

Folly 811

Chapter 811: A Heavy Blow (Part 2)

As soon as Mr. Mu finished speaking, Mu Xiangxiang pushed aside a few women, rushed to Mrs. Lin, and slapped her.

Mrs. Lin was stunned by the hit.

When she saw the anger in Mu Xiangxiang's eyes, Mrs. Lin realized that she had unleashed the wolf that was Mu Xiangxiang, this wicked girl, ruthless and vengeful, must be seeking revenge for last time.

Mrs. Lin became furious and reached out to grab Mu Xiangxiang's loose hair. As Mu Xiangxiang, in pain, tried to protect her head, she was thrown to the ground by Mrs. Lin.

Mu Xiangxiang and Mrs. Lin immediately got into a scuffle.

Although Mu Xiangxiang initially had the upper hand, she was still someone who had grown up sickly, and both her strength and body could not match Mrs. Lin's.

Moreover, as Mrs. Lin intended to retaliate, Mu Xiangxiang quickly suffered, receiving a few punches to the stomach and a scratch on her face from Mrs. Lin.

While hitting her, Mrs. Lin muttered quietly, "Don't think that by pretending to be crazy, you can hit me. Let me tell you, with that frail body of yours, even if you were sold to a brothel, no man would want you.

Trying to provoke me, you little wretch, look in a mirror and see if you're worthy of troubling Lin Xiaozao!"

Mrs. Lin was reveling in her success, thinking she had found Mu Xiangxiang's weakness, when suddenly, her vision brightened, and a crunching sound echoed above her head.

She reached out her hand to touch her head.

A whole tuft of hair was gone, her hair bun left a bare, bald spot where nothing but prickly hair stubble remained.

With one swipe of the scissors, Mu Xiangxiang had been anything but merciful, turning Mrs. Lin into a half-bald woman.

"Oh my goodness, my hair, my hair..."

Mrs. Lin wailed and screamed, and taking the opportunity, Mu Xiangxiang kicked her twice.

Mrs. Lin got up and ran towards the backyard of the Old Mu Family, crying for help as she went.

"Mother, help, help..."

Old Mrs. Mu, who had been taking this chance to explain the Old Mu Family's rules to Huang Bitao in the new room, heard Mrs. Lin's pig-like screams.

Old Mrs. Mu was extremely displeased!

She said, "This second daughter-in-law must be a reincarnation of a wild boar, knowing nothing but how to yell all her life.

You, from Dalang's family, remember this well: your mother-in-law is not a good person, and in the future, you should interact with her less.

And also, do not learn from her to make loud fuss over trivial matters; people might think something serious has happened in our family."

Huang Bitao, sitting on the bed, twisted the handkerchief in her hand into pieces. She had already been warned twice with such words before even getting married.

The first time, it was her mother-in-law, Mrs. Lin, whose words were worse than Old Mrs. Mu's.

Though Huang Bitao had relied on her brother since childhood, she had never been wronged, and now she just wanted to

cry.

"Grandmother, I understand...!" Huang Bitao replied.

"Good that you understand. Now, let me go see what that good-for-nothing pig from the second family is up to!"

Old Mrs. Mu stormed out aggressively.

She bumped into Mrs. Lin who was being chased.

"Mother, help! Help, Xiangxiang wants to kill me!" Mrs. Lin pleaded anxiously.

Old Mrs. Mu didn't care, she started scolding harshly: "Are you stupid? Weren't we supposed to be acting? Are you trying to let everyone know Xiangxiang was pretending?"

"Mother, no, look at my hair!"

Mrs. Lin lowered her head, revealing her bare, stubbled scalp.

Just then, Mu Xiangxiang, holding scissors, advanced again.

"Mother, step aside, I need to kill this wench, she's no good..." Mu Xiangxiang said coldly.

Old Mrs. Mu's eyes widened in fear. "Xiangxiang, what are you doing? Murder requires repayment with a life! Are you not afraid for your life?"

Mu Xiangxiang's anger was uncontrollable. "I'm a madwoman now, madwomen don't have to repay with their life!" Mu Xiangxiang replied.

"I'll kill this wicked woman first, we'll discuss other matters later!"

Mu Xiangxiang roughly pushed Old Mrs. Mu aside and lunged at Mrs. Lin.

Suddenly, Mrs. Lin tripped and fell awkwardly, while Mu Xiangxiang sat down heavily on her waist.

Mrs. Lin screamed even louder in pain!

"Oh my, my waist, my waist... help!"

