

## Folly 751

Chapter 751: The Meat Delivery Turmoil

"Haha, don't you forget about me, Zhao Gouzi. I'm pretty handy myself when it comes to work," said Zhao Gouzi.

"And us brothers, we can work as carpenters," Huang Da chimed in.

"Alright then, how about we all get together and set up the academy?"

Mu Dashan was more than happy to invite Zhang Yutou and Zhao Gouzi.

These two are hardworking and honest, truly like family.

Mu Dashan felt very reassured.

This meal yielded far more than just a meal's worth.

The group sat around the stove and chatted for most of the afternoon until nearly dinner time, when Mu Shuangshuang got up to start preparing dinner.

The promised grilled meat, Mu Shuangshuang lifted the lid off the kettle used for boiling water and placed it on the prepared iron rack.

"Shuangshuang, is this the grilled meat you were talking about?" asked Huang Er.

"Yes, it's quite simple. Later, when I slice the meat, you'll find it even simpler."

The roe deer meat from the morning, Mu Shuangshuang had kept some aside, unseasoned, which was perfect to slice for grilling.

Everyone watched Mu Shuangshuang attentively, from washing and slicing the meat to adding the condiments; it all seemed quite ordinary.

Until Mu Shuangshuang started brushing oil onto the large iron lid and placed the meat slices on it to grill.

The aroma gradually emerged, and only then did Huang Er understand the magic behind it.

"Originally, it seemed simple, but who would've thought it smelled so good. Shuangshuang, you should open a restaurant in the town as a chef, not an academy," Huang Er said.

Mu Shuangshuang laughed without saying whether she had any plans to open a restaurant.

As everyone waited eagerly, the grilled meat was finally ready.

Since only Mu Shuangshuang in the entire kitchen knew how to grill meat, everyone was counting on her.

"If you didn't get meat, have some sweet potatoes to satisfy your hunger. Slowly, everyone will have their turn!"

Everyone patiently waited, and dinner was finally finished.

With some meat left over, Mu Dashan took half a pound over to the Old Mu Family's main house to supplement Mu Xiangxiang's nutrition.

In the main room of the Old Mu Family's house, everyone sat around; the small pile of charcoal had long been extinguished, but Old Mrs. Mu was reluctant to use new charcoal, so everyone just made do.

Mu Dashan's arrival caused a stir among everyone, especially upon seeing the half-pound of meat in his hands.

"Third one, look at you being so courteous. You came, that's enough. Why bring meat? Quickly, give it to the second sister-in-law to take to the kitchen and cook," Mrs. Lin said, eyes fixed intensely on the meat in Mu Dashan's hands like a cat spotting a mouse.

Mu Dashan took two steps back, not wanting to give the meat to Mrs. Lin.

But who would've thought Mrs. Lin would directly step forward and snatch the meat from Mu Dashan's hands.

She exclaimed excitedly, "Third one, you are so thoughtful. Mom and Dad were just saying during lunch how there's not even a mouthful of meat soup in this cold winter."

Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian were also visibly excited.

The food situation at the Old Mu Family was really poor. Since Mu Xiangxiang came back, there's been hardly a drop of oil in the bowls; it's been boiled cabbage and boiled veggie hearts every day.

Even these veggies wouldn't be eaten by cats or dogs. How could men eat them?

They had long been thinking of something to spice things up, and now with meat sent right to them, it's definitely theirs.

Mrs. Lin, holding the meat, started walking out of the main room but turned back after a couple of steps.

"Hold on, third one. I noticed today at noon you invited Zhao Yun and Zhao Gouzi to eat meat, and there was a lot more than this meat here. Why bring so little meat, is it to feed the cat?"

Mrs. Lin didn't know where she got the nerve to say such things.

In an utterly expected manner.

Mu Dashan was so angry his face turned red.

Unable to snatch the meat back from Mrs. Lin, he could only glare at her fiercely.

Mrs. Lin didn't notice Mu Dashan's change in expression and continued saying, "Third one, I'm not saying you... You're a man, be led by women and children; what kind of thing is that?"

"Shuang is ignorant, likes to cause trouble, and you don't understand either? Obviously, that Yu Si Niang wants to bleed you dry to support outsiders.

That Zhao Gouzi, all alone, who knows what Yu Si Niang sees in him, those who don't know might think there's something between them..."

Mrs. Lin had a bad habit; if no one contradicted her, she'd embellish and speak more thoughtlessly, like she was now.

Her meaning was clearly to accuse Yu Si Niang and Zhao Gouzi of having an affair, hence inviting Zhao Gouzi to dinner.

"You talk nonsense!" Mu Dashan shouted.

Mrs. Lin was startled.

She repeatedly patted her chest and cursed, "Oh my, yelling so loudly, what for?"

Before Mrs. Lin could recover, Mu Dashan stepped forward, snatched the meat from Mrs. Lin's hand, and threw it heavily onto the ground.

The meat rolled several times, getting mud all over it.

Mrs. Lin squatted down, quickly picked up the meat from the ground, and cursed, "Third one, did your head get caught in the door? This is meat, not a stone, why throw it like that."

Mrs. Lin's face was full of distress; internally, she kept reassuring herself, "Lucky it's still here, lucky it's still here..."

The dirty part she could cut off with a knife.

Instead, Mu Dashan angrily said, "Second sister-in-law, you don't deserve to eat this meat. If you dare say another bad word about Yu Si Niang, I'm not done with you."

In his rage, even Mrs. Lin couldn't handle it.

She pleaded with Mu Dazhong, but he didn't dare stand up.

He turned his head aside like a turtle hiding in its shell.

Old Mrs. Mu and Mr. Mu didn't dare plead with Mrs. Lin in fear of it backfiring, leading to a beating.

Mrs. Lin started imploring Mu Dazhong, "Dazhong, as a man, advise your brother to treat me better. Why is there such a difference among family members?"

"I'm not going. You've made a mess, deal with it yourself," Mu Dazhong quickly distanced himself.

People say a dog that barks doesn't bite; it's the silent ones that are scary. His brother was one who didn't bark, who knows if he'd bite him.

Mrs. Lin instantly flew into a rage.

"Mu Dazhong, you coward! I'm being bullied, and you dare hide? How could I end up with a man like you?"

"If you don't like it, hurry up and leave. Our Old Mu Family doesn't want people like you," said Old Mrs. Mu, having seen enough of the drama.

She stepped in front of Mrs. Lin and snatched the meat from her hands.

"And you, Mrs. Lin, wish to eat meat? In your next life! Until Xiangxiang recovers, all the meat in the house is Xiangxiang's alone," said Old Mrs. Mu.

Then her attitude softened somewhat, and she said to Mu Dashan, "Third one, about Xiangxiang's engagement, let's discuss it as a family. I'm planning to make sure Xiangxiang marries into the Qin Family honorably; we must give Xiangxiang ample dowry.

Your sister is so badly injured, her voice might not recover. If the dowry isn't generous, I'm afraid she can't hold her own against the Qin Family.

Chapter 752: The Gongs Sound in the Village

Old Mrs. Mu had a very convincing reason for demanding money.

Everyone present, except for Mr. Mu, looked rather displeased.

Mu Xiangxiang was married off to the Qin Family, and the dowry she took with her would never return to the Old Mu Family, making it a loss-making deal.

Moreover, other branches have daughters as well, but different people have different fates; the old lady was willing to give to Mu Xiangxiang, but not necessarily to others.

No one is foolish enough to make a bridal dress for someone else.

"Old Third, say something, don't be like that Yu Si Niang, asking several questions but not saying a word, people might think you're mute." Old Mrs. Mu said unceremoniously.

Mu Dashan had been somewhat hesitant, but after hearing Old Mrs. Mu's rude words, it only solidified his decision.

Just like Shuangshuang said, you have to help others within your means; the third branch can't even manage dowries for their own two daughters, where would the money come from to add to Xiangxiang's dowry?

"Mom, Xiangxiang's dowry, we... our third branch may not contribute. The third branch is also living tight these days.

On December 12th, Shuangshuang and Fengzi need to get engaged, and there's no getting around organizing a banquet, plus someone has to go warm up Shuangshuang's room stove.

In the dead of winter, she sleeps on a bed that's frozen into a block of ice, without even a stove, and both Si Niang and I feel distressed. Also, after the spring, Xiao Han has to be sent to school, and all these matters will drain the third branch.

