

Folly 771

Chapter 771: Praised to the Skies

Speaking of the incident at the restaurant last time, Old Mrs. Mu was furious.

Taking that into account, the Old Mu Family practically didn't gain any benefit from the Qin Family.

Aunt Qin was even angrier; a solid sixty taels of silver were given to Nanny Li to pass on to the Old Mu Family.

There were also various good clothes for Mu Xiangxiang, adding up to around eighty or one hundred taels. Now, in the old lady's words, there were only five taels left.

Isn't this skinning and bleeding overly severe?

"Hmph, a village woman is indeed a village woman. Take the money and refuse to acknowledge it. Anyway, I have Nanny Li as a witness; I'm not afraid to take this to the government!"

Aunt Qin couldn't go without mentioning the government for three sentences, because she knows that the Old Mu Family has an eldest son who became a scholar.

Mu Dade's position hasn't stabilized yet; he fears the occurrence of scandals the most.

"You two ugly women, shut up! When is your Qin Family going to repay the gambling debts you owe us?" a burly man shouted, silencing both Old Mrs. Mu and Aunt Qin who had been arguing.

"Our Qin Family... You should know our situation. Now the Qin Family has no money, so they certainly have to rely on the Old Mu Family for it." Aunt Qin plucked up the courage and whispered to the burly man.

The man seemingly agreed with this reasoning and turned to the people of the Old Mu Family.

"Your Old Mu Family's daughter must marry into the Qin Family. You decide; is it now you take out the money, or wait till I bring my men and rush in to snatch?"

A thousand taels of silver, let alone the Old Mu Family not having it, even if they did, tearing down the house wouldn't make them produce it.

"Sir, forcing our Old Mu Family is useless. We truly don't have a thousand taels, even if you kill us, we still wouldn't have it."

"No money? Then compensate with flesh! Drag all your women to the brothel to sell, gather as much as you can.

And your Qin Family still has a main residence, sell it, earning a few hundred taels is not a problem, all must be gathered to pay!"

The man shouted again.

In the courtyard, everyone was startled with wide eyes.

To repay with flesh, women sold to the brothel???

These vicious words scared the people of the Old Mu Family so much they didn't dare to breathe.

"Where did you bandits, ruffians come from? Why do you want to sell the people of my Old Mu Family?"

A rough male voice sounded, Mu Dade stepped forward steadily toward the Old Mu Family.

"Oh, brother, you came just in time. This man insists that Qin Shijie owes them a thousand taels of silver in the gambling den, and wants our Old Mu Family to pay. A thousand taels, this is not a small amount." Mrs. Lin quickly told Mu Dade.

Mu Dade frowned; his expression immediately became a bit ugly.

The burly man glanced at Mu Dade, seeing him dressed in silk and exuding scholarly air, completely different from the mountain men, he couldn't help but be more polite to Mu Dade.

"Are you speaking up for them? Who are you?" the man asked.

"I'm the eldest son of the Old Mu Family, just passed the scholar exams this year. But just a few days ago I was at the County Magistrate Mansion and came back yesterday.

Soon, I will be the registrar of this county, managing all the documents of the county!"

Mu Dade didn't hold back, revealing his background.

The burly man was taken aback.

Since ancient times, the common folk do not fight with officials, and now the Old Mu Family has someone who is becoming an official; can this piece of meat still be swallowed?

While the man hesitated, Mu Dade's gaze landed on Aunt Qin.

In front of Aunt Qin, Mu Dade picked up the so-called contract, tore it into two halves, and threw the shreds into the air.

"Such a harmful contract shall not count!"

Mu Dade's words were truly exceedingly domineering, Aunt Qin didn't dare to breathe at all, originally relying on the Old Mu Family to be scapegoats, allowing her some respite.

Now it seems, she's hit a hard wall.

"This..." The burly man just wanted to speak.

Mu Dade took the lead, "Now that this contract is gone, my sister is not a member of the Qin Family, what are you still doing here?"

Mu Dade's imposing manner was undeniable, especially after becoming a scholar, he became more overbearing.

Several thugs in front of him didn't dare to resist at all.

But the man didn't want to lose face, so he grabbed Aunt Qin's collar and ferociously said, "You sell your Qin Family's house in the next two days, not a penny less in repayment, or I won't just break Qin Shijie's legs.

I'll take his life!"

A group of ferocious men, having threatened Aunt Qin, left the Old Mu Family's house.

The people of Old Mu Family felt as if they had experienced a major event, sweat pouring nonstop.

Mr. Mu steadied himself, then excitedly approached Mu Dade.

"Dade, my good son, today we are so fortunate. Without you, our Old Mu Family's house would've been torn down by that bunch."

"Now you've saved our house, our lives, and your sister Xiangxiang's life. She won't be threatened by the Qin Family anymore." Mr. Mu said.

Several others who liked to flatter quickly chimed in.

Mrs. Lin said, "Brother, I've long heard that officials are not simple, seeing that dead fatso's arrogance melt into fear when you arrived."

Mu Dazhong said, "Brother, don't forget us, your brothers. We all contributed to your success back then, one mustn't forget their roots!"

But Mu Danian remained quiet, not saying a word.

However, inside he was excited. He knew Mu Dade's secret, knew how he passed the scholar exams, and knew his elder brother wasn't easy to deal with. However, even if his brother turned and refused to acknowledge him, he couldn't abandon him.

"Now you all know to flatter me? How did you speak about your elder brother back then?" Old Mrs. Mu slapped several away.

But Mu Dazhong still shamelessly laughed, "Mother, what's past is past, from now on let's follow elder brother."

"Alright, alright, this good news, I must tell Xiangxiang, she doesn't have to marry that short, ugly Qin Shijie."

Old Mrs. Mu loudly proclaimed in front of Aunt Qin as if intentionally showing off.

Aunt Qin was already upset about the previous incident; now, her expression turned even worse.

"Mother, it's all this nasty woman's fault. If it weren't for her, we wouldn't be threatened to be sold to the brothel. In my opinion, let's deal with her first!" Mrs. Lin glared viciously at Aunt Qin.

Old Mrs. Mu was already a person who bore grudges, and as soon as Mrs. Lin spoke, she rushed up and slapped Aunt Qin.

Aunt Qin's fair face immediately showed an ugly fingerprint.

"It... it's my fault. Please be the bigger person and let this little one go. We... our Qin Family won't marry Miss Xiangxiang anymore, alright?"

Aunt Qin uncharacteristically didn't get angry, instead acted meekly in front of Old Mrs. Mu.

Chapter 772: Shuangshuang Wants to Move (Part 2)

"Aunt Qin, your Qin Family, Qin Shijie must marry Xiangxiang!"

After everyone at the Old Mu Family was celebrating, Mu Dade suddenly said this, shocking everyone.

"Eldest, what are you talking about? You just managed to tear up that harmful contract, why do you still want to harm Xiangxiang?" Old Mrs. Mu asked in confusion.

Not only was Old Mrs. Mu surprised, but even Aunt Qin was astonished.

"Brother Mu, didn't you hear that Fat Eight said? Shijie's leg is already broken. Even if he marries your Xiangxiang, he won't be able to do anything."

A man's broken leg means he can't walk, let alone consummate the marriage.

If that's the case, isn't the daughter marrying into the family just to be a living widow?

Aunt Qin, in her long life, had never heard such words.

"Eldest, what exactly do you mean? Tell us all so we don't keep guessing." Mr. Mu felt his son must have a reason for his actions.

Mu Dade glanced at Mr. Mu, seemingly satisfied with his attitude.

"Father, the incident from yesterday has spread, and the whole village is discussing how Xiangxiang was rejected by the Qin Family. You know yourself how much this matter has impacted our Old Mu Family.

All the unmarried girls of the Old Mu Family will be questioned because of Xiangxiang, and in everyone's eyes, the problem lies not with the Qin Family, but with us, the Old Mu Family."

The Old Mu Family had previously spread too many good things about the Qin Family.

Wealthy and generous spenders, yet such people didn't show up during the betrothal. No one would blame them; they would only think Mu Xiangxiang was at fault.

Upon hearing this, the Old Mu Family realized this was indeed the case.

