maybe set off some firecrackers to celebrate or something."

With some rest these past few days, Mu Xiangxiang had gotten a lot better. Although her voice hadn't fully recovered, she could at least move around.

It wouldn't interfere with her engagement on the eighteenth.

"A family meal, firecrackers? Is it really that simple?" Mu Shuangshuang doubted.

Yu Si Niang thought for a while and said, "Your grandpa wants you to help with the cooking. He said the banquet you made for your sixth uncle's family last time was really delicious, and he also said..."

"What else did he say?" Mu Shuangshuang asked calmly.

Even though she knew that whatever the Old Mu Family said was probably no good, Mu Shuangshuang still listened patiently, determined to hear them out to the end.

"He also said to contribute some money for your little aunt's dowry," Yu Si Niang said, standing by like a child who had done something wrong, waiting for Mu Shuangshuang to speak.

She knew her daughter was bound to throw a fit.

"Helping with the engagement banquet isn't impossible, but my grandpa has to bring the money over. Does he want me to do everything or just cook? That needs to be clear.

As for the dowry money, I haven't heard of it. Why would a daughter's dowry rely on her brother and sister-in-law to provide? Didn't my grandma hoard so much money, so much land? If there's not enough money, then sell the land to make up for it."

With just a few words, Mu Shuangshuang made her stance clear.

If you want something done, either bring money or there's no way.

Mu Shuangshuang had nothing good to say about the Old Mu Family.

The one time she showed any softness was when she heard Mu Xiangxiang had died, and she went to check. What did her kindness turn into?

With so many men at home, it was absurd that the old man wanted a girl to fetch the doctor late at night.

Yu Si Niang sighed. She knew her daughter would refuse.

"Mom, did you agree to my grandpa's request?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"No, when your grandpa said he wanted you to be the cook, I said you'd decide for yourself, but about the dowry money, I didn't know how to refuse, so I said nothing."

Yu Si Niang used silence as her refusal.

But Mr. Mu would likely pretend he didn't hear it, and come back next time to ask for money again.

"Forget it, Mom. If something like this happens again, just let them come to me. I'll handle it.

But still, Mom, you have to learn to say no. Taking a loss is a virtue, but that should be reserved for your own family.

With the people from the Old Mu Family, we won't even give them a Copper Coin, let alone a grain of rice."

Mu Dade was already a scholar, and the third branch had split off. The Old Mu Family still wanted to exploit the third branch, they really had thick skin.

Yu Si Niang agreed with Shuangshuang's view deep down, but whenever facing the in-laws, she felt speaking up as a daughter-in-law wasn't right.

"Shuangshuang, don't be upset, Mom will try... try to learn to refuse your grandpa and grandma's requests. Didn't you say Fengzi was coming? Is he coming for breakfast? Mom doesn't think I've cooked enough porridge."

Chapter 745: Not Letting You Take Risks

"Shuangshuang, I don't know either. Mom, how about I knead some more flour? We can make a few pancakes to fill our stomachs. What do you think?" Mu Shuangshuang said.

"Alright, then I'll knead the dough."

Yu Si Niang scooped some flour from the cupboard and started adding water to knead the dough.

Mu Shuangshuang took two large sea bowls, scooped all the hot porridge from the pot, and placed it on the dining table before starting to wash the pot.

Making pancakes isn't a difficult task, but I don't know when Lu Yuanfeng will come over.

Mu Shuangshuang used a loofah to scrub the pot. Just as she finished washing it, Xiao Han walked in.

"Sister, with such heavy snow, will the pigs in the pigsty and the little rabbits in the rabbit cages freeze to death?" Xiao Han asked with a worried face.

It seems he just went to check on the pigs and rabbits in the pigsty.

"Little animals have fur and aren't afraid of the cold. If you're worried, you can grab some dry grass and throw it into the pigsty, and a little into the rabbit den as well," Mu Shuangshuang said.

"Okay!" Xiao Han nodded.

After saying that, he went out again.

What's more, kids really aren't afraid of the cold. Little Zhi isn't, and neither is Xiao Han. In such cold weather, instead of staying warm under the covers, they don't even come to the fire I set.

Half an hour later, Lu Yuanfeng stepped through the side door of the Old Mu Family into the third branch.

He was carrying a child on each shoulder, followed by two men. The men were only wearing thin autumn clothes and were shivering in the cold wind. When Mu Shuangshuang looked closely, she saw they were the Huang Brothers.

The Huang Brothers' parents died early, and they've been living day by day. Whether it's the dead of winter or the cool spring and autumn, they always wear other people's hand-me-downs.

In spring and autumn, it's okay—a little worn-out clothes. People wear them out, and they don't need them anymore, but for winter coats, people will mend them and wear them again.

So, there's rarely a chance to get someone else's winter clothes.

That's why they came out wearing autumn clothes.

"Huang Da, Huang Er, quickly go into the house and warm up by the fire. You'll freeze stiff otherwise."

Huang Da and Huang Er, without any formality, quickly entered Shuangshuang's kitchen.

Lu Yuanfeng put the two children outside the kitchen, and the children obediently joined the Huang Brothers to warm themselves by the fire.

Lu Yuanfeng was wearing a new cotton coat made by Yu Si Niang, with tightly bound cuffs that looked very warm. When he and Mu Shuangshuang met each other's gaze, a suspicious blush appeared on his face.

"Shuangshuang, aren't you cold?" Lu Yuanfeng asked, staring foolishly at Mu Shuangshuang.