Besides, now that my brother is a scholar, he has plenty of silver, and not to mention the ten liang of silver sent by the village chief; if that were added to Xiangxiang's dowry.

Her dowry would certainly be the most generous in Er Gui Village, and even the Qin Family wouldn't complain. So... our third branch won't pay for this dowry."

After saying this, Mu Dashan fell silent.

Old Mrs. Mu was red with anger, pointing at Mu Dashan's face and hurling curses.

"Alright, Mu Dashan, you ungrateful thing, do you remember who raised you with all the crap and urine?

Do you remember who wrapped you up in quilts when it was cold in winter? It was me, it was this old woman, your life was given by this old woman, and now I ask you for a bit of money, and you refuse.

Mu Dashan, you probably drank the witch's potion from those two cheap women, you don't even know what your surname is."

Mu Dashan remained silent; those who understood him should know that his attitude meant he had made up his mind and wouldn't change it.

But Old Mrs. Mu didn't understand.

All she thought about was getting Mu Dashan to pay to make Mu Xiangxiang look better, so her words grew even harsher.

"Grandma, you don't have to keep scolding, back then, people from multiple branches pooled together to cover Uncle's exam expenses, which is why he has his current status.

It's only natural for Uncle to pay for Aunt's dowry; the third uncle's family also contributed, and no less than anyone else. Now the third uncle's family isn't benefiting, there's no reason for the third uncle's family to add to Aunt's dowry."

Mu Dalang, who had been silent, finally said something fair.

This statement was bound to anger Old Mrs. Mu.

"Dalang, don't think you'll get away just because we, the Old Mu Family, paid for your wedding, I can ask for that money back anytime." Old Mrs. Mu threatened.

"Mom, if that's the case, shouldn't we also take out the money we used to support our brother's education?"

Since it was about his own son, Mu Dazhong didn't remain silent as when Mrs. Lin was bullied.

"That's right, Mom, we had agreed that everyone would support our brother to pass, and he'd take care of us for life, and our branches, we have no income, the money earned from farming was all your doing." Mu Danian chimed in.

Mu Danian was no fool, he didn't like Mu Dalang, but now his mother was asking Dalang for the bride price, which was a big deal.

If they force Dalang to give it back today, they might not even pay his bride price in the future.

"Rebellious, rebellious, you heartless things, you're going to defy me, I'm just asking Old Third to pay for Xiangxiang's dowry, why are you all shouting?" Old Mrs. Mu said.

"Grandma, this isn't right, and everyone thinks it's something that should be said. If you want to call us unfilial, there's nothing we can do." Mu Dalang added.

Mu Dalang was determined to support his third uncle.

Regardless of what his grandmother said.

"Shut up!" Old Mrs. Mu yelled.

A battle of epic proportions was about to break out when suddenly, a loud gong sounded in the village.

The "dong dong dong" sound was exceptionally piercing.

"Oh no, something big has happened in the village." Mr. Mu stood up, looking anxious.

The sound of the gong in the village, Mr. Mu had only heard twice in his lifetime.

The first time was when a man in the village was dragged into the mountains by a tiger at the foot of Niuwei Mountain and eaten.

The other time was when Lu Yuanfeng's mother was dragged away by an animal from the mountains.

It's likely related to such incidents this time.

"Dad, shall we go out and see what's happening?" Mu Dazhong suggested.

Everyone temporarily put aside the issue of Mu Xiangxiang's dowry and wondered what on earth had happened.

The Old Mu Family, along with others in the village, all followed the sound of the gong, heading outside.

By this time, dinner had already been eaten, so it was quite late.

However, because of the heavy snow, visibility was still reasonably high, and everyone trudged through the snow, one foot deep, one foot shallow.

On the road, people were asking, "What's going on, what exactly is happening?"

"Don't know, but from the sound, it seems to be coming from Old Fu's house; no one knows what's happening!" someone who knew a bit shared with the villagers.

Everyone followed the sound towards Uncle Fu's house.

The Third Branch of the Old Mu Family, Mu Shuangshuang, and Lu Yuanfeng, upon hearing the gong, also came out to see what was happening.

As for the children, they stayed at home by the fire with Yu Si Niang, and any news would be relayed by Shuangshuang and Fengzi to Yu Si Niang.

"Fengzi, do you know what's happening?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

Having not systematically learned about village affairs, Mu Shuangshuang was also at a loss.

"Not sure, but based on past practices, it might be a wild beast."

Er Gui Village is backed by Niuwei Mountain, which is full of wild animals, but usually, except when there's heavy snowfall, those animals don't come out because there's more food in the mountains than at the foothill villages.

And in such cold weather, who would go to Niuwei Mountain except hunters?" Lu Yuanfeng was also puzzled.

All morning in the mountains, he hadn't found anything except deer tracks.

"But I heard the sound is coming from Uncle Fu's house, could it be?" Mu Shuangshuang couldn't say outright, but since the village custom was due to wild beasts.

Could it be Uncle Fu encountered a tiger or a bear or something?

Chapter 753: Climbing the Mountain Overnight (Part 1)

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng hurriedly headed towards Uncle Fu's house.

By the time they stepped on the unmelting snow to reach Old Fu's family, the house was already surrounded by people, especially with the village women leading the charge, trying to squeeze in had become as difficult as reaching the heavens.

"What's going on, Fu Wu, why is your family beating the gong?" A bold and curious man asked loudly.

"Today, I called everyone here because my future son-in-law Liu Qingshan was watching the snow at the foot of Niuwei Mountain, and ended up encountering a wild bear. In a panic, he ran up the mountain and hasn't returned yet.

With more people, there's more strength. I... I, Fu Wu, want to ask everyone to help me go up the mountain to find my future son-in-law. I, Fu Wu, would be deeply grateful."

The words from Fu Wu's mouth about the wild bear and Qingshan reached Mu Shuangshuang without missing a beat.

Isn't Uncle Fu's future son-in-law Brother Qingshan from Fu Xiaonan? Back then, Xing Beichen still had some affection for Fu Xiaonan, but unfortunately, at that time, Fu Xiaonan already had a fiancé, Liu Qingshan.

Moreover, the two families had a childhood marriage arrangement, Xing Beichen had no chance.

Mu Shuangshuang had heard countless stories about Liu Qingshan from Fu Xiaonan, and it was clear Xiao Nan truly liked Liu Qingshan. Now that something so serious has happened, Xiao Nan must be having a hard time.

"Fengzi, what should we do? I'm so worried about Xiao Nan." Mu Shuangshuang turned and said to Lu Yuanfeng.

"Shuangshuang, I'll hold back the villagers for you. Can you squeeze in with all your might?"

"Okay!"

Mu Shuangshuang was worried about Fu Xiaonan, so she put in all her effort and desperately squeezed inward with Lu Yuanfeng's help.

Finally, after stepping on quite a few people's feet, Mu Shuangshuang reached the front position and saw the situation in the yard.

In the yard, everyone from Fu Wu's family had come out, each looking anxious, but the reactions of three people were the most intense.

One was Uncle Fu, one was Fu Xiaonan whose eyes were red from crying, and another was a "man" with slightly messy hair, somewhat dazed eyes, dressed in servant's attire.

Let's assume for now that this man truly is a servant. The moment Mu Shuangshuang saw the fabric of his clothes, she felt it was unusual.

Plus, with his overly delicate side profile, fine hair, and slender fingers, Mu Shuangshuang instantly felt that this person was highly likely a woman.

Disguising as a man is actually quite easy to notice—no matter how one dresses up, the traits of a woman don't change.

Figure, voice, side profile...

Mu Shuangshuang stepped forward to Fu Xiaonan and handed over her cotton cloth handkerchief she carried with her. "Xiao Nan, quickly wipe your tears. What's happening exactly? Explain clearly to everyone. With everyone's help, it will be fine."

Listening to Mu Shuangshuang's words, Fu Xiaonan started wiping her tears. She sobbed as she spoke, "I don't know what's going on. It snowed recently, and I wasn't feeling well, so I didn't go out much."

During dinner time, Brother Qingshan said he wanted to go see the snow with his servant. I didn't pay much attention, and it was already late, so I thought he was just looking around the village. Who knew the two of them went to the foot of the mountain.

Just now the servant came back saying Brother Qingshan went into the mountain, Shuangshuang, what should we do..."

Niuwei Mountain has always been a place that the people of Er Gui Village are extremely wary of; let alone going to the foot of the mountain, even looking from afar makes everyone feel a shiver in their limbs.