"Father, Mother, Eldest is right. Now our Qing, Xia from the fourth branch, and Eldest's Dan and Ying are all unmarried, and no matchmakers have come to propose.

If a good family is interested in one of them and hears about Aunt's situation, they might reject our daughters from the Old Mu Family."

Mrs. Lin spoke with increasing fear, relying on a little money she earned from her useless son.

If her daughter became unsellable, what could she do?

Mu Dajiang was also a bit scared. Though he never thought of marrying his daughter Xi Xia to a wealthy family, at least she shouldn't be despised by her husband's family.

"But even so, you can't marry Xiangxiang into the Qin Family. That boy from the Qin Family is already half-dead, addicted to gambling, and owes a thousand taels in debt. Marrying our Xiangxiang there is sending her to her death!" Old Mrs. Mu exclaimed.

"Mother, it's not just that. Xiangxiang's situation might even affect Eldest's career. Think about it, this time Eldest is going to the Capital for exams. If he becomes a Champion Scholar or something and stays in the Capital...

He could end up serving the Emperor, and might encounter colleagues jealous of him. If they hear about Xiangxiang's engagement banquet where the groom's family didn't show up, might they take advantage of the situation?

Might they throw dirt on Eldest? Haven't you always said, for the sake of Eldest's name and the future of the Old Mu Family, we can withstand any hardship?" Mu Danian said.

At this moment, Mu Dade didn't need to say anything more, he just needed to stand aside with cold eyes.

Because naturally, the people of the Old Mu Family would speak a lot.

Mrs. Jin's eyes shifted, and she quickly said, "Second Brother, Fifth Brother, and Gou Dan's mom, stop talking. Even if Mr. Dan Dan agrees, I won't. As a woman too, I know how important it is to marry a good man.

At worst, I'll stop Mr. Dan Dan from being an official, and we'll all farm in the countryside together!"

As soon as Mrs. Jin finished speaking, Old Mrs. Mu became anxious.

"You troublesome woman, are you crazy? Eldest's name is something a woman can comment on? I, old woman, have spent so much effort on Eldest over the years. You say he won't do it? Do you have such a big face?

When did the Old Mu Family let you speak out? Get out of my way!" Old Mrs. Mu shouted angrily.

Mrs. Jin, though yelled at, appeared docile and knowing she was wrong, but inside, she was delighted.

She just wanted to see the old woman hesitate and struggle; she wasn't soft when beating her before.

Now it was just about a girl, yet it's taking so long to decide.

"Mother, since you want Eldest's name, then marry Xiangxiang. We'll let the Qin Family bring a few more people to beg the Old Mu Family's forgiveness from the village entrance.

Let the whole Er Gui Village know the Qin Family's delay was due to a family change. Now the crisis has resolved, they come to marry Xiangxiang." Mu Dazhong voiced his idea.

In essence, this matter meant sacrificing Mu Xiangxiang to preserve the Old Mu Family's reputation.

"No, I won't let Xiangxiang marry into the Qin Family." Old Mrs. Mu insisted.

Having watched the drama for long enough, Mu Dade spoke again, "Mother, don't worry. I won't let Xiangxiang suffer. Xiangxiang is sacrificing for the family; I'll write a letter to the County Magistrate and waive the Qin Family's thousand taels debt.

Also, we'll raise fifty taels for Xiangxiang to marry into the Qin Family in style."

Aunt Qin was naturally delighted because although the Qin Family's shops had been gambled away, their main house was intact. Waiving the thousand taels debt meant she could get the last piece from the Qin Family.

Aunt Qin quickly said, "Mother-in-law, rest assured. As long as I'm in the Qin Family, Xiangxiang will be our Young Madam Qin. And Xiangxiang has good fortune; perhaps marrying into the Qin Family could turn it around. Once we have money, we'll heal Shijie's leg.

At that time, you just wait to see Xiangxiang being envied in style!"

Except for Old Mrs. Mu, everyone in the Old Mu Family supported marrying Mu Xiangxiang out. Even people from the second branch said that in the future, regardless of how Xiangxiang lives, the Old Mu Family will provide for her.

Old Mrs. Mu, alone, was powerless to change the situation. She faced Xiangxiang with a sorrowful face and talked about the issue.

Once she finished, Mu Xiangxiang threw things, fought, and tried to escape the Old Mu Family but was held down by several Mu Dade's, tied up in her room.

This person, Mu Xiangxiang, was destined to marry.

By lunchtime, the Old Mu Family's pig-slaughter-like screams quieted down.

Listening from the third branch, Mu Shuangshuang breathed a sigh of relief only when the Old Mu Family went silent.

"Mother, let's find a way to move out early. This house is like a pig slaughter every day, noisy in the day and night. If this continues, it will lead to nervous breakdown." Mu Shuangshuang said.

This Old Mu Family indeed acted outrageously, while other families lived harmoniously. Only the Old Mu Family had constant drama; one act barely ended before another began.

Annoying!

Chapter 773: Yu Si Niang's Worries (Part 1)

"Shuangshuang, let it be! Let's consider this a trial given to us by life. In the past, our family didn't even have enough to eat, and we were often scolded by your grandparents."

"Now we can live independently without worrying about food and clothes. Once spring arrives, we will even have money for Xiao Han to attend school; that's quite good already."

Yu Si Niang was just an ordinary woman. Being able to feed and clothe her family was already a luxury. If she imagined more beyond that, she feared the heavens might say she's being greedy.

And take away everything she has now.

"Mother, I understand what you're saying, but sometimes, if we tolerate everything, people will think we are easy to bully, treating us like soft persimmons to be crushed at will.

As for grandparents, I won't even mention them. Whenever something happens, they rush to our third branch without caring about whether it's convenient for us or not. As for several uncles, they act like we owe them something. Living like this is not comfortable at all."

Mu Shuangshuang carefully analyzed the current situation of their third branch within the Old Mu Family to Yu Si Niang.

Mu Shuangshuang spoke with determination, and Yu Si Niang said no more. She picked up the spatula beside her and filled the bowls in front of her with sweet potato and vegetable rice.

"Shuangshuang, go call your father to eat; I'll set the table, okay?" Yu Si Niang said.

"Alright, I'll go right away!"

Just as Mu Shuangshuang reached the door, Yu Si Niang spoke solemnly.

"Shuangshuang, regarding the matter you mentioned earlier, if possible, let's do as you said, our... third branch will move out."

Mu Shuangshuang's face lit up with joy. She smiled at Yu Si Niang and then cheerfully went to Mu Dashan's room to call him for dinner.

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Two days later, snow fell, covering the entire Er Gui Village in white once again.

The villagers stayed in their huts all day, burning charcoal, gathered together, gossiping about embarrassing matters of other families!

Meanwhile, Mu Shuangshuang, Lu Yuanfeng, along with the Huang Brothers, planned and agreed to go hunting in the mountains once the weather clears.

This time, the trip is set for one day and night, meaning that even in the evening, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng will not return to the village from the mountains, so they need to bring enough clothes and food.

Initially, Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan didn't agree, after all, she was their darling daughter, and they were reluctant for her to go to the mountains for half a day, let alone a whole day and night.

But Lu Yuanfeng made promises, Mu Shuangshuang was also very considerate, actively helping Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan serve tea and water, speaking kindly, and finally managed to get their consent.

At night, Mu Shuangshuang was soaking her feet in her room when Yu Si Niang entered with a brazier.

"Shuangshuang, why not reconsider and not go tomorrow, okay? Mother is worried about you and Fengzi; Niuwei Mountain is somewhere even many brave men dare not go, and you and Fengzi are still kids, I'm afraid..." Yu Si Niang made one last effort.

A mother's hope is for her daughter not to risk herself, no matter how poorly the family is doing.

As long as everyone is healthy and safe, everything is fine.

"Mother, haven't I told you already? With Fengzi protecting me, along with the help from the Huang Brothers, we'll definitely be fine.

Moreover, the year-end is approaching, and hunters rely on these two months to earn money. Once the year changes, and spring arrives, when the temperature rises and grass grows in the mountains, hunting will become difficult again." Mu Shuangshuang patiently explained.

Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang were both practical and honest village folks; if they had to choose between money and safety, their first choice would surely be to live well, even if life is tight and unprosperous.

"Alright then, you and Fengzi, as well as Huang Da and Huang Er, be careful. If something's wrong, just remember one word," run," alright?"

Mu Shuangshuang suddenly felt like laughing; who knew when it started that her mother, who never joked, had been influenced by her.

"Don't worry, I got it." Mu Shuangshuang replied.

"Alright, I won't say much more. You are a smart kid, just adapt accordingly at the time." Yu Si Niang said.

Mu Shuangshuang nodded along cooperatively.

Only then did Yu Si Niang feel slightly at ease.

She placed the brazier in her hand under Mu Shuangshuang's bed, saying to her: "Your room is cold and doesn't have a kang, so having a brazier is better."

After speaking, Yu Si Niang exited Mu Shuangshuang's room.

The next day, early in the morning, Lu Yuanfeng arrived at Shuangshuang's house with the Huang Brothers.

The three men, led by Lu Yuanfeng, were all dressed incredibly warmly.

The cotton clothes the Huang Brothers wore were bought by Mu Shuangshuang from the town. Er Gui Village had many landlords and masters, different from village folks; they had money and could constantly change into new clothes.

As for those old clothes they stopped wearing, they usually gave them to servants, who might not fit those fine clothes, so they'd bring them to the fabric shop to exchange for some loose change.

In short, Mu Shuangshuang used this method to buy two sets of thick cotton-padded jackets for Huang Da and Huang Er.

Wearing almost brand new jackets, the Huang Brothers were very happy. Even carrying quivers and stepping on the snow didn't affect their stride.

The snow underfoot occasionally made "creak, creak" sounds.

After walking a long distance, they finally reached the foot of the mountain.

This trek into the mountains couldn't be considered absolutely safe, so Lu Yuanfeng said to the Huang Brothers: "Huang Da, Huang Er, this time I can't guarantee we won't encounter danger, so everyone must be extra cautious.

Moreover, action must be taken together; we must not separate. Winter beasts can be extremely ferocious, you know this better than I do." Lu Yuanfeng said.

The Huang Brothers nodded repeatedly.

They both understood, if they didn't encounter something in the mountains, they'd be fine, but if they did, they needed everyone to work together to overcome the challenge.

The last time they encountered a wolf in the mountains, they betrayed Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng; this time, they would never do such a thing.

After discussing this, the group followed Lu Yuanfeng's steps into the mountains.

This time, Lu Yuanfeng was entirely leading the way, going to a deep forest that the Huang Brothers had never ventured into.

When hungry, everyone ate the pancakes Mu Shuangshuang made; when thirsty, they grabbed a handful of snow from the ground.

The journey took considerable effort as they searched for animal tracks.

All they saw was the pure white snow, even more troublesome than last time when they went up to find Liu Qingshan.

Fortunately, Lu Yuanfeng finally discovered animal footprints.

"Everyone be cautious, the sika deer we saw before has disappeared, and these footprints don't look like sika deer either. It could very well be wolves."

As soon as Lu Yuanfeng finished speaking, the Huang Brothers immediately looked around alertly.

Having suffered losses at the hands of wolves, they knew the dangerous nature of these animals.

"Wolves are fierce and vigilant. To catch this wolf, we need to search carefully, even if we encounter it, it's not certain we can hunt it."

Chapter 774: Encounter Danger

Lu Yuanfeng's voice was very soft, but everyone present could hear it.

The Huang Brothers exchanged a look, gritting their teeth, "Brother Fengzi, let's go separately; with this big group, the wolves won't dare come near smelling us.

We've been roaming the mountains for most of the day, and if we delay any further, this trip will really be fruitless."

Originally, Huang Da and Huang Er wanted to follow Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Shuangshuang, even just collecting small prey would make the trip worthwhile.

But they realized that as they walked, all the animals had hidden away, and even the wolves only left footprints but didn't show up.

"But separating might encounter danger; Shuangshuang and I are capable of self-defense, if you follow us..."

Lu Yuanfeng's words were interrupted by Huang Er.

"Brother Fengzi, actually, there's no need to underestimate us brothers, though we haven't caught any prey, our hunting skills were learned practically from old hunters, and we want to prove ourselves as well."

The Huang Brothers insisted on leaving, Lu Yuanfeng couldn't persuade them otherwise and could only ask them to be careful.

As for himself, he pulled Mu Shuangshuang along, made a simple trap on the ground, set the Beast Trap, and found a concealed spot to hide.

Lu Yuanfeng whispered to Shuangshuang, "Shuangshuang, I've visited this spot quite a few times, and only wild boars and deer showed up here before, I don't know why wolves have appeared.

However, this path seems to be one animals like to pass through, so no matter what comes later, we'll hunt it down, okay?"

Mu Shuangshuang naturally nodded, as she was a novice in hunting and didn't understand anything, she could only rely on Lu Yuanfeng.

The hemp rope in her hand was clenched tightly, ready to ensnare the prey once it appeared.

This time, Lu Yuanfeng did an excellent job hiding, using snow and leaves to cover them tightly.

Any slight rustling wouldn't transmit outward.

In winter, animals are extremely alert, whether herbivorous or carnivorous.

Ultimately, it's the food shortage in winter that turns the forests into a battlefield, only cautious animals can survive the season.

After waiting for half an hour, Mu Shuangshuang was frozen stiff, not knowing how to handle the rope anymore.

Her whole body shivered uncontrollably.

Beside her, Lu Yuanfeng noticed, gritting his teeth and pulling Mu Shuangshuang close to his waist.

Once she was near Lu Yuanfeng, she felt warmth returning.

Perhaps it was the serenely quiet environment today that made Mu Shuangshuang slightly embarrassed; just looking at Lu Yuanfeng made her heart pound endlessly.

Just as she was about to ask, Lu Yuanfeng gestured for her to be quiet.

Mu Shuangshuang realized something was up.

After waiting for a while with no prey in sight, Huang Er returned.

In just over half an hour, Huang Er seemed to have transformed, dirty all over, with his sleeves torn in several places revealing the white cotton inside.

Sweat dripped off his brow continuously, looking frantically anxious.

He lowered his voice and called, "Fengzi... Fengzi, save him..."

Huang Er was nearly driven mad, completely unaware of the simple trap Lu Yuanfeng had set on the ground, almost stepping into it until Lu Yuanfeng suddenly stood up shouting, "There's a trap, be careful!"

Huang Er stepped back repeatedly, steadying himself.

"Brother Fengzi, come quickly..." Huang Er howled, his face contorted with pain, eyes red.

It seemed something serious had happened.

Lu Yuanfeng rushed over, Mu Shuangshuang hesitated before her frozen limbs regained sensation.

She hurried forward and asked, "Huang Er, what's going on, what happened to your brother?"

Huang Da and Huang Er were older than Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, but due to past events, they had gotten used to calling them by their names.

"Wolves... wolves..." Huang Er stammered.

No matter how much Lu Yuanfeng asked, he only uttered those words.

"Huang Er, calm down, say it one sentence at a time. With just words here and there, we won't understand what you're saying."

Huang Er took several deep breaths to clear his thoughts.

"There's no time, my brother is besieged by wolves..."

After speaking, Huang Er grabbed Lu Yuanfeng and ran in the direction he had come from.

Mu Shuangshuang closely followed, overhearing what had happened between Huang Er and Huang Da.

Apparently, they separated from Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng partly to prove their own capabilities, and partly not to hold them back.

The Huang Brothers believed Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng to be skilled enough, catching prey without them.

But with them around, Lu Yuanfeng was constrained.

In short, the two deliberately chose a different direction, unexpectedly encountering wolves.

Without thinking, Huang Er shot an arrow at a wolf; rather than killing it, he nearly got himself killed.

Detected by the wolf pack, Huang Da protected Huang Er and became trapped among the wolves.

The three rushed to the place Huang Er mentioned, seeing Huang Da surrounded by more than a dozen wolves.

This situation was such that not only couldn't people get in, even flies might not get out.

In fact, there weren't many arrows left in Huang Da's quiver.

On the ground were dozens of used arrows, indicating Huang Da was relying on them to keep the wolves from biting him outright.