Mrs. Lin only screamed twice before Mu Xiangxiang held scissors within an inch of her face.

The point of the scissors aimed at Mrs. Lin, she turned pale with fear, her body shaking, her mouth constantly pleading for mercy.

"Aunt Gou Dan, it's my fault, I shouldn't have treated you like that, please forgive me... forgive me, I won't dare again!"

The commotion in the backyard was so loud that it even reached Mu Shuangshuang, who was just waiting to eat.

Carrying a small pot used for hot pot, Mu Shuangshuang went out to see what was happening, just in time to see Mu Xiangxiang about to stab Mrs. Lin's face with the scissors.

If she made that move, Mrs. Lin could be disfigured, but more importantly, for Mu Dalang, the marriage would be ruined.

Having blood spilled on the wedding day is certainly inauspicious.

Mu Shuangshuang threw the small pot in her hand, it hit Mu Xiangxiang at the back of the head with a thud, Mu Xiangxiang's vision went black, and she fell to the ground.

It seemed she fainted.

Upon seeing this, Old Mrs. Mu's eyes filled with fury towards Mu Shuangshuang.

"You wretched girl, how dare you hit Xiangxiang, I'll fight you!" Mu the eldest cursed.

"Grandmother, outside who knows what trouble Aunt is causing. If you continue arguing with me, the Old Mu Family's reputation in Er Gui Village will be completely gone this time.

Uncle might not want to take you and Grandpa for a good life anymore if you keep letting Uncle be embarrassed and ridiculed by others!"

Mu Shuangshuang remained calm, knowing Old Mrs. Mu's weakness, unafraid of her retaliating.

Old Mrs. Mu stayed silent, but still glared at Mu Shuangshuang with dissatisfaction.

"What's going on?" Mr. Mu, who followed behind, asked while looking at Mu Xiangxiang lying on the ground.

"Nothing, it's just that I saw Aunt about to stab my second aunt's face, so I happened to throw a pot, and it accidentally hit her!"

But it's a good thing too, at least Aunt won't make trouble, today is Brother's wedding day, absolutely no mishap must occur."

Mu Shuangshuang explained sensibly.

Even honest Mu Dashan turned his head away, barely containing his laughter, showing how absurd Mu Shuangshuang's reason was.

Yet, no matter how absurd, as long as it worked, it was fine.

Mr. Mu said nothing, he instructed Mu Dashan and Mu Dazhong to carry Mu Xiangxiang away to lock her in her own room.

Mr. Mu didn't leave in a hurry, instead, he turned to Mu Shuangshuang to ask.

"Shuangshuang, how should we handle this situation?"

"Xiangxiang's father, you're asking this wretched girl, what does she know?" Old Mrs. Mu complained from the side.

"Shut up, there's no room for you to speak here!"

Chapter 812: The Perfect Moment for a Confession

Old Mrs. Mu opened her mouth, wanting to say something, but she was scared into silence by Mr. Mu's intimidating gaze.

"Shuangshuang, this matter concerns the reputation of the Old Mu Family. Just treat it as your grandpa begging you, will you?"

Mr. Mu was pleading humbly with Mu Shuangshuang, something he had never done before.

Mr. Mu had needed to use Mu Shuangshuang before, but mostly, he didn't take her seriously.

A bit of benefits exchanged with Mu Shuangshuang, that's all.

Seeing Mu Shuangshuang silent, Old Mrs. Mu began to reproach her: "You ungrateful girl, don't forget, you're part of the Old Mu Family. If the family falls, you'll be in trouble too!"

Mu Shuangshuang smirked, "Grandma, the third branch has separated, we can't enjoy the Old Mu Family's glory!"

"You..." Old Mrs. Mu was furious, if it weren't for Mr. Mu being beside her at this moment, she would have surely slapped Mu Shuangshuang twice.

"Shuangshuang..." Mr. Mu looked at Mu Shuangshuang.

"Grandpa, this matter isn't hard to handle. Calm the people outside, then announce to everyone that Aunt has gone mad. You should have contact with the Qin Family, let them reject this marriage publicly, with the reason being Aunt's madness. As for anything else, there's no need to change, what's done is done!

Also, today's atmosphere needs to be stirred up, didn't we buy fireworks? Set off more; the children like them, their laughter will lighten everything!"

Mr. Mu followed Mu Shuangshuang's suggestions and went to the front yard to calm everyone.

Though he became the laughingstock of Er Gui Village and all the relatives, Mr. Mu still thick-skinnedly kept up a smile.