Afraid that a wild beast or bear would jump out and swallow them whole.

That's why, for so long, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng left firewood and wood at the foot of Niuwei Mountain but never worried about it being stolen.

"This young master, hearing from Xiao Nan, you went to see the snow at the foot of the mountain with Liu Qingshan? Can you tell us what happened?" Mu Shuangshuang turned to ask the servant.

The servant's face turned pale, not expecting to be pointed out by Mu Shuangshuang.

She hesitated for a while before speaking, "Today the snow just stopped, and the young master... told me he wanted to see the snow scenery at the foot of the mountain, so I agreed.

Who would've thought, just after arriving at the foot of the mountain, a dark shadow came down from the mountain—it was a bear. In panic, the young master ran up the mountain while I came back to report."

The servant lowered her voice and squeezed her voice as much as possible, so her voice still somewhat mimicked a man's voice.

But Mu Shuangshuang heard it—this was indeed a woman, her inherent crispness in her voice couldn't be changed.

Moreover, what she said didn't quite align with common sense.

Usually, those at the foot of the mountain who encounter danger wouldn't think to run up the mountain, because the upward path is more strenuous than fleeing towards the village, unless they were initially in the mountain.

Having suspicion, Mu Shuangshuang couldn't help but glance a few more times at the person before her.

Judging solely from the facial features, they were merely plain, not as striking as Fu Xiaonan.

But this person's demeanor should be more like a delicate and refined character, completely different from Fu Xiaonan's lively and cute personality.

However, now is not the time to discuss this.

"Uncle Fu, we can basically confirm that Liu Qingshan is in Niuwei Mountain. What should we do next?"

As soon as Mu Shuangshuang finished speaking, Fu Xiaonan cried out, "Dad, I want to go find Brother Qingshan. I want to go find him overnight."

Fu Xiaonan was truly heartbroken, her tears were falling in large drops, turning into ice the moment they hit the snow.

Uncle Fu understood his daughter's thoughts but he wouldn't let his daughter go.

"Today's matter is a personal issue for Old Fu's family. Anyone who goes to the mountain to search for my future son-in-law will receive ten Copper Coins each, and if Liu Qingshan is found, I'll give one Silver, and if there's any danger, I'll cover the medical expenses.

If by any chance... I promise to take care of his family for a lifetime, and give them ten Silvers."

Uncle Fu was a businessman, well aware that going up the mountain so late, without incentives, no one would dare go.

With rewards, there's bound to be braver people willing to take the risk. As soon as Uncle Fu finished speaking, a few strong men from the village boldly stepped forward.

"We'll go!"

The remaining people were still hesitant. Just joining the effort earns ten Copper Coins, which is quite good, but if one dies, even with ten Silvers, there's no way to spend it!

Watching the sky grow darker, Niuwei Mountain became even more frightening.

"Is anyone else willing to go?" Uncle Fu ignored his daughter's pleading gaze and continued to ask the villagers; even now, he wanted more villagers to join.

"Dad, I want to go, I want to find Brother Qingshan..." Fu Xiaonan continued to cry.

"Xiao Nan, don't get involved in this matter. Your father will take care of Qingshan's issue." Fu Xiaonan's mother covered Fu Xiaonan's mouth.

Only five people stepped forward, far from enough to comb through the mountain. Uncle Fu also felt a bit hopeless.

At this moment, Lu Yuanfeng stood up.

He glanced around the entire scene and then looked at Mu Shuangshuang, and said: —

Chapter 754: Women Are Braver (Part 2)

"I'll go. We're all from the same village, and we should help each other out. Plus, this is a matter of life and death, and I, Lu Yuanfeng, can't just sit by and do nothing."

"Besides, I'm familiar with the situation in the mountains. With me leading everyone, there shouldn't be any danger," Lu Yuanfeng said.

"Hmph, you're a hunter and used to all kinds of animals. Of course you'd say that. But we're just honest farmers, and we don't dare go up Niuwei Mountain because we'd lose our lives if we did."

In the crowd, Ma Houhou pushed aside the people blocking his way and finally squeezed into the center of the courtyard.

Ma Houhou didn't look happy, or rather, ever since Mu Shuangshuang had stung him with bees, leaving him with a pockmarked face, Ma Houhou still hasn't gotten himself a wife.

He harbored resentment toward Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, so how could his face show anything good?

"Listen to what I, Ma Houhou, have to say. Don't go risking your life in the mountains for ten wen. Have you forgotten about that son of the Old Qian Family who was torn to shreds by a big cat a few years ago?"

It was such an injustice; he was only farming at the foot of the mountain, and in the blink of an eye, he was gone. Have you all forgotten that because of that incident, the Old Qian Family hasn't dared to approach the foot of Niuwei Mountain since?"

Ma Houhou started stirring up the villagers' emotions with examples that had long existed in the village; he just wanted to prevent the villagers from doing as Lu Yuanfeng and Fu Wu planned.

Talking about life and death and the Old Qian Family's son made those five men who wanted to go hesitate.

Those five men went, not for the so-called ten wen participation fee, nor for the lost ten taels of silver, much less for so-called righteousness, but for finding the one tael of silver on a person.

Man dies for wealth like birds die for food, but when it truly comes to life, let alone trading one life for ten taels, even for a hundred taels, everyone must think twice.

"Fu Wu, we don't want your money. You better find someone else!" the five men spoke in unison.

"Exactly, we don't want to risk our lives for your ten wen, one tael of silver, or even ten taels."

"We're not going!"

"..."

This time, no one in the village was willing to go into the mountains to find someone.

Ma Houhou looked at Lu Yuanfeng with a provocative expression, clearly with the demeanor of a small-minded person who succeeded in causing trouble.

Mu Shuangshuang couldn't hold back any longer. If this continued, no one from the village would go. She stepped forward to the center where everyone was gathered.

"Everyone, quiet down, can you give me a moment to speak?" Mu Shuangshuang said.

In an instant, the villagers' eyes were all focused on Mu Shuangshuang.

Including the Old Mu Family who had already arrived, but could only stand at the back.

"Old Mu Family's Shuang, if you have something to say, we'll listen." someone from the village said.

"Yes, we're waiting to go back to sleep, so don't waste our time." someone urged.

"Everyone, don't be impatient! Listen to Shuang. Although I'm just a child, I understand the principle that many hands make light work. Today, the wild bear forced Liu Qingshan up the mountain, and if we truly ignore it, there's no guarantee other animals won't come out and harm someone.

By then, will we continue to ignore the situation, watching as fierce animals kill and eat the villagers one by one?"

"Old Mu Family's Shuang, what you're saying, we indeed understand, but Liu Qingshan's life is precious, and isn't ours as well? If we die in the mountains, who will take care of our family? Who will take care of our children?" someone asked.

"Exactly, you're here talking, if you have the courage, why don't you go yourself?" Ma Houhou seized the opportunity when someone echoed his sentiment and directly challenged Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang curled her lips into a smile. "Since I dared to stand up, I naturally have this idea. I'll go up the mountain with Fengzi to lend Liu Qingshan a hand."

"I'll go too. I, Mu Dashan, have just recovered from illness, but I must support my daughter's and future son-in-law's matter." Mu Dashan called out from behind Mu Shuangshuang.

"And I, Mu Dalang, support my third uncle's decision!" Mu Dalang said.

Mu Dazhong and Mrs. Lin were furious, especially Mrs. Lin, who grabbed Mu Dalang's hand and tried to drag him back to the Old Mu Family. "Are you crazy? Why go, don't you know this is a matter of life and death? The third branch has gone crazy, and you're following along?"

Mu Dalang shook off Mrs. Lin's hand and said, "Mother, things aren't as you say. In these times, every situation has its dangers. We can choke on water, be suffocated by food, and even die suddenly while walking.

No one knows when they will die, so it's better to do everything well while still alive, to avoid regret."

"Brother is right. I, Fu Xiaonan, will go too!" Fu Xiaonan said.

Even the servant disguised as a woman spoke up. "I'm going too!"

As a result, quite a few people were willing to go into the mountains.

Fu Wu was both excited and scared; he opened his mouth and continued to ask, "Is there... anyone else willing to go?"

As soon as he finished speaking, someone responded.

"We're coming too!" A very familiar voice came from not far away, and upon looking, it was Zhao Yun leading some women from the village, walking towards Old Fu Family.