"Not really, I was just warming myself by the fire. I also threw a few sweet potatoes into the fire. When we go to the mountains later, everyone can take one to fill our stomachs. What do you think?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

At this point, Mu Shuangshuang was getting to the main topic, which was exactly what Lu Yuanfeng wanted to discuss.

"Shuangshuang, today I want to go to the mountains alone first to check the situation. With three days of snow, I have no idea how the situation at Niuwei Mountain is.

Besides, since the snow hasn't stopped yet, I'm not sure if it's suitable for hunting. I need to go up the mountain to see."

It's really cold now, and after standing outside the kitchen for a while, Mu Shuangshuang's nose turned red from the cold.

Lu Yuanfeng, feeling sorry, pulled her into the kitchen and said as she approached the stove, "Shuangshuang, don't worry. My task today is not hunting; it's to check the situation."

Hunting on a snowy day is the most dangerous.

There are tigers, wolves, and bears. These animals are extremely dangerous and, when hungry, they'll attack anything live they see.

Mu Shuangshuang knew Lu Yuanfeng had her best interests in mind.

But she was still worried about Lu Yuanfeng going up there alone.

"Brother Fengzi, we brothers can go to the mountain with you, so Miss Shuangshuang can be at ease," Huang Da said.

"No way, you brothers don't have any cold-weather clothing. You can't go up the mountain like this. The temperature in the mountain is much lower than here. With just these clothes, you'll freeze stiff in a while."

Lu Yuanfeng directly refused.

On the way here, he had also talked to the Huang Brothers, but they didn't take it to heart.

"Then what do we do? We brothers came here to hunt today; we even brought our tools. We can't just go back like this," Huang Er said, pointing to the bow and arrows he placed in the corner.

"How could it be for nothing? You can hang out at my place. There's food and drink, and besides, you still haven't told me what happened that night and how you dealt with my fifth uncle and second uncle," Mu Shuangshuang said, handing a small stool to Lu Yuanfeng and squatting down beside it herself.

"Hahaha..." The Huang Brothers wanted to laugh when they heard this story.

As they laughed, everyone in the kitchen grew curious because Yu Si Niang had been away for a few days and had no idea what had happened at home.

Since Shuangshuang hadn't mentioned it, Yu Si Niang hadn't asked.

Now that this topic came up, Yu Si Niang became interested.

"That night, just after dark, your second uncle and fifth uncle couldn't wait to rush to your house, looking like they were going to tear the roof apart.

I even heard your second uncle say that if he stole enough money, he'd find two concubines to serve him since his wife was temperamental, ugly, and not very bright. Anyway, the more they talked, the more excited they became.

Huang Er and I were hiding inside without making a peep, waiting to see how they'd enter. Unexpectedly, after a while, your fifth uncle really got the door open.

Once they came in, Huang Er and I immediately started beating them up. The two grown men were so scared they wet their pants. The rest you should know; we shoved your fifth uncle and second uncle's heads into a manure bucket and then threw them into the mountain to let them chill in the cold wind all night."

Mu Shuangshuang burst into laughter, her stomach cramping from laughter.

Yu Si Niang, sitting beside her, recalled the day she returned from Yu Family Village, seeing Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian with dirty stuff all over their heads, thinking it must have been manure, and felt a bit nauseated.

Thankfully that day, Shuangshuang's father dragged her away, otherwise, who knows how gross it would've been sticking to her.

"Speaking of, what do we do about talking about something so disgusting right before we eat?" Mu Shuangshuang said.

"No problem, we've brothers have been through worse; it doesn't affect us."

"Alright then, Mom, I'll go call Dad and Little Zhi, and you all get ready to eat."

After breakfast, Lu Yuanfeng went into the mountains, while the Huang Brothers, with nothing to do, took a few kids to the courtyard to build snowmen.

Half-grown snowmen, with the help of two big men, were quickly built.

One wasn't enough. At the request of Xiao Han and Little Zhi, several more snowmen were built.

Mu Shuangshuang carried a wooden basin, gathering clean snow.

After melting, this snow would be stored by Mu Shuangshuang in a sealed jar. When it was time for the beans to mature next year, soaking with this water helps to keep the pickled beans from dissolving.

These little tips were all learned by Mu Shuangshuang from Yu Si Niang.

When it comes to cooking, Mu Shuangshuang did alright, but for pickling vegetables in jars, she still had to learn from Yu Si Niang.

In this era, there were no refrigerators; many foods were gone once out of season. To have them in the off-season, they had to be pickled and stored in jars.

Chapter 746: Deserved It

Niuwei Mountain's Mountainside

Lu Yuanfeng held a long bow and carried dozens of arrows on his back, wandering in the snow-covered forest. Along the way, he carefully observed the snow on the ground.

Most importantly, he watched for animal footprints on the ground.

Through the footprints, Lu Yuanfeng could determine whether large animals had passed through the mountain.

The forest could be dangerous at any moment, so he had to be extra cautious.

This trip was quieter than any other time, maybe due to the snow, Lu Yuanfeng felt the forest seemed larger, and the only sound he heard while walking was the creaking noise in the snow.

The weather in the mountain was extremely cold; Lu Yuanfeng felt his face freeze after walking for a while.

Gradually, he noticed several sets of footprints on the ground, judging by the shape, they should be those of a sika deer.

If you manage to hunt sika deer or wolves in winter, they are worth more than at any other time, and if the fur is intact, a sika deer's hide can sell for one or two taels of silver.

Following the footprints, Lu Yuanfeng wandered around the mountain. Even covered by snow, this forest was indeed Lu Yuanfeng's territory.