"Brother, I have to save my brother..." Huang Er said, wanting to charge at the wolves.

Lu Yuanfeng grabbed his arm, "Huang Er, calm down. Charging in like this won't save your brother, you'll just endanger yourself."

Huang Er was emotionally intense, "How could I harm my brother? If I go out there, the wolves will chase me, then my brother can get out of trouble."

Nearby, Mu Shuangshuang sighed hearing this, unsure whether Huang Er was truly foolish or just pretending.

So many wolves couldn't be satisfied with just one Huang Er, perhaps not even with ten or eight.

"Brother Fengzi, you don't understand how important my brother is to me. These years, if it weren't for him, I'd be dead long ago. You know how it feels? My brother is clearly better at everything, but he always lets me take my pick first in food and clothing, he always takes what I don't want."

Speaking of Huang Da, Huang Er was full of words, and the more he spoke, the more he wanted to cry.

A man crying in front of others is no easy thing, but mentioning Huang Da, Huang Er cried.

"I don't care, I want to save my brother, let me go." Huang Er cried.

"Alright then, crying like this as a grown man, what does it look like? Aren't you trying to save your brother?" Mu Shuangshuang said.

Chapter 775: True Feelings Revealed

"Miss Shuangshuang, do you have a way to save my brother?" Huang Er stared at Mu Shuangshuang, his eyes filled with anticipation.

"I don't know if it will work. These wolves have been starving in the mountains for a while. Look at them, each one is skin and bones, but their eyes are fierce.

This indicates that they are determined to get Huang Da as their prey. You know more about wolves than I do; they are extremely united. If they've made up their minds to hunt, the few dozen arrows we have are useless."

Mu Shuangshuang analyzed in a low voice.

Lu Yuanfeng and Mr. Huang agreed with her assessment.

"There are two ways now! First, we forcibly break through, relying on these arrows in our hands, rush out, and confront the wolf pack. Whether we can save Huang Da depends on fate." Mu Shuangshuang hadn't finished speaking the first method when Lu Yuanfeng denied it.

"This method won't work. When I was in the army, a few soldiers also encountered a wolf pack. They went head-to-head with the wolves, and as a result, those men were torn to pieces by the wolves.

Wolves have innate advantages and patience. If we confront them head-on, it is not likely to end well."

Lu Yuanfeng shared his experience, while denying Mu Shuangshuang's first method.

Huang Er became even more anxious.

"Miss Shuangshuang, what's your second plan? Hurry up and tell me. My brother really can't wait any longer," said Huang Er.

"The second method is to find the wolves another source of food. Although Huang Da is an adult man, he's far from enough to satisfy the whole wolf pack.

In other words, after hunting Huang Da, the wolves will have to hunt other animals to ensure the entire pack is fed."

"Shuangshuang..."

Lu Yuanfeng's face was full of worry, but before he could speak further, Mu Shuangshuang said, "Fengzi, let's split up. You go check if there are any other animals like wolves or bears nearby.

If there are, drive them this way. If the wolves see more substantial food compared to Huang Da, they might abandon him.

Huang Er, you make more torches. Animals naturally fear fire, and the torches can fend off the wolf pack for a while."

"But Shuangshuang, what about you? You're not thinking of staying here alone, are you?" Lu Yuanfeng clenched his fist, the bow and arrows in his hand creaking under his grip.

"Fengzi, Huang Er, our level of danger in this situation is the same for everyone. If you want to survive, just remember one thing; complete what you have to do."

After speaking, before Lu Yuanfeng and Huang Er could respond, Mu Shuangshuang began to climb the tree nearest to the wolf pack.

Mu Shuangshuang was quite skilled at climbing, having practiced in her past life.

Rock climbing, tree climbing, and even jumping stairs, but since it had snowed, Mu Shuangshuang nearly slipped and fell off the tree several times.

Once she climbed the tree and tied the rope around it, steadying herself, Mu Shuangshuang aimed her bow and arrow at the wolves surrounding Huang Da.

"Brother Fengzi, let's split up and move quickly!"

Lu Yuanfeng was unwilling to move, his eyes fixed on Mu Shuangshuang.

"Brother Fengzi, I'm begging you, Miss Shuangshuang's skills are unparalleled. Forget about us brothers, even you yourself can't guarantee to climb a tree with such grace and ease, can you?"

If it weren't for the urgent situation, Huang Er would have asked Mu Shuangshuang to teach him the climbing skill.

The hunter earns a living with skill, but these skills are based on a single bow and a long tube of arrows on the ground; hunters who could hunt while climbing trees simply don't exist.

Reluctantly, Lu Yuanfeng watched Mu Shuangshuang until he disappeared from her sight.

This forest, at that moment, was full of death traps. From the moment they stepped into the forest to hunt, Mu Shuangshuang knew that danger could descend at any moment, so they couldn't be careless.

The sky grew darker, and the wolves were becoming increasingly impatient. Huang Da, standing within the encirclement of wolves, had grown exceedingly anxious.

The bow and arrow in his hand were still against the wolves, but there was an air of exhaustion visible.

Mu Shuangshuang immediately felt that things were not going well. She felt she should remind Huang Da not to lose hope, but she feared that once she moved, the wolf pack might lose their temper and tear Huang Da apart.

One person, no matter how strong, couldn't withstand an attack from more than a dozen wolves.

"Awooo~"

The wolf pack began howling, and Mu Shuangshuang knew this was the wolves communicating a signal, similar to human language.

Mu Shuangshuang scanned the area and her gaze landed on a white wolf at the back of the pack.

Compared to the others, this wolf was tall and majestic.

Moreover, its fur was the most distinctive among them, and its eyes harbored a menacing and cunning look, making Mu Shuangshuang certain this was the Wolf King.

Mu Shuangshuang also noticed that under the Wolf King's direction, the wolf pack was tightening the encirclement.

If this continued, Huang Da would become a trapped beast, at the mercy of the wolves.

Mu Shuangshuang tightened her grip on the flint, then released it.

The flint could allow Huang Da to start a fire, and there were usable dry grasses not far from his feet. Even though they were covered by snow, the layer underneath could still be ignited without problem.

"Awooo~"

Another wolf howl resounded, and Mu Shuangshuang noticed the wolves were moving more urgently.

Huang Da noticed this too, tightly gripping the bow and arrow in his hand and occasionally turning in other directions, when suddenly an impatient wolf pounced ferociously at Huang Da.

Then came the second, the third.

"Huang Da, be careful!" Mu Shuangshuang shouted, releasing two arrows from her hand. One struck the wolf's head, while the other missed its mark.

One of the wolves had bitten Huang Da's wrist, tearing off a chunk of flesh.

Huang Da, in agony, slashed the wolf in the belly with a short knife, causing it to howl, adding to the wolves' frenzy.

The situation became more urgent as Mu Shuangshuang continued to shoot arrows at the wolves, but it still couldn't stop those continually closing in.

Huang Da noticed Mu Shuangshuang.

He knew someone was helping him from the tree, but due to the canopy, he couldn't see who it was.

"Brother Fengzi, Miss Shuangshuang, whoever you are, when I'm torn apart by the wolves, just run. Don't worry about me."

Huang Da understood that his chances of survival were slim, and he didn't want anyone else to die with him.

"Huang Da, stop talking and focus on dealing with the wolves."

Mu Shuangshuang's clear female voice came from the tree, slightly calming Huang Da's tense heart.

"Miss Shuangshuang, having you here makes me content enough. Friends like you and Brother Fengzi were well worth having in this life.

Later, you all must take Huang Er with you, and if possible, tell Huang Er that the silver in our house is hidden in the deepest part of the stove.

Have him take this silver, find a wife, and never hunt again!"

Chapter 776: Don't Speak

The more intense the situation became, the calmer Mu Shuangshuang became.

"You should tell Huang Er that yourself." Just as she finished speaking, Mu Shuangshuang pulled the hemp rope in her hand and jumped down from the tree, kicking a wolf away in the process.

She landed lightly and stood firmly beside Huang Da.

When she chose that tree earlier, Mu Shuangshuang had calculated the distance so that she could jump down and save Huang Da in moments of crisis.

However, the two of them definitely couldn't rely on just this rope to leave.