Each of them held torches in their hands, looking formidable.

Women taking responsibility on their own was something the villagers had never seen before. The remaining women, still watching the drama, somehow got heated up and joined in, saying, "We're going too!"

This time, it was truly beyond everyone's expectations.

Only a few men stood up—Mu Dashan, Lu Yuanfeng, Mu Dalang—but nearly all the women from the village were going.

The men felt even more uneasy.

"Damn it! If our womenfolk dare to do it, what are we, these big men, worth? At worst, we'll bring hoes and sickles to find Liu Qingshan.

If we really encounter a wild bear or tiger, we'll all join forces to kill the bear. Who knows, we might even get to drink some bear blood." One of the men shouted.

This time, the men seemed inspired and stood out one after another.

"We're going too!"

"Are you crazy? Don't you care for your lives? The mountains are terrifying, anyone who goes up will die!" Ma Houhou couldn't believe that his words didn't work despite saying so much.

"Ma Houhou, you ugly thing, if you're not going, don't stop everyone.

Our men in Er Gui Village have always been fearless, and we must not lag behind the little women.

Everyone quickly go back and get your tools. After half a stick of incense's time, we'll gather at the foot of Niuwei Mountain. Fengzi will lead, and we'll go into the mountains together!"

Zhang Yutou shouted to the villagers, and those who decided to go were already rushing back to get their tools.

Suddenly, the villagers dispersed.

Fu Xiaonan tugged on Mu Shuangshuang's sleeve and said, "Shuangshuang, thank you!"

#### Chapter 755: Concealment

"Xiao Nan, everyone is doing their part in this matter. Fengzi and I will go back first to get some tools. Make sure to wear something warm, preferably cotton shoes, not embroidered shoes!"

After giving her instructions, Mu Shuangshuang ran towards Mu Dashan and Uncle Yu, together with Lu Yuanfeng.

"Dad, Uncle Yu, lives are at stake. Instead of arguing about who should go and who shouldn't, let's just head up the mountain together," Mu Shuangshuang said quickly, cutting through the conversation.

This left Mu Dashan, who originally wanted his daughter to stay at the foot of the mountain, speechless.

"Alright, let's go get the tools first. We must stick together and not get separated!" Mu Dashan said.

Mu Dashan and Zhang Yutou walked towards the third branch.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng headed towards Lu Yuanfeng's house.

Mu Dalang watched as the people from the third branch walked off into the distance and asked Mr. Mu, "Grandpa, should we go too? So many people from the village are going."

"Go for what? Are you out of your mind, child? It's a life-threatening matter. If you don't care about your life, that's one thing, but don't drag the rest of the Old Mu Family into risking their lives with you. Dalang, explain to everyone, what's your real intention?" Mu Danian said.

Having said this, he turned to Mr. Mu and said, "Dad, others might not understand, but you know very well what happened to Old Qian's son back then. You said yourself you couldn't even eat after seeing all that blood.

Do you really want to witness such a scene again? Besides, those people from the village are rough-handed men and coarse women who barely scrape by. Even if something happens to them, it doesn't matter much.

But we're different. In the Old Mu Family, we have someone who will be a high-ranking official one day. My big brother worked hard to become a scholar to make our family esteemed.

If we all go up there and perish in the mountains, there will be nothing left to promote!"

Mu Danian's long-winded speech actually convinced Mr. Mu.

The passionate determination Mr. Mu felt was completely extinguished.

"Right, the Old Mu Family can't go. Fifth Brother, quickly go and get the third branch and Shuang back. None of our family should go up the mountain."

In Mr. Mu's heart, even though the third branch had separated, they were still descendants of the Old Mu Family.

They couldn't let their lives be wasted just like that.

"Grandpa, if you don't want to go, fine, but why stop Uncle and his family? You're scared and won't go, but I'm going with Uncle," Mu Dalang said angrily and stormed off.

Leaving the rest of the Old Mu Family in a rage, Mu Dazhong cursed Mu Dalang for being unfilial.

"That brat, who knows if he's even my blood, with a temper like that, rushing to his death!"

"Mu Dazhong, what do you mean by that? If he's not your son, whose son is he? Speak clearly!" Mrs. Lin retorted at Mu Dazhong.

Recently, with everything that's been happening, Mrs. Lin had increasingly felt her husband was unreliable.

When things arise, instead of helping, he adds insult to injury.

Now he's even saying such shameless words.

"Hmph, if he's my son, don't you know as his mother?" Mu Dazhong countered, refusing to back down.

"Alright, why are you arguing? Isn't the house chaotic enough?" Mr. Mu scolded, silencing everyone, though there were still plenty of exchanged glances and silent gestures.

"Let's hurry back home. No one should mention today's events again!"

After Mr. Mu spoke, the people of the Old Mu Family quickly returned home.

...

...

After half an incense stick of time, everyone gathered at the foot of the mountain. Led by Lu Yuanfeng, they began the climb up the mountain.

The sky grew increasingly dark. Using the reflective snow and torches, they could barely make out the path. However, there were many traps on the mountain, and after being covered with snow, it was more dangerous than ever.

So everyone dared to follow closely behind Lu Yuanfeng.

"Liu Qingshan..." someone from the village shouted!

"Brother Qingshan, it's me, Xiao Nan..." Fu Xiaonan also called out.

The mountain quickly became lively, with voices carrying far into the night, far and wide...

Gradually, as everyone walked further, they neared the dense forest.

Mu Shuangshuang glanced at Liu Qingshan's servant, who had been beside her the whole time.

Was it just Mu Shuangshuang's illusion, or had the servant been staring in the direction of the left all this while?

"Little master, do you know something?" Mu Shuangshuang asked, lowering her voice.

The servant was startled, shaking her head like a rattling drum.

"No, no, I know nothing. Let's hurry and find the young master!" the servant replied anxiously.

Mu Shuangshuang squinted her eyes; she felt this servant was hiding something.

"Little master, if you know anything, just say it. Out here in the mountain, it's not just beasts that can harm people; the cold also kills.

Moreover, when I came up, I checked around. There were no bear tracks at the foot of the mountain."

Though it was dark, Mu Shuangshuang was more observant than anyone else.

From the start, she thought Liu Qingshan didn't run up the mountain from the foot.

After coming to Niuwei Mountain, her suspicion grew stronger.

"I..."

The servant had never expected Mu Shuangshuang to be so aggressive in her questioning.

So frightened, she turned pale, and tears started to fall.

"I..."

"What is it? Why can't you just say something? Your hesitation does not waste our time, but Liu Qingshan's time. Have you thought about how he might not survive because of your silence?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Qingshan wasn't chased by a bear at the foot of the mountain; he was on top of the mountain!" the servant sobbed, finally revealing the secret held inside.

Since she hadn't kept her voice low, it was now clear that the servant's sobbing voice was indeed that of a woman.

"You... you're a woman?" Fu Xiaonan widened her eyes in disbelief, questioning the so-called servant.

"Miss Xiao Nan, I'm sorry. It wasn't my intention to deceive you, nor was it Qingshan's. I... I'm a girl. We returned this time to break off the engagement with you. Qingshan and I truly love each other. Please, let us be together!"

With those words, the servant fell to her knees in the snow.

Fu Xiaonan trembled uncontrollably, and if not for Mu Shuangshuang supporting her in time, she might have collapsed.

"Xiao Nan, this matter is only one-sided from the person before us. Let's find Liu Qingshan first, okay?" Mu Shuangshuang gently patted Fu Xiaonan's back.

Fu Xiaonan pulled herself together slightly.

Yes, Fu Xiaonan couldn't lose her composure at this moment, nor could she collapse.

"Where exactly did you and Brother Qingshan vanish? Tell me!" Fu Xiaonan demanded.

"Over there!" the servant pointed, her finger directed to the left side she'd been looking at all along.

Chapter 756: Are You Not Aware?

Mu Shuangshuang quickly walked up to Lu Yuanfeng and briefly explained the situation.

Then Lu Yuanfeng took the lead and guided everyone to search in the direction of the left.

This time, with the servant leading the way, it was much better compared to wandering aimlessly like headless chickens in the wilderness before.

Finally, everyone found the place where the servant and Liu Qingshan initially watched the snow.

"Is it here?" Mu Shuangshuang asked again, uncertain.

"Yes! It's exactly here!" The servant took a deep breath before speaking.