In the forest, he could enter and exit freely, and no one could stop him.

Lu Yuanfeng wandered for an entire morning, and the harvest was decent—a lone roe deer, and a rabbit with a broken leg. The rabbit was bitten by some animal, losing half a leg.

Lu Yuanfeng picked up a stray rabbit and went down the mountain.

Mu Shuangshuang had already cleared the snow in the yard, afraid that Lu Yuanfeng might slip when he returned.

Coincidentally, just as she finished clearing the snow, Lu Yuanfeng came back, carrying quite a bounty.

Mu Shuangshuang was astonished and stepped forward to smile at Lu Yuanfeng.

"Not bad, young man, you haven't been gone long and already caught a roe deer."

Lu Yuanfeng blushed, feeling a bit embarrassed by Shuangshuang's compliment.

He chuckled, showing a row of white teeth. "Actually, it's nothing. If Shuangshuang went, she'd surely catch more."

"Who says so? I'm dumb when it comes to hunting. Without you, I wouldn't catch anything."

Mu Shuangshuang wouldn't dare boast about hunting in front of Lu Yuanfeng.

"No worries, with me by your side, whatever I catch is yours, so..." Lu Yuanfeng scratched his head, blushing.

Although Lu Yuanfeng's words sounded slick, they were quite sincere.

The biggest difference between him and other men was that what he said was always true, never just to amuse.

"By the way, was there any danger in the mountains?" Mu Shuangshuang asked, still a bit worried even seeing him safe.

After all, she hadn't gone herself.

"No, I grew up in the mountains, and though I've spent years at the barracks, it doesn't affect my familiarity with the mountains. Moreover, I found traces of sika deer, tomorrow when I go back, I'll search thoroughly and should find them."

"I'll go with you, you can't leave me behind again. You made me a bow and arrow, and I haven't even used it yet." Mu Shuangshuang preemptively warned Lu Yuanfeng.

"Shuangshuang, after the snow, the forest seems much larger. This morning, I only checked a few areas, and the roads are too slippery, easy to fall. How about... How about you don't go, I'll hunt for you."

"Hmph, you just said you're familiar with the mountains, you liar!" Mu Shuangshuang pouted and turned away from Lu Yuanfeng.

Lu Yuanfeng panicked; he nearly dropped the roe deer, if not realizing the rope tied to it wasn't secure, he'd have lost his first catch.

"Shuangshuang, I'll take you, please don't be mad."

Lu Yuanfeng couldn't bear seeing Shuangshuang upset and distressed; he wished she'd always be happy.

"Hmph, Lu Yuanfeng, if you go adventure alone again next time, I truly won't speak to you, no matter what you say." Mu Shuangshuang pouted.

Lu Yuanfeng nodded heavily.

"So, Shuangshuang, how should we handle these catches? Should the roe deer be killed or what?" Lu Yuanfeng asked.

In this weather, likely no one would buy the roe deer, Lu Yuanfeng didn't know what to do.

"Kill it and salt it, then, when the weather clears, dry it into cured meat. Is the roe deer's hide valuable?"

"The roe deer's isn't valuable; at this time, it's the sika deer and wolf hides that are worth money. Also, bear hides, which are rare. Plus, the one at our place..." Lu Yuanfeng glanced at Mu Shuangshuang's room.

Mu Shuangshuang knew he referred to Little Black.

The fur of that critter could be made into a mink coat worth thousands in the modern day, even more in ancient times.

"Fengzi, why don't we sell Little Black and split the money?" Mu Shuangshuang said with a sly smile.

In the room, Little Black suddenly trembled, jolting awake from sleep.

It squinted, looking around, then hissed for a long time.

The sound was loud enough that even Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng in the yard could hear it.

Mu Shuangshuang threatened more. "Fengzi, bring the knife over; let's skin Little Black today."

In the room, Little Black seemed frightened, jumping and scrambling around.

For a moment, the room echoed with Little Black's pitiful cries.

"Haha, this little thing is so easily scared." Mu Shuangshuang laughed.

Mu Shuangshuang went with Lu Yuanfeng to his house to get the tools to kill the roe deer. Along the way, Lu Yuanfeng worried she'd fall, his large hand holding Mu Shuangshuang's hand all the way.

His palm was sweaty, but he was reluctant to let go.

All the way, he kept reminding, "Careful where you step, don't fall."

Finally arriving at Lu Yuanfeng's house outside, before entering, they saw Gu Jiulian glaring at Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng with resentment.

"A pair of shameless lovers, do you know what day it is?" Gu Jiulian yelled.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng ignored Gu Jiulian.

They walked straight into Lu Yuanfeng's yard.

Gu Jiulian persistently chased and cursed: "It's Gua Gua's birthday, it's all because of you two shameless lovers. If not for you, our Gua Gua would already be married and possibly a mother by now."

Why don't you both go die? Why don't you go die?"

"Aunt Gu, be careful of your words. Xia Guagua made her own mistake, ran away herself, and you want to blame us? Why don't you talk about how Xia Guagua almost killed someone, then fled in fear?"

Lu Yuanfeng didn't want to deal with Gu Jiulian, but she shouldn't, by any terms, curse at Shuangshuang in front of him.

"Hmph, if you hadn't rejected my daughter back then, would she have gotten involved with Wang Fugui? Would she have fought Wang Fugui?"

Lu Yuanfeng, all this is your cursed fault. You're nothing but bad luck, your mother was killed by your curse, and you'll suffer retribution."

Gu Jiulian kept cursing, and Mu Shuangshuang directly picked up a snowball and threw it at Gu Jiulian's face.