They could only take it one step at a time.

Mu Shuangshuang's sudden appearance temporarily startled the wolves. The white Wolf King howled twice, and no more wolves attacked.

But its fierce gaze was fixed on Mu Shuangshuang.

Huang Da was like an eggplant hit by frost. "Miss Shuangshuang, are you crazy? Doing this will get you killed too."

Ignoring the blood still flowing from his wrist, Huang Da scolded Mu Shuangshuang.

"If I hadn't come down, your wrist would've been bitten off. Now stop talking and focus on dealing with the wolves; Huang Er and the others are almost here."

As soon as Mu Shuangshuang finished speaking, Huang Er's furious roaring gradually approached.

Nobody knew where he got a wooden frame from, but on it were bundles of firewood, already set ablaze.

When he got closer, the wolves parted to let him through.

Huang Er charged into the circle. Mu Shuangshuang instructed them, "Quickly, gather some more dry grass and firewood. We must hold out until Yuan Feng comes back."

Mu Shuangshuang only trusted Lu Yuanfeng to have the ability, so she waited for Lu Yuanfeng.

Huang Er noticed the blood flowing from Huang Da's wrist and wanted to check it, but Huang Da waved him off.

"Huang Er, guard one direction each. For the rest, leave it to the fire to hold."

Near the fire, the snow had already melted, and stepping on it felt quite muddy.

Huang Er was so scared that he broke out in a cold sweat.

Though he held the longbow in his hand, he didn't dare to draw it.

"Brother, I'm not afraid of dying, but this time we've dragged Miss Shuangshuang into it too," said Huang Er.

"Stop babbling. If you hadn't insisted on shooting an arrow into the wolf pack, we wouldn't have angered them." Huang Da reprimanded Huang Er.

No matter what Huang Da said, Huang Er listened without daring to retort.

"Miss Shuangshuang, if we get out of this, the Huang brothers will follow you and Brother Fengzi for life, doing whatever you say." Huang Da added.

"You two are really talkative; you never stop. If it weren't for this situation today, I'd definitely beat you up." Mu Shuangshuang said with a smile.

Only someone like Mu Shuangshuang could still be smiling in such a situation.

The Huang brothers were increasingly amazed.

"Miss Shuangshuang, I've never met a girl as brave as you in my life."

"Our Tie Dao Village and your Er Gui Village, just hearing the name Niuwei Mountain scares everyone to death, let alone going up." Huang Er agreed.

"Exactly, the strategies you give us don't even resemble those of a countryside woman; they're more like those of an experienced hunter," Huang Er chimed in.

"That's right, you guys should see what Fengzi does; he's the king of the jungle." Mu Shuangshuang shamelessly praised Lu Yuanfeng along with herself.

Huang Da and Huang Er secretly laughed, but their hearts were filled with admiration for Lu Yuanfeng.

That guy is really lucky. They thought he only found a village woman, but her wisdom is way above the average village woman.

The three of them eased their nerves by talking, while staying alert.

They were scared and hungry, and their nerves were on edge.

After a while, a howling sound suddenly came from not far in the forest.

Mu Shuangshuang was the first to react, asking Huang Da, "What animal makes that sound? It seems to be coming this way."

"It's a jackal... it's a jackal. Wolves love to fight jackals; we're saved." Huang Da replied.

The howling of the jackals was getting closer.

The wolf pack perked up their ears, as if trying to determine the direction of the jackals, but the sound was too far away to tell.

"Ah-ooh~"

The wolves howled back and forth, seemingly trying to intimidate the still unseen jackal pack.

Now, the pack bared their sharp wolf fangs. Their target, as Mu Shuangshuang said, had shifted.

The three of them weren't enough to feed a dozen wolves, but a jackal pack was different.

If they won, the whole pack could survive the winter.

Wolves are adventurous animals; facing unknown danger, they were excited rather than afraid.

Mu Shuangshuang reminded Huang Da and Huang Er, "Later, seize the moment to escape. Take care of yourselves."

"Ow~" the sound of jackals got closer.

The wolf pack started running in the direction of the sound.

Mu Shuangshuang took the opportunity to grab a burning torch and fled in the opposite direction from the wolves.

The Huang brothers hadn't even reacted before Mu Shuangshuang was far away.

The sky gradually darkened.

The forest was in chaos, with animal cries echoing throughout the woods.

Lu Yuanfeng followed the footprints all the way with a torch and finally found Mu Shuangshuang and the Huang brothers in a hidden cave.

Inside the cave, the fire burned high. Seeing the person he had been thinking about, Lu Yuanfeng rushed straight over and hugged Mu Shuangshuang tightly.

"As long as you're okay!" Just a few words, but they exhausted all of Lu Yuanfeng's strength.

Mu Shuangshuang grinned and gently patted Lu Yuanfeng's back, comforting him and also telling herself that there was no more danger.

"Yuan Feng, are you okay?" Mu Shuangshuang grabbed Lu Yuanfeng's wrist and looked him up and down, finally landing her gaze on his feet.

Mu Shuangshuang felt a pang of heartache. "Oh dear, your shoes, why are they ruined?"

Lu Yuanfeng's pair of old cotton shoes were worn through, his toes sticking out, and inside the shoes, ice-shard blood had formed.

Even so, Lu Yuanfeng didn't feel cold; instead, his heart was rather warm.

"Yuan Feng, sit down quickly, take off your shoes, and warm your feet. I brought an embroidery needle; I'll patch your shoes, or else you won't be able to wear them." Mu Shuangshuang seated Lu Yuanfeng on the ground.

The embroidery needle was given to her before leaving by Yu Si Niang.

She wasn't good at embroidery, the only thing she knew was patching clothes. As for embroidery, something every Da Ning woman knew, she was clueless.

Yu Si Niang said that in the mountains, branches were many, and clothes easily got torn. If they tore, they had to be patched quickly to prevent the cotton inside from reducing.

What kept the cotton-padded clothing warm was indeed the cotton inside. If all the cotton was gone, then the clothes were useless.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't want Yu Si Niang to worry, so she brought it. She didn't expect it would actually come in handy.

"Shuangshuang, there's no need to sew them. I'll make do for a day; we'll go down the mountain tomorrow." Lu Yuanfeng didn't let Mu Shuangshuang touch his feet.

He felt they were dirty.

"Don't talk. I told you to take care of yourself, but you talk nonsense!"

Chapter 777:

Mu Shuangshuang fiercely finished scolding Lu Yuanfeng, then casually took Lu Yuanfeng's shoes off his feet.

Lu Yuanfeng's face turned red, and for a moment, he didn't know how to respond to Shuangshuang's words.

Huang Da and Huang Er watched from the side, clicking their tongues in amusement. These two weren't angry at all; they were clearly flirting!

But gobbling up this bowl of dog food doesn't make one's heart ache.

Lu Yuanfeng's socks were completely soaked, and even Mu Shuangshuang felt distressed looking at them.

"You fool, not willing to take off your shoes. In such cold weather, if you let them freeze overnight, your feet will become ice sticks."

Mu Shuangshuang kept nagging, like a little wife.

Lu Yuanfeng wasn't angry at all; instead, he seemed like he'd encountered something good, his mouth spreading in a grin, smiling non-stop.

"Still smiling, the socks also need to be taken off and dried!" Mu Shuangshuang said sternly once more.

Lu Yuanfeng's smile grew even deeper.

The earlier awkwardness had completely vanished.

By the fire, Mu Shuangshuang used a stick to place Lu Yuanfeng's shoes properly, waiting for them to dry, and intended to help Lu Yuanfeng mend them as soon as they did.

Taking advantage of the opportunity, everyone started chatting.

The topic was, of course, the wolf pack they encountered today.

"Huang Da got injured; tomorrow we must go out and find some medicine."

Since Mu Shuangshuang is from the modern age, she understands more about the harm caused by infected wounds.

But Huang Da is indeed something; such a large chunk of flesh was torn off from him, and he hasn't shouted in pain even once.

Instead, he's joining in the laughter and talks.

If you didn't notice his pale, frightening face, it really wouldn't seem like he was injured.