Mu Shuangshuang held the torch she had taken from Lu Yuanfeng and carefully searched the ground.

Indeed, there were chaotic footprints and some snow deeply sunken below, even a tree was uprooted.

Mu Shuangshuang started to admire the cleverness of the servant, despite such a severe situation, he still claimed the person was scared by a bear at the foot of the mountain, which was clearly a lie.

Could anything be more important than human life?

Mu Shuangshuang was puzzled.

"Shuangshuang, did you find anything?" Lu Yuanfeng saw Mu Shuangshuang silent and worried.

"Fengzi, he probably went ahead, for now, Liu Qingshan should be safe, the bear didn't follow him, but I can't guarantee he won't encounter other wild animals."

All of Mu Shuangshuang's answers were based on reasoning and conjecture, basically without any mistakes.

Lu Yuanfeng also trusted Mu Shuangshuang's words.

He turned to the villagers behind him and said, "Everyone, this is the place where the person went missing, when you reach here, you must search carefully, don't miss any grass, tree hole, or cave."

Once we find the person, we'll go back!"

Everyone had been searching for so long, cold, hungry, and tired, they already wanted to return, Lu Yuanfeng's words encouraged the villagers.

The group started feeling around slowly based on Lu Yuanfeng's clues.

They gradually dispersed, mostly in groups of threes or fours, Mu Shuangshuang instructed Fu Xiaonan, who was with Lu Yuanfeng, to keep an eye on the servant, not letting her leave her sight for even a step.

This left Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng to act alone.

"Shuangshuang, stay behind me later, no matter what happens, remember, run towards where there are more people," Lu Yuanfeng said cautiously to Mu Shuangshuang, holding a bow and arrow.

Mu Shuangshuang nodded obediently, she stood behind Lu Yuanfeng, but still didn't lower her guard.

Suddenly, Mu Shuangshuang noticed a slight shift in the bushes ahead, the snow that originally covered the grass was now clean.

Mu Shuangshuang nudged Lu Yuanfeng's back, signaling him to check the bushes.

Lu Yuanfeng also sensed the movement, his bow was already aimed at the bushes.

Two arrows were directly pointed at the bushes, ready to shoot anything that jumped out.

After waiting for a while, the movement stopped, Mu Shuangshuang squatted down, grabbed a handful of snow, and signaled with a look to Lu Yuanfeng.

Lu Yuanfeng nodded knowingly, and at that moment, Mu Shuangshuang threw the snowball.

A shadow suddenly jumped out from the bushes.

With a scream, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng's arrows didn't fly out.

"Liu Qingshan?" Mu Shuangshuang tentatively called out.

The shadow paused, then suddenly burst into tears.

"You guys came to rescue me, you came to rescue me..."

As soon as he finished speaking, he fainted and collapsed in the snow.

"Fengzi, let's carry him back!" Mu Shuangshuang pointed at Liu Qingshan.

As soon as Lu Yuanfeng touched Liu Qingshan's body, it felt like touching a block of ice, bone-chillingly cold.

It's no wonder, hiding in the mountains for half the night, it's lucky he's not dead.

Lu Yuanfeng carried Liu Qingshan and started to head back towards the original path.

"Fengzi, are you tired?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"No worries, let's hurry and find the villagers, I'm afraid if we're late, they'll wander farther away!" No sooner had Lu Yuanfeng finished speaking than a woman's scream was heard not far off.

"Damn, something's happened over there," Lu Yuanfeng said.

"Fengzi, you take Liu Qingshan to a safe place, I'll go check it out." Mu Shuangshuang had just intended to head towards the villagers when Lu Yuanfeng grabbed her wrist.

"Shuangshuang, I'll go, you keep an eye on Liu Qingshan, if danger arises, just run, leave Liu Qingshan to me!"

Lu Yuanfeng quickly tossed Liu Qingshan to the ground, as if he were carrying not a person but a piece of cargo.

Mu Shuangshuang watched in amazement, not knowing what to say.

While Lu Yuanfeng swiftly ran towards the direction of the scream and quickly disappeared.

This place is not yet dense forest; Mu Shuangshuang has been here many times and is fairly familiar with it. Besides, she has a bow in her hand, so she's not afraid.

Dragging Liu Qingshan over to lean against a nearby tree trunk, Mu Shuangshuang started looking for dry wood.

There was a lot of wood in the forest; Mu Shuangshuang piled dry branches together after clearing away the snow. The middle was hollowed out as she walked to Liu Qingshan's side and directly tore a large piece from the hem of his clothes to light a fire.

While tearing, Liu Qingshan suddenly woke up.

"Who... who are you?" Liu Qingshan asked.

"Never mind who I am, but you, you've caused quite a bit of trouble for Er Gui Village, coming to Niuwei Mountain to watch the snow in the middle of the night, did your head get pinched by a door?" Mu Shuangshuang spat.

It's no wonder her attitude towards Liu Qingshan is unfavorable; this man might be two-timing.

"Why are you scolding me like this, girl?" Liu Qingshan asked, displeased.

"I not only scold you, I'll beat you up." Mu Shuangshuang raised her fist and approached Liu Qingshan.

"You... you rustic woman, ignorant and vile, I won't argue with you!" Liu Qingshan huffed.

Mu Shuangshuang rolled her eyes at Liu Qingshan. "Even a rustic woman is better than you, two-timing. Do you have any regard for Xiao Nan or what is this thing with the servant?"

Mu Shuangshuang spoke confrontingly; Liu Qingshan's eyes darkened but immediately refuted, "What relationship, I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Liu Qingshan, as a man, just tell the truth, you're wasting Xiao Nan's youth. She's a young lady, you may be shameless, but she still has pride."

"Who the hell are you? Why are you accusing me baselessly? Don't think that just because you're a woman, I'll endure your slander; I, Liu Qingshan, have no such perversions!"

Liu Qingshan had studied for a few years, and his words were somewhat scholarly.

It was precisely because of this that Fu Xiaonan was especially gentle to Liu Qingshan.

She always talked about how wonderful Liu Qingshan was.

But Mu Shuangshuang didn't think so, with merely a few words, Liu Qingshan's character was exposed completely.

This man was no good.

"Who said you were into men? Did I say your servant was a man? Liu Qingshan, just what is your relationship with your servant, don't you have a clue?"

Chapter 757: Just a Village Woman

"You... you..." Liu Qingshan's face turned red with anger from Mu Shuangshuang's words.

His words became increasingly incoherent, and the look in his eyes as he gazed at Mu Shuangshuang grew even more hateful.

"It's just the two of us here, Liu Qingshan, so don't pretend to be infatuated. Whether it's true or not is just a matter of saying yes or no." Mu Shuangshuang said.

Inside Liu Qingshan, fear, anger, and resentment were interwoven.

He didn't know Mu Shuangshuang's identity.

Because he rarely returned to Er Gui Village, perhaps only once or twice a year.

Each time, he was only focused on talking to Fu Xiaonan, completely disregarding others in the village.

But the person in front of him was definitely a friend of Fu Xiaonan, Liu Qingshan guessed.

"Hmph, are you a friend of Xiao Nan? I really doubt Xiao Nan's taste. How could she have a village woman friend like you, rude and aggressive. Well, someone like you is only fit to be a village woman!" Liu Qingshan sarcastically glanced at Mu Shuangshuang.

I don't know where Liu Qingshan got the confidence that he must be better than Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang found it amusing.

"Village women are better than you with your outward respectability and dirty heart! You're eyeing Xiao Nan's family's little property and reluctant to let go, aren't you?" Mu Shuangshuang rudely speculated.

"Don't talk nonsense, the Liu Family has plenty of money, I just... I genuinely like Xiao Nan, I've liked her since childhood, no matter what you say, I won't let go." Liu Qingshan said firmly.

Only in Mu Shuangshuang's view, this firmness was no different than being a rascal.

For a man like Liu Qingshan, Mu Shuangshuang admired his shamelessness.

"Eating from the bowl, eyeing the pot, Liu Qingshan, you're certainly not a good person!" Mu Shuangshuang said.

In terms of verbal sparring, Mu Shuangshuang claimed to be second, and no one dared claim to be first.

Liu Qingshan didn't want to get tangled in this matter, so he simply turned his head away, not looking at Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang lit a fire with the cloth pulled from Liu Qingshan, and the pile by the fire gradually grew warm.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't know what was happening with Lu Yuanfeng, but at this moment, all she could do was wait for Lu Yuanfeng to return.