Stacks of wedding candies, fruits, and pastries eased the crowd's anger at last.

Mr. Mu breathed a sigh of relief; the matter was finally resolved.

In the front yard, people started eating quickly, as they were eager to see the bride and groom bow and marry afterward, it was a major festive event they didn't want to miss.

The members of the Old Mu Family, including the children, hadn't sat at the table, since yesterday Old Mrs. Mu had assigned them to wait until after the guests finished eating, and Mu Dalang and Huang Bitā had entered the bridal chamber before they could eat.

Their task was to assist the couple in completing the ceremony smoothly.

This meal was finished quickly.

The people from the front yard began moving towards the back yard, heading to the Old Mu Family's main hall.

The main hall looked especially festive at this moment.

The ancestral tablets of the Old Mu Family were all placed on the table, Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu along with Mu Dazhong from the second branch occupied the right side, while the Huang Brothers sat on the left.

Without parents and close elders, Huang Bitā treated her eldest brothers as parents for this ceremony.

Smart villagers found their spots, while the less clever ones stood outside watching.

Large red candles burned on the table, and Mr. Mu, Old Mrs. Mu, and the Huang Brothers all had smiles on their faces.

Mu Dashan, in charge of announcing the wedding, shouted after everyone was seated: "The auspicious time has come, the couple enters!"

Huang Bitā, covered with a red veil, was led into the wedding hall by Matchmaker Sun, while Mu Dalang waited in the center for her to enter.

"The couple steps over the fire basin..."

A series of rituals were announced by Mu Dashan and completed by Matchmaker Sun leading Huang Bitu.

It reached the most classic part when Huang Bitu was handed to Mu Dalang.

Mu Shuangshuang grinned and energetically said to Lu Yuanfeng beside her, "Fengzi, Fengzi... they're bowing and marrying...!"

Mu Shuangshuang was visibly excited, as a modern person, she had seen mostly modern wedding ceremonies, and few of these complex, yet interesting ancient ones. This was her second time seeing such a ceremony.

The first was Yu Liulang's.

His wedding didn't have as many rituals as the Old Mu Family's, which used all sorts of elaborate customs.

"Bow to Heaven and Earth..."

Mu Dashan's rich voice rang out, everyone craned their necks, following the couple's actions with their eyes, attempting to glimpse Huang Bitu's appearance under her veil.

Some even playfully blew towards her red veil from afar, as if hoping to blow it open.

Lu Yuanfeng suddenly found some courage, stretched out his hand, and gently cupped Mu Shuangshuang's face.

He said, "Shuangshuang, if I have the chance to marry you, I, Lu Yuanfeng, will never fail you in this lifetime, the next, and every life to come."

Mu Shuangshuang's eyes welled up with tears; she felt both amused and moved.

Luckily, everyone's attention was on the couple; otherwise, this silly boy might have overshadowed Mu Dalang today.

Confessing at another's wedding; what a notion from this silly boy.

But responding seemed harmless!

Mu Shuangshuang thought so, then whispered in a soft voice, "I also... want to marry you, so... keep working hard!"

Lu Yuanfeng blushed, attempting to pull Mu Shuangshuang outside, only to be held back by her.

"Silly boy, don't get too excited; wait until the ceremony's over. There's plenty of time."

After all, it's Mu Dalang's wedding; Mu Shuangshuang didn't want to miss such a good moment.

Lu Yuanfeng nodded heavily, obediently watching the main hall with Mu Shuangshuang.

"Bow to the parents..."

Bowing to Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu wasn't a big deal; after all, Mu Dalang was part of the Old Mu Family, so it didn't matter!

But the Huang Brothers were emotional because Huang Bitu was getting married, eyes reddened.

The sister they watched grow up had finally reached seventeen or eighteen, married, and now she had to stay with her husband's family.

"Dalang, please treat our sister well, Bitu has been sensible since she was little. Though we lost our parents, she's an obedient girl.

We're entrusting you with our precious sister. It's not about how much money you make, just hoping you'll be good to her."

The heartfelt words of the Huang Brothers moved everyone deeply.

Huang Bitu began to sob; though not much, Mu Dalang, who was holding her hand, could feel it.

He tightened his grip on her hand.

"Trust me, Bitu, I have already planned our future, you won't lack food, nor will our future children..."

Huang Bitu felt comforted upon hearing this.

What could be better than a man's promise during the wedding ceremony?

The ceremony continued, yet it was not peaceful outside the Old Mu Family's kitchen.