Chapter 747: Past Scandals (Part 1)

Gu Jiulian was stunned. She stared at Mu Shuangshuang, seemingly not expecting that Mu Shuangshuang would dare throw snow at her.

As she opened her mouth, intending to curse Mu Shuangshuang,

another snowball hit Gu Jiulian right in the mouth.

This time, Gu Jiulian fell into the snow, eating snow like a dog.

Mu Shuangshuang covered her mouth and laughed out loud.

"Mu Shuangshuang, you little bitch, you... don't be too excessive." Gu Jiulian shouted angrily at Mu Shuangshuang from her snow pile.

"Old witch, your mouth stinks too much, you should eat more snow to clean it.

Besides, Fengzi's mother isn't dead; she's doing just fine now. As for you, you're no different from a madwoman. Look at yourself, I feel embarrassed just looking at you."

Mu Shuangshuang, hands on her hips, defiantly shouted at Gu Jiulian.

Gu Jiulian struggled to get up from the ground, but slipped again, eating snow like a dog.

Mu Shuangshuang laughed even more joyfully.

Standing nearby, Lu Yuanfeng felt his heart warm because of that laughter; even when Gu Jiulian called him a curse, the hidden shadow in his heart completely vanished.

Shuangshuang's laughter was contagious; at least, it filled Lu Yuanfeng with happiness.

In a snow-covered world, a little girl in a red cotton jacket laughed freely and boldly.

Her face full of confidence, seemingly never to be defeated by the difficulties ahead.

Beside her, the tall and strong young man looked at the little girl as if she were a treasure. Together, they were so dazzling, so harmonious.

"Fengzi, let's go inside and get some stuff; just this bit of fighting strength isn't worth me tearing apart." Mu Shuangshuang said confidently to Lu Yuanfeng after dealing with Gu Jiulian.

Lu Yuanfeng nodded with a smile, and the two turned and entered Lu Yuanfeng's house without looking back.

Leaving Gu Jiulian alone in the snow, angry, flailing, and cursing.

Before entering the house, the two said nothing and went inside, taking only tools, then headed to Shuangshuang's house.

When they came out, Gu Jiulian had already fallen countless times, yet she was still cursing, spouting all sorts of unpleasant words, seemingly trying to provoke Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng directly bypassed Gu Jiulian; for such shameless women, ignoring them was best.

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In the courtyard of the Third Branch of the Mu Family, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng placed the tools: a large wooden basin and a few pig slaughtering knives.

The Huang Brothers, who were warming themselves inside the house, also came out, each giving Lu Yuanfeng a thumbs-up.

"Fengzi, you were only gone a short while and caught a roe deer. Last time, our brothers wandered in the mountains for two days and didn't even see a rabbit." Huang Da said with envy.

"Brother, I've always said that following Brother Fengzi will surely lead to catching good things. Once we borrow winter coats from the village, we'll follow Brother Fengzi into the mountains to hunt big game." Huang Er said excitedly.

The Huang Brothers discussed the clothing issue in the morning; since Lu Yuanfeng suggested they wear something warm to the mountains, they had none themselves and had to borrow from the village.

Mu Shuangshuang knew the Huang Brothers lived a tight life but didn't know they had to borrow even coats.

Hearing this, Mu Shuangshuang felt uncomfortable inside; after all, the Huang Brothers helped her significantly.

"Huang Da, Huang Er, Shuangshuang will prepare coats for you. It's cold now, so hurry to the kitchen and warm up." Mu Shuangshuang urged.

The Huang Brothers stared dumbfounded at Mu Shuangshuang, before saying, "Miss Shuangshuang, don't be so kind to us. We brothers once thought about taking your and Brother Fengzi's lives, we..."

The Huang Brothers recalled past events with immense shame.

"No fighting, no knowing. I also fought back then." Mu Shuangshuang laughed.

Speaking of it, her fiery temper hasn't changed even now.

"Haha, speaking of which, I remember the day in the cave when we brothers were taught a lesson by Miss Shuangshuang. Back then, Miss Shuangshuang was so formidable, most men weren't her match." Huang Da recollected, not with resentment but with amazement.

Lu Yuanfeng also recalled; his Shuangshuang has always had this fiery temper.

Lu Yuanfeng never knew that intelligence, calm and fiery temper could combine so well.

And Shuangshuang is just such a person who combines them perfectly.

"Alright, alright, let's move past the past, think of nothing more." Mu Shuangshuang said, slightly embarrassed.

"Okay, we won't talk about it anymore. Anyway, thank you, Miss Shuangshuang."

Having said that, the Huang Brothers went into the kitchen, and Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng continued busying themselves in the courtyard.

"Fengzi, I'll get a wooden bucket to catch the roe deer blood."

Mu Shuangshuang went inside and came out again holding a clean wooden bucket.

Lu Yuanfeng picked up a slaughtering knife and started bleeding the roe deer; with a cut, the roe deer began to struggle, and Lu Yuanfeng held it down hard.

Mu Shuangshuang caught all the roe deer blood with the wooden bucket and planned to give a bowl to Aunt Zhao Yun's home and Zhao Gouzi's home later.

And also send some roe deer meat.

Lu Yuanfeng skillfully skinned the roe deer with the slaughtering knife; he placed the pelt aside, planning to tan it later in the storeroom.

Roe deer pelts aren't as valuable as those of animals like deer, so Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng decided to tan it and use it to make shoes, perfect for wearing during snowy days.

The snow came so suddenly; Shuangshuang's house still had many cold-proof items unprepared.