"By the way, did anyone bring alcohol?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Our brothers brought it." Huang Da pointed to a water sack hanging at Huang Er's waist.

"Big Brother, my alcohol... was used to start the fire earlier, there's nothing in the water sack now."

"I did." Lu Yuanfeng said, then took his own water sack from his waist and handed it to Mu Shuangshuang.

He didn't question anything, just followed Mu Shuangshuang's instructions.

Mu Shuangshuang tossed the water sack to Huang Er, "Alcohol can disinfect; you wash Huang Da with it, I brought some cloth along, tear it open and help Huang Da bandage him, even the strongest body must be treated well."

Huang Da and Huang Er were both rough guys; even if they were injured, they only wiped the bloodstains from the wound clean, never paying attention to things like disinfection.

Mu Shuangshuang's care for the two brothers actually made them feel increasingly embarrassed.

"Miss Shuangshuang, Brother Fengzi, today our lives were saved by you two, as per the previous agreement, whatever you want us brothers to do, we'll do, we won't take any benefits from you."

Earlier when Mu Shuangshuang asked the Huang Brothers for help, it was paid help, a form of employment relationship.

Now it's akin to a master-servant relationship.

"Huang Da, we'll call on you and Fengzi for help; as for you saying you don't want a penny, Shuangshuang cannot agree, and you don't know what help I'm going to ask for. Let's put that aside for now." Mu Shuangshuang said.

Huang Da was deeply moved; this young girl, already so mature and sensible, he feels there'll definitely be a day he hits it big following Mu Shuangshuang.

"Alright, we'll discuss it later." Huang Dao said.

"But today we didn't catch anything, and tomorrow we have to get down the mountain early, are we just going down empty-handed?" Huang Er asked.

Going up the mountain to hunt was for the sake of prey.

But now it's already dark; it's impossible to choose to go out hunting from the cave at this time.

"Don't worry about hunting; I checked around the area in the afternoon, I know where the jackals' den is, after the fight with the wolves today, the jackals must have suffered heavy losses, tomorrow we'll go straight to the jackals' den."

Lu Yuanfeng indeed suits this line of work, he grasped the affairs in the mountains thoroughly in no time.

After this event, it's hard for the Huang Brothers not to be impressed.

After resting overnight, early the next morning, Huang Da stayed in the cave to recover while Mu Shuangshuang and the other three went to find the jackals' den that Lu Yuanfeng mentioned.

Sure enough, the battle between jackals and wolves had killed off most of the robust jackals in the den, and thanks to Lu Yuanfeng's skills, they caught six jackals.

In town, jackal pelts aren't cheap, plus they were alive; according to Lu Yuanfeng, one could sell for two taels of silver, which means just this trip earned them twelve taels of silver.

For a farmer's family, this money could renovate a new house and buy three to four acres of land, so it can be considered a considerable harvest.

The four returned down the mountain happily; Mu Shuangshuang gave the Huang Brothers the two taels of silver they deserved, making the jackal sale unrelated to them.

The brothers returned to Tie Dao Village happily, not stopping at Er Gui Village.

"Fengzi, do you say these Huang Brothers really aren't greedy? I offered them four taels, yet they only wanted two." Mu Shuangshuang spoke casually once Huang Da and Huang Er were far away.

Lu Yuanfeng understood and explained to Mu Shuangshuang, "Shuangshuang, hunters have their rules too, I guess the Huang Brothers feel this trip only deserved that much silver.

Speaking of it, their changes are all thanks to Shuangshuang."

No one would have thought that not long ago, the Huang Brothers were stealing and swindling in the village, even hunting required snatching from other hunters.

So, when people change for the better, it does happen quite fast.

"I didn't do anything special; these two kids aren't inherently bad, just went down the wrong path, they can still be saved."

Blaming the occupational hazards of Mu Shuangshuang, she was used to teaching criminals as a member of a security team in her past life and those habits still occasionally influence her thoughts.

"Shuangshuang is really impressive." Lu Yuanfeng complimented Mu Shuangshuang generously.

Mu Shuangshuang blushed, turning her head away while looking at the jackals tied with hemp ropes by Lu Yuanfeng, unable to suppress her curiosity.

"Fengzi, do you think when we bring back so many jackals, will the villagers come to watch us?"

"Of course, but these jackals aren't easy to deal with; after lunch, I'll take them all to the market to sell."

After all, these are live animals; keeping them at Lu Yuanfeng's home could risk damage or something.

They returned before lunchtime, but the village was quiet; the snow hadn't melted yet.

Walking on the snow, Mu Shuangshuang shivered from the cold.

Without saying a word, Lu Yuanfeng took off his coat and draped it over Mu Shuangshuang.

"What are you doing? I'm not cold, quickly put your clothes back on."

In the dead of winter, taking off one's own cotton clothes to give to someone else, Lu Yuanfeng was the first.

"Shuangshuang, I'm holding a jackal; the warmth from its body will transfer to me." Lu Yuanfeng said, then picked up a smaller jackal from the ground.

Chapter 778: Others Cannot Intervene

In the heart of winter, hugging a jackal for warmth doesn't sit well with Mu Shuangshuang. She returned the clothes to Lu Yuanfeng.

She pulled Lu Yuanfeng's hand spontaneously.

"Listen to me, wear the cotton clothes properly and then...hug me. It's warmer than hugging a jackal."

Lu Yuanfeng's face instantly flushed red.

He said, "But... if villagers see us, they might talk."

Lu Yuanfeng hesitated. He had long wanted to hug Shuangshuang; that way, she wouldn't tread on snow and be cold.

"Such cold weather! Only ghosts come out to catch—cheaters. Besides, we'll soon be engaged; it's a legal embrace, none of their business."

Upon hearing "legal embrace," Lu Yuanfeng no longer cared about rules. He directly lifted Mu Shuangshuang in his arms.

The temperature rose instantly, with a faint sign of warmth and heat.

In the snowy land, a sturdy young lad held a petite, charming girl. The boy's face was flushed, and the girl's smile widened at her mouth's corners.

This scene contrasted perfectly against the white snowy background.

"Shuangshuang, are you still cold?" Lu Yuanfeng asked frequently.

His broad palms held Shuangshuang's hands in his own.

The warmth in his palm reached his heart, making Lu Yuanfeng feel weightless as he walked, his footsteps deep and shallow, as if stepping on cotton.

Turns out, happiness is this simple.

But yesterday's events still lingered like a thorn in Lu Yuanfeng's heart.

To outsiders, it seemed like nothing happened by luck, not worth noting.

But Lu Yuanfeng believed he hadn't protected Shuangshuang well enough.

"Shuangshuang, next time you better avoid going to the mountains with me, or... let's not call others to join us."

Lu Yuanfeng isn't someone unwilling to give others a chance, but the mountains are unpredictable, and danger is always a possibility.

No matter how strong he is, he just wants to protect Shuangshuang alone.

Like yesterday, saving Huang Da required separating from Shuangshuang.

In that long time, if something happened, Lu Yuanfeng wouldn't be at peace, even in death.

Mu Shuangshuang nodded. She knew what Lu Yuanfeng was thinking. Originally, she agreed to go up the mountain with Huang Da and Huang Er to give the Huang brothers a way to make a living.

However, the meals in the mountains are not easy; a careless mistake could cost a life.

One safe trip doesn't guarantee that every trip will be safe.

So necessary precautions must be taken, and the business for the Huang brothers, now that they've taken up work making desks and benches for the academy, should earn them enough for the new year.

"I promise you, we'll face any danger, just the two of us." Mu Shuangshuang said.

With one person and a bow and arrow, Lu Yuanfeng could protect her.

Of course, Mu Shuangshuang could also protect Lu Yuanfeng.

Lu Yuanfeng's face regained its smile. At this moment, they arrived at Lu Yuanfeng's home.

Lu Yuanfeng tied up six jackals, placing them in his storeroom, then went to the third branch with Mu Shuangshuang.

Upon returning home, Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan rushed out. Yu Si Niang scanned Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng up and down, trying to see if her daughter and Fengzi encountered any danger.

"Thank goodness. Ever since you left yesterday, I prayed to the immortals at our doorstep. Finally, the immortals blessed you with safety." Yu Si Niang patted her chest, speaking soothingly.