A shadow sneaked towards the kitchen, with a tattered cloth wrapped around her forehead, eyes fixed intently on the kitchen.

Inside were tonight's dinner materials for the Old Mu Family, and she intended to steal some to eat...

Chapter 813: Caught in the Act

"Huh... Why won't it open?" The shadow pushed the door several times and found that the door didn't move an inch, muttering to itself.

This voice was extremely familiar. If it wasn't Mrs. Lin, who could it be?

Mrs. Lin's hair had been ruined by Mu Xiangxiang, and before the new hair could grow out, she had to cover it with a black cloth to prevent others from seeing.

Mrs. Lin fiddled with the door again and suddenly discovered that the kitchen door was locked with a large lock, the kind used by affluent families for their backyards. Even if Mrs. Lin was foolish, she knew who was behind this.

"That brat actually locked even the kitchen door," Mrs. Lin said angrily.

She thought about using a hammer or a stone to break it down, but the noise would be too loud. If it attracted others and they saw her like this, she feared she wouldn't be able to continue living in Er Gui Village.

Mrs. Lin had no choice but to temporarily leave the kitchen, heading towards the second branch.

In the main hall, the noise of revelry hadn't ceased, but Huang Bitu was sent into Mu Dalang's new room.

This was the second time she entered the new room, and everything felt familiar. However, Matchmaker Sun entered with a group of people.

First, they urged Huang Bitu and Mu Dalang to drink the cross-cup wine, and then the group started teasing the bride and groom.

The whole wedding was lively and jubilant.

When the sky fully darkened, everyone finally left Mu Dalang's new room.

Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu personally went to escort some relatives from the family, while Mu Dalang was dragged by several young men from the village to drink another round.

The others were even more eager, as the villagers were prepared to talk the whole night through.

Mu Shuangshuang pulled Lu Yuanfeng to the kitchen, took out a key from her pocket, and Mu Shuangshuang unlocked the kitchen door, taking out a bowl of chicken soup. The chicken soup was made with red dates and longans—good stuff.

It was to give Huang Bitu something for her stomach.

Though it was dusk, it was still early, not yet time for bed.

"Fengzi, hold onto the key and wait here for a bit. Grandpa and Grandma are still busy seeing off guests, so they won't be back to start dinner anytime soon. I've saved some good stuff we can all eat over at the third branch later."

As the only chief cook, Mu Shuangshuang had hoarded the good stuff. After a day of hard work, if she couldn't protect the people working with her, she might as well stop being a chef.

Lu Yuanfeng listened to Mu Shuangshuang and stood at the door like a loyal guard.

Mu Shuangshuang confidently took the chicken soup and quickly slipped into Huang Bitu and Mu Dalang's room.

Huang Bitu was nice, and Mu Dalang truly liked her, making her suitable as a wife.

Moreover, the three brothers from the Huang Family were all good people. A few days ago, they helped build the foundation and the academy for Shuangshuang's house, rising earlier than roosters and working till after sundown.

Shuangshuang's father, Mu Dashan, even said he hadn't seen such hardworking young men in a long time, deserving twice the usual wages.

But in fact, none of the three brothers took Mu Shuangshuang's double wages.

Mu Shuangshuang knew the three brothers' only hope was for the Old Mu Family to treat Huang Bitā well.

She couldn't control the Old Mu Family, but she could do her best to look after Huang Bitā.

"Sister-in-law~" Mu Shuangshuang called out to Huang Bitā, still with her head covered.

"Is it Shuangshuang?" Huang Bitā's tone was particularly gentle, and though hidden beneath the veil, Mu Shuangshuang could imagine the faint smile on her face.

"Sister-in-law, there's no one else here, you can uncover your veil!" Mu Shuangshuang said.

When drinking the cross-cup wine, Huang Bitā had lifted her veil once, so there were no taboos now.

Huang Bitā removed her veil and carefully placed it aside. Before Mu Shuangshuang was a small, delicate face painted with heavy makeup. Despite the thickness, her delicate features still shone through.

"Sister-in-law, this is the chicken soup I secretly cooked; hurry and drink it. Not eating dinner tonight can easily hurt your stomach."

Huang Bitā's eyes reddened. It wasn't just dinner she missed, she hadn't eaten lunch either.

Seeing the chicken soup in Mu Shuangshuang's hand, her hunger was undeniable.

But...

"Shuangshuang, Grandma and Mother have instructed... I can't eat anything tonight, please take it back!" Huang Bitā said.