The quilts weren't thick enough, and there wasn't enough charcoal for warmth at night.

Furthermore, Yu Si Niang only made coats but not shoes; it's estimated that they will have to go to town to buy materials for making shoes soon, like fabrics and things for thousand-layer soles.

In winter, wearing straw shoes or embroidered shoes isn't wise; the former is too cold, and the latter too easily wet. If they can make cotton shoes with roe deer pelt as the upper, it would be perfect.

Lu Yuanfeng cut the roe deer meat into several pieces and took off a leg for Mu Shuangshuang to use for lunch. He also cut two pounds of roe deer meat to send to Zhao Yun and Zhao Gouzi's homes.

Mu Shuangshuang watched as Lu Yuanfeng sliced up the remaining roe deer; she placed the sliced roe deer meat into a large jar, salted it for preservation.

The biggest benefit of winter is that these stored items won't easily spoil.

Mu Shuangshuang covered the salted roe deer meat with a pot lid and began dealing with the rabbit with the broken leg in the courtyard.

Lunch included dry-fried roe deer meat, braised rabbit, and some side dishes.

The side dishes were picked by Yu Si Niang from the vegetable patch early in the snow; perhaps due to the cold, Mu Shuangshuang noticed the vegetable cores seemed somewhat frostbitten.

Chapter 748: Shouting Once and Helping

While Mu Shuangshuang was handling the rabbit, Lu Yuanfeng had already removed the organs of the roe deer. He placed them aside, unsure which parts Shuangshuang intended to use.

Mu Shuangshuang accepted them all; there was certainly enough for the midday meal, so they could eat the rest for dinner.

The organs and intestines of the roe deer are not necessarily inferior to the meat.

"Fengzi, it's almost done here; you go inside and warm up by the fire," Mu Shuangshuang put the rabbit meat into the wooden basin, raised her head, and said to Lu Yuanfeng.

"I'll wait for you to go in together," Lu Yuanfeng replied.

"It's alright, I'll be finished soon." Mu Shuangshuang laughed cheerfully, her hands working without pause.

"Shall I go inside and roast a sweet potato for you?" Lu Yuanfeng asked.

"Alright, you hurry in; it's quite cold out here."

The northern wind howled fiercely; even Mu Shuangshuang felt it was unbearable.

But soon she was almost finished, lifting her head to see that Lu Yuanfeng hadn't left at all. His sturdy frame blocked the wind, as if by doing so he could shield Mu Shuangshuang from the cold.

Mu Shuangshuang felt a warm glow in her heart, even warmer than when she roasted fire in the morning.

"Shuangshuang, let me carry the rabbit. How do you plan to prepare lunch? Let me help you light the fire, and I'll wash the vegetables and rinse the rice too," Lu Yuanfeng took the wooden basin from Mu Shuangshuang's hands.

"No need, it's too cold. I'll handle it myself," Mu Shuangshuang refused.

"Shuangshuang, you are a girl. I asked Grandpa Zhang; in winter you should rarely touch cold water, and also... also..." Lu Yuanfeng reddened as he spoke halfway.

"Also what? Quickly say it, don't leave things half-said like a cat scratching its chest, leaving people anxious." Mu Shuangshuang's face was full of curiosity.

"It's just... it's just that your period is approaching. I also asked Grandpa Zhang, and he said girls shouldn't overexert themselves, or they'll leave health issues for the future, like back pain when old." Lu Yuanfeng's face turned as red as a monkey's bottom.

Talking about Mu Shuangshuang's period required most of his courage, and if he had to bring it up again, he truly lacked the nerve.

Mu Shuangshuang also felt a bit shy, but her heart brimmed more with sweetness.

It's strange how some men's words on women's periods or the like can feel sleazy, but Lu Yuanfeng was different.

He was sincere, remembering every little thing for her.

And he would follow through with what he said.

If he said he would wash the vegetables and rice, he wouldn't leave any task undone.

Unlike some men who only tell women to drink more water without showing any other care.

"Alright, I'll leave the heavy task of washing vegetables to you today." Mu Shuangshuang smiled brightly at Lu Yuanfeng.

They both went into the kitchen together.

Inside the kitchen, a group of people gathered together. The adults chatted, while the children stared at the sweet potatoes in the fire pit that were almost, yet not quite, cooked, with mouths watering.

Even Xue Zheng couldn't take his eyes off them.

He probably had never had this kind of roasted sweet potato before, Mu Shuangshuang guessed.

"Do you guys want some roast meat?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"What meat?" Speaking of food, the Huang Brothers immediately left Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang who were in conversation and turned their attention to her.

"Roast meat, since Fengzi caught a roe deer today, I can make roast meat for everyone," Mu Shuangshuang said mysteriously.

The crowd didn't understand but still looked expectantly at Mu Shuangshuang.

Unfortunately, as soon as Mu Shuangshuang played this card, she said no more, leaving the group curious about how she'd make roast meat.

Everyone wanted to see Mu Shuangshuang preparing roast meat.

"No rush, wait until I finish making lunch, or we can make roast meat tonight."

Mu Shuangshuang planned to use the heavy iron lids from the water barrels next to the large iron pots as grilling plates for the roast meat. It was convenient and effortless.

"Haha, Miss Shuangshuang, now that you've said it, we are all eagerly waiting to see you grill meat tonight."

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Mu Shuangshuang started preparing lunch, while Lu Yuanfeng helped her wash the vegetables one by one thoroughly.

Even though the water was cold, Lu Yuanfeng felt happy.

Inside the kitchen, everyone chatted happily, mostly discussing the matter between Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng.