Leaning against the tree trunk, Liu Qingshan felt the warmth of the fire pile, opened his eyes, and saw Mu Shuangshuang roasting the fire; he just wanted to approach but was called away by Mu Shuangshuang.

"You better not come over. Fengzi and I went up the mountain to find you, but we just didn't want Xiao Nan to be sad. Now that I know you're a scumbag, your life or death has nothing to do with me!" Mu Shuangshuang said unceremoniously.

After speaking, Mu Shuangshuang picked up a twig and placed it between herself and Liu Qingshan, hinting that if Liu Qingshan dared to approach, she wouldn't be polite.

Liu Qingshan tried to come over several times but was hit by Mu Shuangshuang's twig several times, his hands turning red.

He held his hands and glared at Mu Shuangshuang viciously.

Half an hour later, Mu Shuangshuang became a bit sleepy, but the gradually approaching footsteps instantly aroused her alertness.

"Shuangshuang, Shuangshuang..." Lu Yuanfeng called softly.

He followed the torchlight, and as he approached, he grasped Mu Shuangshuang's hand.

But he immediately let go.

Mu Shuangshuang's hand was warm, but Lu Yuanfeng's was frozen like ice.

"Are you stupid, why are you pulling your hand back?" Mu Shuangshuang grabbed Lu Yuanfeng's hand and brought it to the fire pile.

Next to the fire pile, a heap of snow melted and was already very moist, but because Mu Shuangshuang used rocks to separate the snow when lighting the fire, the fire hadn't gone out yet.

"Brother Qingshan..." Fu Xiaonan, who came along after Lu Yuanfeng, walked up to Liu Qingshan.

At this moment, Liu Qingshan's upper teeth were chattering against his lower teeth, and his entire mind was somewhat unclear.

But he still remembered to complain to Mu Shuangshuang.

"Xiao Nan, she... she..."

Mu Shuangshuang swiftly declared, "Xiao Nan, I have already told Liu Qingshan that we are friends, but he doesn't believe it and insists that I'm a man-eating demon. He doesn't even dare to come close when I make a fire."

Mu Shuangshuang said with such sincerity that even Lu Yuanfeng next to her believed it.

Lu Yuanfeng frowned at Liu Qingshan, clearly showing his displeasure.

"You... you... liar..." Liu Qingshan couldn't finish his sentence before he fainted directly.

Fu Xiaonan panicked, and the accompanying servant panicked as well.

"Everyone calm down, Liu Qingshan is just fainted from the cold, take him down the mountain, and he'll be fine." Mu Shuangshuang said.

"What are we waiting for then, let's hurry up and go!" The servant urged Mu Shuangshuang.

"Are you going to carry him down?" Mu Shuangshuang sneered.

"Such a heavy man, it's not like a mountain pheasant or hare that you can just carry down; we've been exhausted all night and can't rest a bit?"

Mu Shuangshuang's hostility was released in her words.

The servant knew seeking Mu Shuangshuang was useless, so he turned to plead with Lu Yuanfeng.

"Brother, please, save Qingshan. He is a good person, has never done anything cruel or harmful, just save him, I'll pay you, I'll give you as much money as you want!" the servant pleaded.

Lu Yuanfeng remained unmoved; he wasn't blind to the fact that this time, it was Shuangshuang who didn't want to save Liu Qingshan.

Seeing Lu Yuanfeng not speaking, the servant turned to plead with Fu Xiaonan.

"Miss Xiao Nan, please, save Qingshan. After we go down the mountain, I'll tell you the matter between me and Qingshan, please..."

The servant pleaded with Fu Xiaonan.

This step was the right one; Fu Xiaonan had suspicions, but those words ultimately did not come directly from Liu Qingshan's mouth.

Therefore, she would not give up.

Unless Liu Qingshan personally tells her that he indeed has issues with this servant.

"Shuangshuang, Fengzi, won't you do it for me? Just consider it as me, Fu Xiaonan, asking you both. Later, I will tell my dad that you saved Brother Qingshan, and those two taels of silver are yours."

Fu Wu originally said, whoever saves Zhao Qingshan will be rewarded with one tael of silver each, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng being two people naturally meant two taels of silver.

But those words somewhat hurt Mu Shuangshuang's feelings.

"Since you think we came up for the money, then Fengzi, let's take the person down and collect the silver, then leave quickly!"

Lu Yuanfeng squatted down, helped Liu Qingshan onto his back, and carried him down the mountain.

Fu Xiaonan knew Mu Shuangshuang misunderstood her intentions and explained to Mu Shuangshuang, "Shuangshuang, I didn't mean it that way. I just want you to save Brother Qingshan, besides, what my dad said must be fulfilled."

"Shuangshuang..."

Mu Shuangshuang didn't speak because she was close to being infuriated by Fu Xiaonan.

With her mind, she'd probably be completely misled by Liu Qingshan this scumbag.

"Shuangshuang..." Along the way, Fu Xiaonan kept calling Mu Shuangshuang's name.

Mu Shuangshuang did not respond.

At this moment, the villagers had already withdrawn following Lu Yuanfeng down the mountain, and when they descended, the villagers had gone to Fu Wu's house to collect their money.

The ten coins for going up the mountain, additional compensation for medical expenses for those injured, luckily, no one lost their life on this trip.

Chapter 758: Two Silver Coins

By the time Mu Shuangshuang and a few others reached Uncle Fu's house, it was already past midnight.

Most of the villagers had gone back to sleep, leaving Uncle Fu's family waiting for Fu Xiaonan and the others to return.

As Lu Yuanfeng carried Liu Qingshan into the Old Fu Family's door, Uncle Fu rushed up to help Lu Yuanfeng move him inside.

In Liu Qingshan's room, the bed had been heated well in advance, making it just the right temperature when he lay down.

After handling Liu Qingshan's matter, everyone gathered in the Old Fu Family's parlor room.

In the parlor, Fu Xiaonan's mother had prepared a pot of ginger tea, which the villagers would each have a bowl of when they came to collect their money.

Mu Shuangshuang and the others had it too.

"Fengzi, Shuangshuang, thank you really for today. I heard from the villagers that it was you two who rescued my son-in-law Qingshan.

Haha, you two are great, don't worry, I, Fu Wu, will not treat you poorly." Uncle Fu said with a hearty laugh, looking at Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng with growing fondness.

Uncle Fu, caught up in constantly praising Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, overlooked the fact that the atmosphere among the group wasn't very good. Fu Xiaonan looked pleadingly at Mu Shuangshuang, while Liu Qingshan's servant kept staring at his own toes.

As for Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, although they appeared quite normal, those who knew them understood it was a sign they were troubled.

"Okay, okay, let the children have their ginger tea and warm themselves by the fire to ward off the cold!" Fu Xiaonan's mother said.

She handed each person a bowl of ginger tea and moved the two large basins of fire in the room closer to them.

The flames in the basins burned brightly, dispelling much of the chill upon approach.

Mu Shuangshuang held her bowl of tea, taking a large gulp of ginger tea, which brought more warmth back to her.

"Fengzi, Shuangshuang, here is your reward. If you feel unwell after going back, you must tell Uncle Fu. Uncle Fu is responsible for your health." Uncle Fu pulled out two ounces of silver from his pocket.

Handing it to Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng.

Mu Shuangshuang said nothing and took her share.

"Uncle Fu, it's getting late, Fengzi and I will head back first." Mu Shuangshuang said.

"Shuangshuang..." Fu Xiaonan called after Mu Shuangshuang.

"What's up?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Shuangshuang, I'm sorry, I misspoke earlier. I shouldn't have said you went looking for Brother Qingshan for the money. I apologize, please don't ignore me." Fu Xiaonan said and began to cry.

Her tears fell into the bowl of ginger tea, drip by drip.

Throughout the evening, Fu Xiaonan had joined in the search, no matter how tough, cold, or tiring it was, she hadn't complained once, even though she found out the servant was a woman, she hadn't cried.

The only time she couldn't hold her emotions was when Mu Shuangshuang hardly paid her any attention.

Mu Shuangshuang stepped forward and handed her handkerchief to Fu Xiaonan: "Why are you crying? You're a grown woman. Aren't you embarrassed? I'm not angry; if I were, I'd certainly pull you aside for a good scolding."

Mu Shuangshuang was generally considered straightforward, but due to her previous profession, she had learned to be reserved, thus her personality was often a contradictory mix.