"Sister-in-law, just let it go in one ear and out the other; your stomach is your own. When you're hungry, it's you who suffers, not Grandma or Aunt, who won't care a bit!"

Huang Bitā still refused to take it, but Mu Shuangshuang forcibly placed it in her hands.

"Don't worry, I cooked this separately. After you drink it, I'll take the bowl away, and nobody will know."

After Mu Shuangshuang's insistence, Huang Bitā nervously drank the chicken soup.

This bowl of chicken soup was probably the best she had ever tasted.

The soup was fresh, and the chicken meat inside was especially delicious.

After finishing the bowl, Huang Bitā wasn't full; instead, she felt even hungrier.

Her stomach growled several times, and Mu Shuangshuang took a small amount from the fruits and snacks on the table.

"Sister-in-law, eat these. If it's not enough, tell me."

Huang Bitā was shocked, with her mouth open. Everything on the table, including the burning red candles, was purposely instructed by Old Mrs. Mu and Mrs. Lin.

Huang Bitā was told not to touch them.

Now, Mu Shuangshuang not only touched them but took out some of the food, leaving Huang Bitā truly startled.

"Sister-in-law, my eldest cousin also told you about the Old Mu family's situation back then. You thought it wasn't a big deal, so I helped you with ideas and got Grandpa and Grandma to agree to the marriage.

But I must say, we're not here to be bullied, and there's no need to endure everything quietly. Just like now, we're hungry; instead of not eating, we should find a way to eat without being discovered."

Mu Shuangshuang's philosophy was undoubtedly novel to Huang Bitu.

She accepted the food from Mu Shuangshuang and finished it, finally feeling satiated.

Mu Shuangshuang put everything back in place and stepped out with the chicken soup bowl.

Huang Bitu followed to send her off, and when the door was opened, her face was revealed at the entrance.

In the shadows, a pair of eyes was watching Huang Bitu's face, almost drooling.

"Damn, such a pretty little wife, clearly meant for me, ended up snatched by that brat Dalang..." Mu Danian cursed quietly.

Yet he couldn't move his eyes away.

After bidding farewell to Mu Shuangshuang, Huang Bitu closed the door.

Mu Danian no longer saw the face that made him drool.

Swallowing his saliva, Mu Dalang headed toward Huang Bitu's wedding room.

He knocked on the door and then confidently pushed it open, entering Mu Dalang's wedding room.

Huang Bitā sensed someone coming in, but that person remained silent.

"Is that you, Dalang?" Huang Bitā asked apprehensively.

Chapter 814: At the First Crow of the Rooster, Get Up and Work

Mu Danian didn't say a word and continued to walk towards the kang.

Huang Bitā realized something was wrong and suddenly lifted the wedding veil, just in time to see Mu Danian nearly drooling.

"Fif...Fifth Uncle!" Huang Bitā timidly called out.

At this moment, Huang Bitā was extremely nervous, not for any other reason than that she was the only person in the room, and the one who came in was Dalang's Fifth Uncle, a man. If someone saw them, it would be a scandal that couldn't be washed away.

"Bitā, what do you think of our family?" Mu Danian asked with a grin, getting closer to Huang Bitā.

Seeing that he was about to approach the kang, Huang Bitā said, "Fifth Uncle, you'd better not come over. It would be bad if someone saw us."

"Bitā, your words really sadden me." Mu Danian pretended to be upset, but his eyes still wouldn't budge an inch.

At this moment, Mu Danian even felt like it was his own wedding night.

The beautiful woman in front of him was his own wife.

"Bitā~ how about you..." Before Mu Danian could finish his sentence, the wedding room door suddenly opened, and it was Old Mrs. Mu who had returned from escorting relatives.

She originally wanted to check if Huang Bitu was still in the room as she had instructed, but upon seeing Mu Danian and Huang Bitu alone together, her face immediately turned grim.

"Fifth, what are you doing in Dalang's room, and you, Huang Bitu, who told you to lift the veil? Hurry and cover it back up, don't bring bad luck to me!" Old Mrs. Mu scolded loudly.

Huang Bitu was stunned and quickly covered her veil.

Mu Danian said, "Mom, I just came to see what Dalang's wife looks like. It's not like there's no one in the room, Shuang came in earlier, and I only came in after she left. But she went to the kitchen to prepare food."

Old Mrs. Mu was skeptical but still drove Mu Danian out.

In the room, only Huang Bitu and Old Mrs. Mu remained for a moment.