"You didn't encounter any danger, did you?" Mu Dashan asked.

"No, Mom, I'll help you prepare lunch. The meat cured last time can be eaten today." Mu Shuangshuang said to Yu Si Niang.

"Lunch is ready, we're just waiting for you and Fengzi to eat." Yu Si Niang replied smiling.

"Your mother has been mumbling since early this morning, wondering if you had breakfast. She's prepared your breakfast and lunch, afraid you'd return to find no food." Mu Dashan said nearby.

Yu Si Niang blushed and laughed teasingly. "Oh, the children are home, aren't you going to serve the food? After Shuangshuang eats, don't you have something to discuss with her?"

"Alright, alright, let's serve the food quickly." Mu Dashan chuckled, entering the kitchen.

Once the food was served, he went indoors to call for the four children. With recent snow, the kids' delight was apparent. The half-human-high snowmen, stacked by four children to over ten, cleared the courtyard's snow.

Mu Dashan enjoyed the scene silently, saying nothing.

After the meal, Lu Yuanfeng returned home, needing to rush to town to sell the jackals. Mu Shuangshuang crouched by the stove, a brazier beside her. She had to shovel the coal from the stove into the brazier.

Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang sat around the kitchen, waiting for Shuangshuang to finish with the fire, ready to discuss matters.

"Dad, Mom, what were you going to say before the meal? Can you tell me now?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Ah, yesterday you went hunting in the mountains, and your grandmother came over," Mu Dashan said.

At this opening, Mu Shuangshuang sensed trouble with Old Mrs. Mu.

Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang wiped away their smiles, replacing them with concern.

"Dad, continue, I'm listening." Mu Shuangshuang said, casually poking the fire in the brazier with a dry branch.

In the brazier, coal sparkled like stardust, close by, delivering warmth.

"Your grandmother said that these days, what's been happening with the Old Mu Family, especially regarding your little aunt's marriage... The Qin Family didn't attend the engagement banquet because they're overwhelmed with debt. Qin Shijie lost everything in the gambling den, even owed a thousand taels, and ended up with his leg broken."

"The most chaotic day was when the creditors came to the Old Mu Family for payment. Eventually, your eldest uncle sorted everything out, while your grandmother initially thought your little aunt wouldn't have to marry."

"But unexpectedly, your eldest uncle's first decision was to have your little aunt marry. Your grandmother disagreed, but the whole family believed she should marry."

Mu Dashan felt distressed discussing this matter.

He remembered when the Old Mu Family wanted to marry off his daughter Shuangshuang, everyone agreed unanimously, making his opposition futile.

Now the circumstances have changed; different events, different people, yet the same approach.

Mu Dade and Mr. Mu intended to preserve the family's reputation by marrying Mu Xiangxiang to the Qin Family.

Even though the young master Qin Shijie had his leg broken, he refused to cancel the engagement.

Following Mu Dade's directive, Mr. Mu sold two mu of land to gather the fifty taels for the bridal money, determined to marry off Mu Xiangxiang.

"Dad, what's the point of Grandma telling you this?" Mu Shuangshuang asked perplexed.

Chapter 779: Too Terrifying

Mu Dashan also happened to want to talk about this matter. Since his daughter asked, he straightforwardly said, "Your grandma came to me, hoping I'd help and get your aunt, Xiangxiang, to leave."

"What? Leave? Where to?" Mu Shuangshuang was full of surprise.

"Your grandma said she wants your aunt to go find your second aunt. In short, your grandma said your aunt must not marry Qin Shijie." Mu Dashan replied.

Is Old Mrs. Mu planning to let Mu Xiangxiang escape the marriage?

"But wasn't this matter decided by the whole Old Mu Family? My grandma must have agreed at the start. Now she's regretting it; is she not afraid my grandpa will find out and cause trouble for her?"

Mu Shuangshuang understood Old Mrs. Mu. If she hadn't agreed initially, the people of the Old Mu Family wouldn't have gotten to the point of having no room for negotiation.

"Indeed, your grandma agreed initially for the sake of your big uncle's future and the fate of the Old Mu Family, to marry off your aunt. But later, your aunt cried, causing trouble, refused to marry, and even went on a hunger strike with the intent to die.

Your aunt is your grandma's cherished one, and with the situation escalating, your grandma regretted it."

Old Mrs. Mu initially sided with Mr. Mu. Her daughter was her precious, but the eldest was also her hope for better days.

Furthermore, she optimistically thought that Qin Shijie being disabled had its advantages; at least he wouldn't bully her daughter.

Besides, the Qin Family promised to find caretakers for Qin Shijie, and Mu Xiangxiang could be a young mistress, leading a life of leisure.

But plans couldn't keep up with changes. Mu Xiangxiang's heart-wrenching cries, and Mu Dade tying her up in her own room to marry her off—

Old Mrs. Mu's hair turned mostly white overnight, and she appeared significantly aged.

After contemplating for a long time, she came up with the plan to send Mu Xiangxiang away. If she's not there, the Qin Family can't ask for her, and the marriage arrangement would naturally be broken.

"Dad, we can't help with this!" Mu Shuangshuang said directly.

Not to mention anything else, but just before the third branch was about to split off, Old Mrs. Mu and Mrs. Jin treated the third branch badly to gather travel expenses for Mu Dade's exams, even wanting to sell her.

Now that Mu Xiangxiang is in trouble, Old Mrs. Mu's single word of unwillingness can change Mu Xiangxiang's fate.

In her eyes, in her heart, there are only her own daughter and eldest son. Are there other granddaughters and sons?

Moreover, the current situation of Mu Xiangxiang was caused by Old Mrs. Mu herself.

That day, villagers were saying the Qin Family was essentially out of money, and Qin Shijie was rumored to cause harm to his wives. Old Mrs. Mu not only didn't investigate but claimed the woman spreading the news was jealous, intentionally harming the Old Mu Family.

But none of this could be spoken in front of Mu Dashan; the real important reason was Old Mrs. Mu's purpose.

"Dad, think about it yourself, why did my grandma come to you? If we talk about honesty, my fourth uncle is the most honest in the family now.

When it comes to shrewdness, my fifth uncle is the most clever in the whole family, and there's also my second aunt, yet she didn't seek them but came to our already separated third branch. Think for yourself about the implications."

Mu Dashan followed his daughter's reasoning and, upon thinking about it, had a sudden epiphany.

"Shuangshuang, are you saying your grandma... wants me to take responsibility for all this?" Mu Dashan asked in surprise.

This matter, as Old Mrs. Mu puts it nicely, is to have Mu Dashan take the lead in sending Mu Xiangxiang away.

But in front of the Old Mu Family, she nodded to agree to marry off Mu Xiangxiang.

So no one would suspect Old Mrs. Mu of having other intentions.

When Mu Xiangxiang is missing, and people start investigating, they wouldn't know that it was Old Mrs. Mu's doing. They would just blame Mu Dashan.

They would only feel that Mu Dashan made the Old Mu Family lose face, causing hardship for everyone.

"Dad, it's good you understand. It's best if you don't get involved in this matter." Mu Shuangshuang said.

From this matter, Mu Shuangshuang saw a point that others hadn't noticed.

The ruthlessness of Mu Dade, ultimately the Old Mu Family members were the ones who step by step brought it out.

The Old Mu Family lived frugally, not eating meat or wearing new clothes for a year, saving every copper coin for Mu Dade's education and exams.

The whole family's only hope was for Mu Dade to become a scholar and then lead them to a better life in the county.

Even the lazy second branch, and the equally reluctant-to-work Mu Danian, contributed to Mu Dade's examination efforts.

But what about Mu Dade?

After becoming a scholar, he didn't give a single penny to any of these brothers.

He often went to the town and county, playing around here and there.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't believe he was spending money from someone else.

A scholar is indeed a prestigious title, but it's not an official position. People won't keep foolishly spending money on Mu Dade if they don't gain any benefits.

Moreover, knowing it's simply a matter of breaking off an engagement, yet Mu Dade feared it would affect his career and insisted on pushing Mu Xiangxiang into the fire pit.

He even had Mu Xiangxiang tied up, preventing her from escaping.