Caring to friends, ruthless to enemies.

Liu Qingshan had become her enemy, so naturally, she had no favorable attitude toward him.

"Really?" Fu Xiaonan wiped her tears, asking Mu Shuangshuang.

"Of course, it's so late, Fengzi and I really need to go back and sleep. If there's anything, come to my place tomorrow, okay?" Mu Shuangshuang said.

"Okay! I'll come to find you tomorrow!" Fu Xiaonan said and looked eagerly at Mu Shuangshuang: "Shuangshuang, is there anything else you want to tell me?"

Fu Xiaonan wanted to ask about Liu Qingshan.

Though she already had the answer in her heart, because she was afraid, she still wanted to avoid it.

"Nothing else, take care of yourself!" Mu Shuangshuang said.

Fu Xiaonan watched as Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng left the Fu family's yard and headed straight to the Third Branch of the Mu Family, finally feeling reassured.

Fu Xiaonan didn't dare tell her parents about Liu Qingshan, but she desperately wanted answers, so she secretly called the servant to her room.

She said, "Now you... can tell me about your relationship with Brother Qingshan, right?" Fu Xiaonan felt really uneasy at that moment.

She had never felt she failed as a person like this before.

Her childhood sweetheart fiancé came home twice a year, and once he brought along a woman disguised as a servant.

"Miss Xiao Nan, the young master is Yueying's benefactor. Back when I and my parents went to the county seeking relatives, my parents fell seriously ill, and the young master saved their lives by giving a large sum of money, allowing them to survive.

But Yueying is incapable and can't earn money to repay the young master, so I can only serve as a maid to repay the young master's kindness with my life." Shen Yueying said, crying as she spoke.

Her tears seemed to become her weapon, leaving Fu Xiaonan unable to scold or criticize her.

"If I give you money, will you return it to Brother Qingshan and then leave him, is that possible?" Fu Xiaonan asked.

"No way... Miss Xiao Nan, I... I swore that if I don't stay by the young master's side for life, let me be struck by lightning and die miserably,"

Shen Yueying looked genuinely fragile, yet her words were blood-stained with resolve, each one causing Fu Xiaonan to feel more pained.

"Then how do you plan to live? Spend a lifetime as Brother Qingshan's maid?" Fu Xiaonan asked.

"The young master said Yueying won't threaten Miss Xiao Nan's status. Even if someday Yueying has the young master's child, Yueying would only be a concubine, never a wife.

If Miss Xiao Nan truly dislikes Yueying, just let Yueying work as a cook stoking the fires, preparing meals for the young master, and that would be enough."

Liu Qingshan's family was quite reputable in the county.

They could afford to hire servants.

Servants were ranked; apart from the master of the house came the steward, followed by the maids near the master. The maid responsible for stoking fires was paid the least, and the kitchen wife could freely command the fire maid.

Shen Yueying indeed lowered her stance to the lowest point.

From the start, she expressed she wouldn't compete with Fu Xiaonan.

But what Fu Xiaonan pursued was not the position of the Liu family's young madam.

That position wasn't even preferable to Fengzi marrying Shuangshuang alone.

"What you said I won't agree to; if Brother Qingshan marries me, he can't have anyone else.

As for you, there are numerous ways to repay him; street cleaning jobs can earn money, anything can if you earn silver and repay him,"

Fu Xiaonan's words were brutally straightforward.

She wanted to personally extinguish Shen Yueying's hopes.

Shen Yueying's body trembled uncontrollably, she cried as she walked out, and right at the moment she shut the door, she heard Fu Xiaonan's voice from inside.

"You used to be a servant and could stay in Brother Qingshan's room, but not anymore. Find yourself a room where you can live!"

Chapter 759: Big Misunderstanding (Part 1)

Lu Yuanfeng escorted Mu Shuangshuang back to the third branch.

The north wind howled, and the cold wind felt like an ice blade, painfully striking the face.

With the night temperature low and such a large movement of people in the village, the snow on the ground, stepped on by so many, had turned into ice.

Every step felt like walking on an iceberg, cold and hard.

Mu Shuangshuang shivered, just about to cover her face, when Lu Yuanfeng suddenly placed his hand on her shoulder, trying his best to protect Shuangshuang, afraid she might freeze.

"Still cold?" Lu Yuanfeng asked.

Lu Yuanfeng's voice, in the cold night, carried a warmth that penetrated Mu Shuangshuang's heart, which was infiltrated by the cold.

She shook her head, softly saying, "Not cold!"

Mu Shuangshuang's back leaned against Lu Yuanfeng's chest, she could even hear the thumping of his heartbeat.

Along the way, neither of them spoke, both cherishing this brief moment together.

Outside the courtyard of the third branch, Mu Shuangshuang noticed a light in the kitchen, but no one was there. It was probably left by Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan to warm Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng up.

"Fengzi, come with me to the kitchen to warm up, let's chat for a bit, okay?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

Lu Yuanfeng's hand gently brushed through Mu Shuangshuang's long hair, and his heart beat even faster. Like a fool, he nodded forcefully.

"Okay!"

Inside the kitchen, the warmth dispelled much of the cold. Mu Shuangshuang added two more sticks of firewood to the brazier as the two sat opposite each other, looking at one another.

Their faces slightly reddened.

In Mu Shuangshuang's view, her relationship with Lu Yuanfeng was more inclined towards being naive and pure.

The boy in front of her was just a young lad, fearless of heaven and earth, but every time, he blushed due to matters of emotions.

"Stop staring at me, let's chat for a bit, once we are warm, I'll make a little snack, and we'll eat together."

After being busy all night, saying she wasn't hungry would be a lie.

But once cooking, she would definitely need to use cold water, and in such cold weather, Lu Yuanfeng couldn't bear to let her.

"Shuangshuang, how about I do it? You teach me, and I'll follow your instructions, okay?" Lu Yuanfeng asked.

"I won't touch cold water, I'll just make some egg fried rice." Mu Shuangshuang understood Lu Yuanfeng's intention.

Only then did Lu Yuanfeng feel at ease.

"By the way, Fengzi, what happened during that half hour you were gone? What kind of animal did you see, a bear or a sika deer?"

Mu Shuangshuang wanted to know who the woman was that screamed up in the mountains earlier, and how the matter was resolved.

Similarly, Lu Yuanfeng also had questions for Mu Shuangshuang.

"Actually, it wasn't anything dangerous, just a woman who saw a half-person tall tree, and she didn't have a torch with her.

In the dark, she mistook it for a bear, yelled, and some villagers got scared and ran. One fell into a pit, and I spent some effort getting him out, but now it's all okay." Lu Yuanfeng answered.

With that, the situation became clearer.

It was just a false alarm, scaring themselves.

"There wasn't much on my side either. After you left, I started a fire using Liu Qingshan's clothes, and then Liu Qingshan woke up.

I wanted him to tell the truth, but he refused to admit the servant was a woman, claiming I falsely accused him of being one with a penchant for men, and saying he liked Xiao Nan, anyway, I felt he was no good..."

Mu Shuangshuang honestly recounted the events that happened after Lu Yuanfeng left, including how she used a branch to hit Liu Qingshan.

Lu Yuanfeng understood Shuangshuang well, knowing that she spared some grace in doing so, and he didn't think Shuangshuang did anything wrong.

A man behaving dishonorably, bringing a woman disguised as a man to his future bride's side, was utterly shameless.

The only thing Lu Yuanfeng couldn't understand was why Shuangshuang didn't advise Fu Xiaonan knowing Liu Qingshan was no good.

In front of Mu Shuangshuang, Lu Yuanfeng was always easy to understand.

So Mu Shuangshuang quickly guessed Lu Yuanfeng's thoughts.

She went up the mountain to find someone for Fu Xiaonan, Liu Qingshan's fate was none of her concern.

Now that Liu Qingshan's true colors were revealed, she had no reason to show mercy.

"Fengzi, I know you're wondering why I didn't warn Xiao Nan. Mainly, it's a personal matter for Xiao Nan, it's not for others to interfere.

What you think is for her own good, she may not think so. Besides, she already knows the servant is a woman and her relations with Liu Qingshan are unclear, so the rest is up to her to decide.

No matter how much I say, it cannot surpass Xiao Nan's own willingness to accept. Overall, let's just let it be, we saved people, and achieved what we wanted, without losing out."

Mu Shuangshuang continued, "Fengzi, everyone has their fate, Xiao Nan will come to me for help when she needs it."