"Marrying into our Old Mu Family, you must follow Old Mu Family's rules! Always remember who your man is, and don't think that just because of your face, you can seduce people recklessly by showing it off.

Let me tell you, I'm not to be trifled with. Starting tomorrow, when the rooster crows for the first time, you have to get up and work for me.

If I find out you dare to slack off, I'll make you regret it!" After leaving these harsh words, Old Mrs. Mu stormed out of the wedding room.

Huang Bitu sat on the kang, feeling utterly chilled.

The words of Old Mrs. Mu, openly and covertly insinuating that she was seducing Mu Danian, made Huang Bitu feel extremely wronged.

But she knew that whatever she said, the old lady wouldn't believe her.

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After sending off the last relative who was leaving, the Old Mu Family began to have dinner.

Those eating dinner together were all from the Old Mu Family; the Huang Brothers and Lu Yuanfeng had been called back by Mu Shuangshuang.

She had prepared a hot pot for them at the Old Mu Family, and whatever ingredients were there, she arranged for them.

Since they were eating in the dining room in the backyard, Mrs. Lin came out, but the black cloth on her head was still particularly conspicuous.

Mu Yingying occasionally glanced at Mrs. Lin and giggled, while Mu Dandan continuously served Mu Yingying food.

The relationship between the two sisters seemed great, but the only change was that Mu Dandan was no longer as cautious in her speech and actions, carefully pretending all the time.

Now she behaved casually; after all, her father was a scholar, the only one in Er Gui Village, which alone set her apart from those local bumpkins in the village.

Mu Shuangshuang prepared a table of meals according to the dinner standards, and everyone who had been busy all day had no complaints.

There was just some disagreement when it came to seating arrangements.

Mu Dade took the main seat, and when Mu Dandan and Mu Yingying wanted to sit beside him, Ms. Lin scolded them.

The two girls immediately said, "We're not eating!"

"Oh, Dan and Ying, are you planning to have breakfast early? Everyone knows that the main seat to the north used to be where your grandparents sat.

Now my eldest brother is a scholar and holds the highest status in the family, so sitting in the north is fine. But as for you two little girls,

no contributions, can't earn money, eating and living for free at home despite your age, why should you sit next to my brother?"

Filled with frustration, Mrs. Lin could only vent on the eldest sister's two daughters.

"I say, Second Aunt, that's not how you should put it. The contributions we've made, haven't you seen?"

Besides, is it not natural to sit next to our own father for a meal? Don't take out your anger on us because you were offended by our little aunt and had your hair cut off by her." Mu Dandan responded sharply.

It nearly made Mrs. Lin jump with anger.

"Mom... look at these two girls, they are out of control." Mrs. Lin said.

"I'm not blind, I can see the situation clearly. If Dan and Ying want to sit, let them sit. How is it your place to complain here?"

And as for your hair, if you know it's shameful, then don't come out, or if someone sees you, they might just throw you into a pig cage."

Old Mrs. Mu's scolding left Mrs. Lin with no words to argue back.

She could only stand to the side, red-faced and unwilling.

Mu Dandan and Mu Yingying were naturally delighted; they weren't scolded and even got the old lady's support.

Once everyone was seated, they began to eat. Mr. Mu glanced at the table and suddenly asked: "Shuangshuang, where are the Huang Brothers and the Lu Family's boy who helped all day in the kitchen? Why aren't they here for dinner?"

"They said this place was too small, couldn't accommodate them." Mu Shuangshuang hinted, looking at Old Mrs. Mu.

In fact, it was because Old Mrs. Mu had earlier said not to let them stay for dinner, claiming they had already been paid for their work.

Mu Shuangshuang was too lazy to argue with her grandmother; after all, she was the cook, and she could prepare whatever she wanted.

"What kind of talk is that? How can you help and not eat? Where are they? I'll personally go and call them." Mr. Mu said.

"No need, Grandpa, I've already sent them back!" Yeah, right!

Mu Shuangshuang just didn't want the Old Mu Family to know that she had set up a table for them elsewhere. If she mentioned it, her grandmother would probably have some nasty things to say about it.

Mr. Mu's face turned red. He felt like his own face was being slapped. They worked at the house, helped out, and at the very least deserved a meal, regardless of how much they were paid.

If word got out that they weren't even given a meal...

Mr. Mu couldn't imagine how the Old Mu Family would be scorned by the village.

Sigh, Mr. Mu let out a long sigh, then said, "Do-nothing, good-for-nothing lot!"