Today he can do this to Mu Xiangxiang, and tomorrow he can do it to anyone.

"Dad, there's something I must say, regardless of how you might think of me," Mu Shuangshuang said stubbornly, looking firmly at Mu Dashan.

"We must find a way out for the third branch. If my uncle makes it big, the first one to be cut will certainly be our third branch."

Mu Dashan opened his mouth, about to speak, but was interrupted by Mu Shuangshuang.

"Dad, listen to me. Regarding aunt's situation, you and my mom both see it clearly. My big uncle, for an uncertain future, is willing to push my aunt into the fire pit.

It's likely that tomorrow he'll remember that our third branch refused to sell my sister to fund his exams and send us to hell.

Aunt is one of grandma's most beloved daughters, yet he acts without regard for my grandma. Moreover, I heard he knew about the matter with my second aunt running away with a man and suggested my grandpa and grandma cut ties with her, forbidding the Old Mu Family from acknowledging her as their daughter."

Every deed of Mu Dade that Mu Shuangshuang saw spoke of his ruthlessness and unkind nature.

As for Mu Dade expressing gratitude, bringing prosperity to the Old Mu Family—it's just a foolish dream.

It's an impossible matter.

An outsider sees clearly while those involved are confused; Mu Shuangshuang never counted on Mu Dade's success, so she saw things more transparently than anyone else.

These words were relayed in full to Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang.

For the first time in their lives, the couple understood what it meant to be confused and scared.

Their own big brother had unknowingly turned into such a terrifying person.

Hurting even his own flesh and blood relatives.

"Shuangshuang, what should our third branch do now..."

Chapter 780: Discussing Important Matters in the Kitchen (Part 1)

"Dad, don't panic. My uncle is just a scholar for now, even if he enters the officialdom in the future and becomes an official.

That won't happen overnight. What we need to do now is seize this period to make ourselves stronger, so even if in the future my uncle takes action against us, our third branch won't be afraid."

Although whether Mu Dade can succeed in the exam is another matter, it's always good to be prepared in advance.

Mu Dashan was indeed flustered. At first, he hadn't thought deeply about this matter, but after Mu Shuangshuang's analysis, he realized the complexities involved were indeed immense.

"Dad, I want to open a restaurant in the town. As for the capital, I plan to sell the cold noodle recipe," Mu Shuangshuang said.

Having delivered cold noodles for almost half a year, Mu Shuangshuang knew well that while this method could earn some petty cash, making a fortune was almost impossible.

Moreover, she had to deliver cold noodles to the town every few days. Instead, she might as well open the restaurant directly in the town, saving both her and Fengzi's energy.

"Previously, I thought about taking it step by step, waiting until we had enough money to open it, but now that I think about it, we can't wait that long."

"Acquiring a restaurant isn't something that can be operated immediately. It requires renovation, recruiting staff, and determining supply channels. All these matters would take a considerable amount of time."

"If we wait any longer, our third branch might not have risen, and the first branch will have taken off. By then, our days would be even harder."

Mu Shuangshuang shared her thoughts with Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang.

"Si Niang, our daughter is so sensible. All these things, even I, a grown man, don't understand, yet a little girl has arranged everything," Mu Dashan laughed and said to Yu Si Niang beside him.

Hearing Mu Shuangshuang's words, Mu Dashan did calm down a lot.

Their family now had only one goal, not just to have enough to eat and wear, but to become strong, fearing no one and no difficulties.

"Yes, I'm just afraid our daughter will be exhausted," Yu Si Niang sighed, "and don't we still have to build the academy? So many things piled up together, will we be able to manage them all?"

Mu Shuangshuang shook her head, "For the academy, we'll find more people to help. We can call people from my Sixth Uncle's side."

Get the academy built as soon as possible. As for how to run it, I already have an idea in mind; there shouldn't be any big problems."

In Mu Shuangshuang's view, how to run the academy wasn't the most challenging; the biggest challenge lay with the restaurant.

However, she had to first acquire the premises. Only with the restaurant could she proceed with the subsequent tasks.

The idea to quickly acquire the restaurant came to Mu Shuangshuang as a sudden inspiration and hadn't been discussed with Lu Yuanfeng. She still needed to discuss it with Lu Yuanfeng when he returned from selling jackals in the evening.

Mu Shuangshuang covered her mouth and yawned.

She looked utterly exhausted.

Yu Si Niang quickly said, "Shuangshuang, if you're tired, go rest in your room. I'll set up a brazier in your room to ensure you sleep warmly."

Mu Shuangshuang covered her mouth, trying to steady her shaky body.

"Mom, I'm fine. There's one more thing I forgot to mention. What are you planning to do about my little aunt?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

Things had reached this point, and naturally, they couldn't go along with Old Mrs. Mu's wishes.

But Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang were kind-hearted people, so it would be impossible for them to pretend they didn't know about Mu Xiangxiang's issue.

However, if they were to help Mu Xiangxiang, Mu Shuangshuang herself wasn't willing.

When it came to this matter, Mu Dashan got a headache.

Mu Xiangxiang's situation was now dire. A normal person, with a hoarse throat, being tied up like cattle, how could she be okay?

"Shuangshuang, dad... won't lie to you. I really can't bear to see your little aunt like that. Your grandma cried and told me about your little aunt, and it made me emotional and conflicted for a moment.

But when I saw your little aunt tied up in her room, looking at me with pleading eyes, I felt I had to help her this time."

After saying this, Mu Dashan looked at Mu Shuangshuang nervously.

Truth be told, Mu Dashan felt a bit ashamed himself. He hadn't given his daughter a good life, yet it always seemed to be Shuangshuang who had to solve the trouble.

Mu Shuangshuang sighed deeply in her heart. Helping Mu Xiangxiang was something she could not do.

However, her parents cared about it. As their daughter, she couldn't bear to see them endure hardship and fatigue.

Forget it, she still couldn't intervene in this matter.

Once you start, you might have to continue. Why did Old Mrs. Mu come to Mu Dashan with kind words?

It was nothing more than thinking Mu Dashan was easy to bully and could be persuaded to send someone away with just a few words.

If she agreed now, Old Mrs. Mu would think her plans were right and would only get bolder in bullying the third branch in the future.

"Dad, I'm going to rest now. Think clearly about this matter for yourself."

With that, Mu Shuangshuang left the kitchen and headed for her room.

Yu Si Niang followed up with the brazier and entered Mu Shuangshuang's room. Seeing Mu Shuangshuang fall asleep as soon as she lay down, before she could even speak, Yu Si Niang only heard her daughter's even breathing.

"Ah, good girl, your mother won't force you. Do whatever your heart tells you; you don't have to listen to your dad," she said before leaving the room.

Initially, Mu Shuangshuang, who had closed her eyes, opened them again.

Ah, still too kind-hearted!

...

...

Yu Si Niang returned to the kitchen, where Mu Dashan was holding a bowl of freshly poured hot tea, waiting for her to enter.

Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang's thoughts were the same. Although he wanted to help Xiangxiang, he didn't want Shuangshuang to get involved.

"Shuangshuang's father, regarding Xiangxiang's matter, how about we follow Shuangshuang's advice and not get involved anymore."

"If their mother is really worried about Xiangxiang, she shouldn't have agreed with brother's decision in the first place. When she made her choice, she leaned towards brother. Now, she played the good guy.

Do we have to be the bad guys, and end up with the entire Old Mu Family resenting our third branch? What then?"

Rarely did Yu Si Niang muster the courage to discuss such a matter with Mu Dashan.

In the past, she would agree to whatever Mu Dashan said.

But this time, her daughter personally opposed the matter and listed so many drawbacks.

Yu Si Niang was truly torn!

"Si Niang, I understand what you're saying, and I understand what Shuangshuang is saying, but that is still my sister, and my mother."

"My brother has so many schemes; it's uncertain whether he will treat our parents well in the future. As a son, I don't mind enduring hardships, but I don't want my parents, in their fifties or sixties, to still struggle for a meal.

If someone must offend my brother, I'd rather it be me, not mom. Si Niang, do you understand what I'm saying?"

Mu Dashan had only this one thing in mind. He would definitely not easily help other members of the Old Mu Family in the future.