"Aunt Si, when will Miss Shuangshuang and Brother Fengzi marry? These two seem inseparable, might as well marry soon and become one family."

"We don't know that either; they said they wouldn't marry for now, but the engagement is set for the 12th day of the twelfth lunar month. Once the engagement is settled, Shuangshuang is practically part of Fengzi's family." Yu Si Niang spoke with evident satisfaction.

Ultimately, she was very pleased with Fengzi as her son-in-law.

Moreover, as her daughter was growing older each day, Yu Si Niang also wanted to settle her daughter's marriage soon.

"Haha, the 12th of the twelfth month is a good day; at that time, we brothers will surely come to support it." Huang Da laughed heartily.

Huang Er chimed in from the side, "Miss Shuangshuang, what might you and Brother Fengzi need for your engagement? We brothers will prepare things for both of you."

Huang Er was straightforward and always spoke his mind.

He didn't care if it was a surprise for Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng.

"You guys can send whatever you like, but don't send anything too expensive; homemade items are better." Mu Shuangshuang didn't hold back with the Huang Brothers.

She knew it was no use refusing.

The Huang Brothers would prepare something regardless, so she preferred to accept their goodwill directly and have them make homemade items.

"Haha, Miss Shuangshuang, you asked the right thing. We brothers are pretty good at carpentry, how about we give you a dressing box with a piece of copper mirror inside." Huang Dao said.

"Just call me Shuangshuang; always calling me Miss sounds so formal." Mu Shuangshuang said and then asked, "You guys are good at woodworking, right? Can you make desks like those scholars use?"

The sudden snow had halted not only Mu Shuangshuang's winter storage plans but also the construction of her planned private school.

Mu Dashan is mainly skilled in masonry, which involves using clay bricks for wall building, laying foundations, and similar tasks.

Mu Shuangshuang initially wanted Lu Yuanfeng to handle the carpentry, but he had numerous tasks already. Short-term tasks were manageable, but long-term ones were too much to handle.

"Don't just talk about making desks; we brothers can make wooden doors for houses too."

Mu Shuangshuang nodded in satisfaction. "It's actually like this, Fengzi and I are planning to build a private school in the village, similar to the academy in the town, but on a smaller scale.

We'll likely have about a dozen students, needing a dozen or twenty desks, and an office space will also need desks and chairs."

"My goodness, Fengzi, Shuangshuang, are you really opening an academy? Did I hear that right?" Huang Da and Huang Er exclaimed simultaneously.

The crowd's reactions were actually quite similar to Mu Dashan's initial response.

Matters related to scholars seemed like a distant dream for farming families.

Chapter 749: Looking Through the Window

What's more, Mu Shuangshuang has now skipped studying and moved on to opening a school.

"Actually, it's nothing much. We were just thinking about Xiao Han and Yuanbao. Sending the two little kids to town for school is inconvenient, and the nearby villages don't have private schools, so Fengzi and I thought of this idea."

Mu Shuangshuang explained with a smile.

"Sister Shuangshuang, Xiao Han and Yuanbao can stay at my house," Xue Zheng suddenly spoke up.

Everyone present was a bit taken aback.

"Brother Xiao Zheng, are you inviting us to your home?" Yuanbao asked.

Xue Zheng nodded. "We have a lot of rooms at home, more than enough!"

"Then can Xiao Han, Little Zhi, and I go to your place to hang out?"

Among those present, only Xue Zheng's family lived in the county. Yuanbao had visited the county countless times but had never seen the night market there.

He had heard there were lots of delicious foods at the night market. Every time his second brother took him to town, they would leave early, and when they returned, it was even earlier. If they were late, they couldn't see on the way back, and it was easy to encounter dangers on the road.

"Alright!"

The three kids started chatting again while the Huang Brothers continued the previous topic.

"Shuangshuang, you and Fengzi are the most innovative among all the people we brothers know. Fengzi is capable, and you have a good mind. The two of you together, I think it's a perfect match," said Huang Da Dao.

"That's natural. Fengzi and I are obviously smart and have brains; those are undeniable facts." Mu Shuangshuang accepted the compliment with thick skin, and in the process, praised herself and Lu Yuanfeng again.

People in the kitchen laughed heartily, even Mu Dashan, the father, had a proud look on his face.

Amidst the laughter of the crowd, Mu Shuangshuang began cooking, and Lu Yuanfeng started the fire.

Everyone occasionally joked a little, and the first dish, braised rabbit, was surprisingly quick to be done.

The rabbit with dried chilies gave off a meaty smell and a spicy aroma from the chilies at the same time. In the kitchen, sneezes and the sound of swallowing were continuous.

Originally, the dishes Mu Shuangshuang made were delicious, and now, being so close in the kitchen, it was simply a test of endurance.

"Everyone, don't hurry; we're just getting started. Shuangshuang still has several more dishes to stir-fry, and the rice isn't cooked yet," Mu Shuangshuang reminded everyone.

Smelling the aroma, Mu Dashan suggested, "Shuangshuang, why don't we invite your Aunt Zhao Yun's family and Uncle Zhao Gouzi over, and we all can have a lively time together?"

"That's right, Shuangshuang, your Aunt Xiao Yun is also a very frugal person, and she's reluctant to eat meat even for half a meal," said Yu Si Niang, speaking up about her good friend.

"Alright, Shuangshuang has no objections, but calling people over will have to wait until Shuangshuang finishes cooking the venison, the road outside isn't easy to walk."

Mu Shuangshuang knew that if she didn't go, it would certainly be her parents going.