But these words were directed at Old Mrs. Mu.

Old Mrs. Mu was just about to get angry when Mu Dashan said, "Mom, let's hurry up and eat. There are still relatives and neighbors outside waiting for us to go out and drink and chat with them."

Only then did Old Mrs. Mu bury her head in her meal, and after taking a few bites, she asked Mu Shuangshuang, "Shuang, later, give me a full report on how much material was used today and how much is left!"

Chapter 815: Asking for a Higher Price

"Grandma, in the kitchen, all that's left are scraps, you'll know how much was used yourself after you see what's left.

Today's banquet used ingredients that are far more than other families in the village, so naturally, there isn't much leftover."

Mu Shuangshuang really didn't want to settle accounts with Old Mrs. Mu.

It's not because she took some food to the third branch for Huang Da, Huang Er, and Lu Yuanfeng to eat.

It's because Old Mrs. Mu, when she gets serious, might ask about every single scallion you used.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't have the time to waste with her.

So, she straightforwardly refused.

Old Mrs. Mu wasn't happy to hear Mu Shuangshuang's words, but as she was about to retort, Mr. Mu interrupted. "Alright, this matter is over, let's not talk about it anymore. Shuangshuang being able to make so many tables of food with what was at home is already quite an achievement."

Mr. Mu supported Mu Shuangshuang, which made Old Mrs. Mu even more dissatisfied.

She angrily stood up, picked up a bowl, and scooped food into a large bowl, all the premium pieces of meat were put into the large bowl — no need to guess, this was for Mu Xiangxiang.

Mr. Mu turned a blind eye, pretending not to see this scene.

Mrs. Lin saw this and felt angry inside. Mu Xiangxiang did such shameless things, cut her hair, and still gets to eat and drink well.

Since that's the case, then she won't hold back.

"Dad, how is the matter with Xiangxiang going to be resolved? Are the Qin Family really going to dissolve the engagement as they said?" Mrs. Lin asked, looking very concerned.

Mr. Mu's face changed immediately.

"Second daughter-in-law, speak less, this matter isn't for you to handle. Eat your meal!" Mr. Mu said.

"Indeed, even eating can't shut your mouth, say another word, and I'll tear your mouth apart." Old Mrs. Mu flared up and scolded Mrs. Lin.

Mrs. Lin still wouldn't stop talking, "Dad, from my perspective, this isn't over! Everyone thinks the Qin Family was ungrateful, Xiangxiang is no longer responsible, and neither is the Mu Family, but ultimately Xiangxiang went crazy. In the future, there might not be any man willing to propose.

An insane sister-in-law could affect Dan and Ying getting married, and also Qing and Xia. Most importantly, it might affect Big Brother's career."

"Shut up, you awful woman, say one more word against Xiangxiang or the Mu Family, and I'll have your husband divorce you and send you back to the Old Lin Family."

Mrs. Lin was so angry she ground her teeth, sitting down, grabbing the chopsticks from the table, and started eating vigorously.

It was almost like a sweep, you wouldn't be wrong to say it was like a pig eating; she filled her bowl with the starter dish so no one else could have any.

Seeing other dishes about to suffer, Mu Shuangshuang quickly shared some with the people from the third branch, everyone took a few bites but soon put down their chopsticks, without feeling full.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't do the dishwashing in the evening because what was agreed upon only included making food.

Mu Shuangshuang swaggered back to the third branch, while the remaining branches kept eating, avoiding work.

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In the third branch's kitchen, Huang Da, Huang Er, Lu Yuanfeng, and Yu Liulang sat at a table, with good wine and food laid out.

They chatted while eating.

"Let me tell you, Shuangshuang is really clever, letting us eat hotpot here beats eating at the Old Mu Family by miles," Yu Liulang said.

"Yeah, Miss Shuangshuang is indeed much smarter than most people," Huang Da echoed.

The men enjoyed drinking and chatting, generally taking twice the time women did to finish a meal. In a place like this, they needn't worry about time or being scolded by an old lady.

"But really, this engagement at the Old Mu Family is quite a farce," Yu Liulang couldn't help but comment.

First came a groom with a broken leg, then Mu Xiangxiang went crazy, chasing and hitting someone, followed by the groom ungratefully in front of the whole village.

Not even in a play could you see such an exciting series of events. Moreover, one followed another, each more exciting than the last.

Yu Liulang felt like he had finally witnessed what the Old Mu Family was capable of.