Lu Yuanfeng paused for a moment, a faint smile appearing at the corner of his mouth.

"I understand, oh, by the way, this is one tael of silver that Uncle Fu just gave, you take it!"

Lu Yuanfeng placed the money into Mu Shuangshuang's palm.

"I don't want it, it's rightfully yours. Besides, you already have a lot of silver with me, I'm running out of places to store them." Mu Shuangshuang shook her head.

"Just consider it... consider it saving up for our wedding gift, storing bit by bit with you, and once you think it's enough for us to get married, we'll marry."

When mentioning marriage, Lu Yuanfeng's face turned red again.

"Fengzi, maybe tonight, you shouldn't go back." Mu Shuangshuang said.

As soon as she said that, Lu Yuanfeng's mouth gaped open, his face turning even redder than before.

"Shuangshuang, we... we aren't married yet, we shouldn't sleep in the same room." Lu Yuanfeng swallowed hard before speaking the words.

Mu Shuangshuang was stunned, only coming back to her senses after a while.

"What are you saying, I meant you should go find my cousin, it's not safe to travel so late."

"I..." Lu Yuanfeng felt even his breathing was a bit labored.

"You silly boy, what on earth are you thinking all the time? Get rid of all those unhealthy thoughts." Mu Shuangshuang also looked unnatural.

She stood up, beginning to prepare the midnight snack.

Speaking of egg fried rice, it actually used several ingredients.

Eggs, mushrooms, and two slices of greens.

In the stove, as soon as the fire was lit, Mu Shuangshuang started frying the rice, and after the time of half an incense stick, a bowl of hot, fragrant egg fried rice was ready.

Because of what was said before, Lu Yuanfeng buried his head in the rice, not even daring to look up at Mu Shuangshuang.

Soon, he had finished a bowl of rice, while Mu Shuangshuang just started eating.

Chapter 760: Arranging People to Go

"Why are you eating so fast, are you full?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

Lu Yuanfeng nodded, then shook his head.

"What does that mean, are you full or not?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"I'm full, but I ate too fast and didn't feel it!" Lu Yuanfeng said.

"Pfft..." At this, Mu Shuangshuang clutched her belly and almost laughed till she cried.

"Fengzi, you're something else." Mu Shuangshuang said, half amused and half exasperated, as she gave half of her untouched meal to Lu Yuanfeng.

"This time, eat slowly!"

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The next day

Mu Shuangshuang got up early to busy herself in the kitchen preparing breakfast, with Lu Yuanfeng helping out.

The Old Mu Family also woke up.

In three days, it would be the big day of Mu Xiangxiang's engagement. The Qin Family would send people over then to formalize the engagement. The matchmaker was already arranged, and the rest was just about preparing the house.

The Old Mu Family needed to take advantage of the free time now to clean the house thoroughly, clean the doors and windows, and everything needed tidying.

Then there were some old furniture that needed repairs, and if they couldn't be repaired, they'd be replaced with new ones.

Old Mrs. Mu and Mr. Mu were beside directing everyone, but chatting amongst themselves about what would happen in three days.

"Xiangxiang's mother, Xiangxiang's health has just gotten a bit better, and her voice hasn't recovered. Are we really letting Xiangxiang make an appearance that day?" Mr. Mu asked worriedly.

"Xiangxiang making an appearance is just going through the motions. Besides, it's just the engagement, not the wedding yet."

For villagers, engagements were actually simple, just invite familiar people for a meal and have the matchmaker witness it.

Then at the engagement, present some betrothal gifts.

In Mr. Mu's eyes, the Qin Family was a big family in town, and they would certainly put on a show.

The Old Mu Family had to show their own attitude, so they wouldn't be overshadowed by the Qin Family.

"Oh, by the way, did you send someone to call the eldest?" Mr. Mu asked.

"Called, called, the eldest sent word that he'd definitely come back for Xiangxiang's engagement, and I also notified that wicked wife of his.

"If the eldest sister-in-law doesn't show up for the engagement, wouldn't people gossip?" Old Mrs. Mu said angrily, almost escalating the matter.

Mr. Mu quickly changed the subject.

"The third branch hasn't given an opinion last time, not sure if they're willing to help us cook. And the fourth branch seems to be waiting for us to split the family."

Thinking about these matters, Mr. Mu felt all sorts of headaches.

"Humph, no other branches have this many issues, just the third branch. It's just having a girl cook for Xiangxiang.

"Didn't she cook for Old Yu's, Yu Si Niang's brother back then? A mother's brother is a person, but a niece isn't?"

Old Mrs. Mu said, a bit unhappy.

"In my opinion, we must let Shuang come over, her cooking is delicious. When the Qin Family comes, it will give us face.

"As for the fourth branch, I think they're itching for it. Talk about splitting the family—they eat my food, live in my house, use my things—how does that count? Already raised one ingrate, if another comes out, I'll drown him in a urine bucket for sure."

Mr. Mu remained silent, which indirectly meant he agreed with Mrs. Mu's words.

"Mother, whatever you and father think, I have no objection. But with so much work, what do we do? Go call third brother and third sister-in-law here to help work!" Mu Danian urged.

As soon as Mrs. Mu heard this, she was about to head to the third branch but was stopped by Mr. Mu.

"Alright, let's not ask the third branch to do this. We have so many people here, can't we handle cleaning our own house?"

"Fine, let's not go to the third branch for this. Fifth, don't you be a lazy donkey on the grindstone, you're always good at causing trouble, not a good egg." Mrs. Mu said.

"Mother..."

Mu Danian turned away in anger, found a spot, and continued to work.

In the kitchen, Mrs. Lin and Mu Qingqing were speaking in hushed tones.

"Qingqing, soon Young Master Qin will be engaged to Xiangxiang, have you thought of a way to kick Xiangxiang out?"

Mrs. Lin was indignant, her eyes slightly bulging, her aura filled with resentment, like a resentful woman.

"What kind of way, just give what my aunt wants to her, it's not anything good!" Mu Qingqing said dismissively.

"You're the one who's foolish, your aunt is now a mute, how can she find such a good family?" Mrs. Lin scolded Mu Qingqing.

"Mother, you're the one who's foolish. You're not even sending people to inquire about what kind of family the Qin Family is, having already lost a few wives. Plus, I heard that the Qin Family is actually not doing well.

They're hoping to change their luck by marrying my aunt, but my aunt, with her kind of luck, you know, right? I bet if she marries over, not only will she fail to improve the Qin Family's luck, she might even impoverish them.

With this kind of family status, I'm really not interested!" Mu Qingqing said with disdain.

"I was wondering how could you not quarrel with your aunt, turns out you know the true situation. You say the Qin Family is unreliable, who can our family rely on to rise up?"

Mrs. Lin began to worry again, her husband and brother-in-law's business was still stalled.

And Mu Dade had no news whatsoever, saying he'd become an official, but no sign of anything.

"No need to worry about that, I naturally have a way!" Mu Qingqing said.

Lately, Mu Qingqing had been trying to find ways to ingratiate herself with that woman surnamed Liu, as she was a wealthy person in town who could help her.

If she became the woman's adopted daughter, her status would certainly rise.

Even if her uncle wasn't there, her life wouldn't be too bad.

"What way, tell me?" Mrs. Lin leaned in, looking at Mu Qingqing with a flattering expression.

At some point, Mrs. Lin suddenly felt her once underestimated daughter had grown, even she couldn't quite figure her out.

Originally, in Mrs. Lin's eyes, the daughter was money-losing, meant to be sold when she reached age to save up money for the two sons' future marriages.

But now it seemed they had to keep this daughter for a while longer.

"You'll find out soon enough. Just make sure the marriage is arranged so that my aunt is entangled with the Qin Family people for life." Mu Qingqing said.

"Don't worry, leave that to me. Your little mind is just like mine, no surprise you're my birth daughter." Mrs. Lin said with a chuckle.

The enmity between Mu Xiangxiang and Mu Qingqing started during the village's weaver selection last time, Mu Qingqing never got a chance to get back. Now, Mu Xiangxiang was mute, and Old Mrs. Mu was greedy, just the right time to settle that score.

Mrs. Lin left the kitchen, headed straight to Old Mrs. Mu, praised the Qin Family, and told Old Mrs. Mu to prepare a generous dowry for Mu Xiangxiang, so she could marry into the Qin Family with grandeur.