Although her mother's body was not weak, she was a woman after all, and if she fell, unlike Shuangshuang herself, she wouldn't recover quickly due to her youth.

As for her father, it's even more so, it took a lot for him to recover well, he can't risk anything.

"I'll go, I can find someone to momentarily take over the fire," Lu Yuanfeng stood up.

Everyone scrambled to go out because no one wanted the others to get hurt.

"It's better if we brothers go. Aunt Si and Uncle Dashan are elders, Fengzi needs to tend the fire, and the kids have fragile bones, so it's better if we brothers go and come back quickly."

After saying this, the two men went out the door simultaneously.

Mu Shuangshuang continued stir-frying. Indeed, vegetables fried with rapeseed oil smell better.

Mu Shuangshuang even got overwhelmed by the aroma while stir-frying the venison.

"Mom, Shuangshuang will also make some egg soup. Two eggs, a bowl of soup, though it's bland, it's warm for the stomach."

"You decide, whatever you make, mom agrees."

Mu Shuangshuang finished frying the vegetables and then started making the egg soup.

Another pot also started cooking rice; it would be ready in about the time it takes to burn an incense stick.

Some time later, amid the chilly wind, Zhang Yutou's family and Zhao Gouzi arrived.

As soon as they stepped into the house, they exclaimed, "What's this? Smells so good, it's making our mouths water."

Coincidentally, the dishes were ready, just waiting for everyone to arrive.

"Let's eat, let's eat..."

Everyone gathered around, several people could fit on a long bench.

Lu Yuanfeng served Mu Shuangshuang a big bowl of rice, worried that she might be hungry. "I'll serve rice today; if it's not enough, just call me. You've been busy for so long, you must be starving."

Mu Shuangshuang happily grabbed the rice bowl, shoveling a big mouthful of rice into her mouth, then mumbled, "I am indeed hungry, I'll have to eat an extra bowl of rice this noon."

Lu Yuanfeng was delighted, he also started eating but kept glancing at Shuangshuang's bowl to make sure her food was enough.

This little gesture didn't escape the eyes of Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang. They exchanged a glance, increasingly satisfied with their future son-in-law.

The food on the table was indeed hearty, with a balanced mix of meat and vegetables, and most importantly, the portions were ample.

Everyone had no worries about not getting enough to eat.

As they started eating, the conversation at the table resumed.

The third branch of the house was filled with laughter and joy.

Outside the third branch, not far from the outhouse.

After finishing her business, Mrs. Lin, rubbing her aching behind from crouching, was just about to return to the main house of the Old Mu Family.

She overheard laughter from the third branch. Judging by the sound, there were quite a few people there, and the faint aroma carried on the wind.

Mrs. Lin smacked her lips together.

She slowly walked towards the third branch.

Last time, Mrs. Lin's head was bashed by Old Mrs. Mu, and she still had a piece of gauze on her head, and it would hurt from time to time.

But the pain was nothing compared to her current situation.

Although Mrs. Lin had successfully stayed at the Old Mu Family, she was treated like a servant by Old Mrs. Mu.

She had to take care of Mu Xiangxiang's eating, drinking, and excretion every day, and even the chamber pots were emptied by Lin Xiaozao.

As for food, Lin Xiaozao didn't even get a share.

Lin Xiaozao had been eating cold rice soaked in water for days, now she just wanted to have a little feast, something tasty.

Following the aroma, Mrs. Lin meandered towards the third branch's kitchen.

She stood on the firewood under the eaves of Shuangshuang's house, looking through the window at the people eating inside.

From Mrs. Lin's eyes, she saw meat.

Delicious, aromatic meat.

The sound of swallowing her saliva was so loud that everyone in the kitchen heard it.

Mu Shuangshuang looked up and saw Mrs. Lin, whose entire face was squished tightly against the windowsill pillar.

Mrs. Lin stared greedily at the dishes on the table, like a ravenous wolf.

Mu Shuangshuang even saw her drooling mouth.

Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan were seeing this kind of situation for the first time and didn't know how to respond.

After a while, Yu Si Niang nudged Mu Dashan.

"Shuangshuang's dad, what should we do about this?"

Ordinarily, if someone barged in while a rural family was eating, they would invite that person to join, usually out of courtesy and not actually intending for them to stay.

However, if they were to say something, Mrs. Lin would definitely stay.

Chapter 750: Warm Enthusiasm

In recent times, Mrs. Lin's actions have made it impossible for Mu Dashan to be close to her.

Especially after Mu Dashan heard from Mu Shuangshuang the full story of what Mrs. Lin did to Mu Xiangxiang.

Even though Mu Xiangxiang is gradually returning to normal, the resentment still remains.

Not only did Mrs. Lin fail to help and care for her closest family, but she did something utterly depraved to them as well. No matter how honest Mu Dashan is, he cannot overlook such things.

"Si Niang, let's eat our own and ignore others!"

Since Mu Dashan had spoken, Yu Si Niang, regardless of her thoughts, wouldn't say anything more.

As for Mu Shuangshuang, she couldn't be happier.

Mrs. Lin is like a frozen venomous snake; whoever helps her will get bitten once she recovers.

Peeking from outside the window, Mrs. Lin watched the third branch's people, not letting her in for dinner, and she was getting restless!

Just as she was about to remind the third branch's people, from a distance came Old Mrs. Mu's loud curses.

"Second daughter-in-law, did you fall into the outhouse while relieving yourself? You haven't come to wash Xiangxiang's clothes yet.

Second daughter-in-law... Hurry and get your old hag self out here, second daughter-in-law..."

As the voice that chased like a harbinger of death drew near, Mrs. Lin was startled and slipped, falling face-first into muddy ground.

Afraid Old Mrs. Mu might find her, Mrs. Lin quickly left the yard of the third branch.

Just as she headed toward the main house, she bumped into Old Mrs. Mu coming her way.

"Mom, why did you come out? It's so slippery; what if you fall?" Mrs. Lin said ingratiatingly, trying to hold Old Mrs. Mu.

But Old Mrs. Mu brushed her off and spat at her.

"Pft, Lin Xiaozao, if you keep being lazy, you'll go back to your Lin Family Village. We, the Old Mu Family, don't want such a vile daughter-in-law and certainly not someone who's barely human."

Old Mrs. Mu cursed with spiteful words.

No matter what Mrs. Lin said, she'd be retorted by Old Mrs. Mu.

On the surface, Mrs. Lin seemed obedient and sensible; even if humiliated or beaten by Old Mrs. Mu, she'd never retaliate, but she still tried to drag someone down with her.

"Mom, just earlier, do you know what I saw outside the third branch?" Mrs. Lin spoke mysteriously.

"Hmph, I don't want to hear the dirt that your eye-boogered eyes saw. Whatever you say is useless today; don't think of being lazy!" Old Mrs. Mu dismissed Mrs. Lin's words and scolded her again.

"Mom, inside the third branch's house, they're feasting on meat and fish, even invited that little brat Zhao Yun and that Zhao Gouzi.

These people are always close to Yu Si Niang, it must be her idea. Mom, Yu Si Niang is really siding with outsiders.

She'd rather invite outsiders than let our family have a good bite, mom, we ought to..."

"Lin Xiaozao, even the mess in your own pocket isn't clean, and you think of dragging others down? Let me tell you, you'd better drop that thought.

What the third branch eats is their freedom, I won't interfere. But what you eat is under my old hag's control!"

This is the first time Old Mrs. Mu didn't make it difficult for the third branch.

Just because the words came from Mrs. Lin's mouth, Old Mrs. Mu hated her more.

Mrs. Lin's scheme failed, and she was forced to stick by Old Mrs. Mu, enduring her curses and sudden slaps.

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After the meal, everyone was so full they were immobile, clutching their stomachs, exclaiming in comfort.

Because the meal was had in the kitchen, cleaning up was convenient.

Yu Si Niang, Zhao Yun, Mu Shuangshuang, the three women huddled together, assigning tasks to each other.

Mu Shuangshuang washed dishes, Yu Si Niang cleaned the table, and Zhao Yun was responsible for boiling water and making tea for the rest.

A cup of tea after a meal, live to ninety-nine.

In Er Gui Village, most households drink a cup of tea after meals; the wealthy use good tea leaves, while the less fortunate drink plain water.

The third branch occasionally receives some tea leaves due to Yu Liulang's tea garden, and the quality is quite good, almost ranking among the best in Er Gui Village.

Thus, it's common for villagers to come by for a sip of tea, which is normal.

Mu Shuangshuang took up the dishwashing chore, scooping up the leftover sweet potato rice from the pot, adding two ladles of cold water into the pot. Lu Yuanfeng stood at the hearth, stuffing pine twigs into the stove.

In this way, the water Mu Shuangshuang used for washing dishes would be warm.

After finishing the kitchen work, everyone had their second cup of tea.

Zhang Yutou coincidentally chatted with Mu Dashan about sending his son Da Long to school.

As parents, they almost thought of the same thing.

"Dashan, let me be frank with you, Yun'er and I have only one son. We've already planned to send Da Long to the academy.

Should Da Long achieve a scholar's rank or become a scholar it would be fabulous for Da Long and the Old Zhang Family.

However, the town's academy is too far; Yun'er and I cannot fetch Da Long daily. Dashan, isn't your Yuanbao and Xiao Han also preparing for school?

Why don't we pool some money to hire Wang Fugui's ox cart in the village to transport our three kids daily, what do you think?"

Zhang Yutou directly included Yuanbao in the Mu Dashan Family.

First, the relationship between Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng is bound for marriage, making them one family.

Second, Yuanbao is also closely affiliated with Shuangshuang's house, and changing the address is only a matter of time.

"Yutou, we, too, were worried about sending our kids to school. But Shuangshuang found a friend who's a teacher, willing to teach in our village. Shuangshuang and Fengzi's idea is to set up a school in the village. It would make things convenient for us and also for everyone else."

As soon as Mu Dashan finished speaking, Zhang Yutou gave him a thumbs up.

"Shuangshuang and Fengzi are two individuals with ideas. Since you're starting a school, I'll just send Da Long to your academy. As for the gift, whatever it costs in town, we'll pay the same." Zhang Yutou said with admiration.

He envied Mu Dashan having such a sensible daughter and an excellent son-in-law.

"Let's not discuss money now. Shuangshuang said we should wait till the academy is built, calculate all costs, then decide the gift amount for each student.

Of course, it'll be cheaper than the town academy, and the teacher is a scholar reportedly of good character."

The more Mu Dashan spoke, the more Zhang Yutou looked forward to the spring of next year.

He even thumped his chest and said, "Dashan, if you're short of manpower for building the academy, be sure to call me. I'm not skilled at much but I know how to dig a foundation."

Mu Dashan was delighted too.

The recent heavy snow had delayed a lot, and he was worried about not finding help.

"Yutou, if you've got no other commitments, I'll count on you to dig the foundation. Let's start as soon as the snow melts, shall we?"