"A day of dreams that seem unreal, it's actually entertaining to watch, hehe," Huang Er added.

"Well, they can argue while we eat our fill, once Miss Shuangshuang comes back, I reckon she'll want another round of eating."

"Who said just one? Of course, it's two rounds!" Mu Shuangshuang said with a laugh as she entered.

Behind her were Yu Si Niang, Mu Dashan, and a few kids.

"What are we waiting for, grab your chopsticks and let's eat!" Yu Liulang said.

After a satisfying meal, Mu Shuangshuang settled wages with Huang Da and Huang Er and sent them off. For Lu Yuanfeng, Mu Shuangshuang arranged for him to continue warming up by the stove.

The highlight of the night at the Old Mu Family was the late-night snack.

Besides, the straightforward relatives had already left, leaving the troublesome ones who were sure to cause chaos.

In the middle of the night, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng were getting impatient.

Just then, a knocking sound came from the next room, followed by Mr. Mu's voice.

"Shuang girl, Shuang girl..." Mr. Mu called out.

Mu Shuangshuang kept silent, so Mr. Mu kept knocking, so as not to wake Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang, Mu Shuangshuang reluctantly emerged from the kitchen.

"Grandpa, what are you doing?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Hey, Shuang girl, the main house needs someone to make a late-night snack. It's not much, could you help out?" Mr. Mu asked.

"Grandpa, I can't do that, I have to make the cold noodles to be sent to town tomorrow. If I can't make it, it'll be a huge loss. Please ask Auntie, she ate the most tonight, she's surely strong."

Mu Shuangshuang had long quit making cold noodles, she was just waiting in the kitchen.

Mu Dalang's banquet didn't earn her money, and she didn't set prices, no reason why the late-night snack should go without earning a dime.

"Shuang girl, listen, you're the best cook left. Your aunt's cooking isn't good, and since her hair was cut by Xiangxiang tonight, I let her rest. The fourth daughter-in-law said she's sick, not suitable for staying up all night, so..."

"So nobody else is willing, just coming to call a kid like me?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

After being called out, Mr. Mu looked embarrassed but still said, "In the front yard, there aren't many people left, at most two tables, they're all people you know well, with good relations with our family.

Also, they've waited so long and are sleepy, hungry. If it weren't for congratulating your big cousin, in this cold weather, they wouldn't be waking up early and working late, you can do it for your big cousin, right?"

Chapter 816: Wedding Night

Of course not! Mu Shuangshuang thought to herself.

The old man had some nice ideas, but she deliberately waited until the middle of the night to make a big profit, and in the end, the old man wanted to use friendship and family ties to help.

Are you kidding? Even blood brothers have to settle accounts clearly. Besides, if you don't make money when you can, what are you if not a fool?

"Grandpa, I understand what you're saying, but there's really no way around this. Shuangshuang promised them, and otherwise, we'd lose nine hundred coins. The money is the least of it.

The most important thing is Shuangshuang's reputation. If I can't get the goods to town by tomorrow morning, I'm afraid no one will buy from me again," Mu Shuangshuang said solemnly.

It's not like Mu Shuangshuang was making excuses; making a midnight snack isn't difficult, both Mrs. Lin and Mrs. Liu can do it.

But the old man insisted on finding her, so she can't be blamed for raising the price.

"What? Nine hundred coins?" the old man exclaimed.

A day's meal, giving it to Shuangshuang would be one tael. If it were another nine hundred coins, the feast would be in a big loss.

It's about the household's food expenses for over half a year.

"Shuang, how about this, seven... seven hundred coins, you help your big cousin make this midnight snack. If there's any benefit in the future, I'll remember you, okay?"

Mu Shuangshuang hesitated for a moment, feeling awkward about the sudden reasonableness of the old man.

She thought for a moment and deliberately appeared conflicted. "Fine, seven hundred it is, let's just say it's for my big cousin!"

Mu Shuangshuang's 'sacrifice' made the old man quite pleased.

After all, with seven hundred coins, he still saved two hundred.

The old man went back to the Old Mu Family, and the first thing he did was ask Old Mrs. Mu for money.

Aside from the money of the main branch managed by Mrs. Jin, the rest of the Old Mu Family's finances were managed by Old Mrs. Mu alone, even the old man needed to discuss money matters with her.

Old Mrs. Mu was stingy by nature, especially when it came to spending money, so she inevitably asked a few more questions.

"Old man, what do you need money for at this hour?"

Inside the room, Old Mrs. Mu looked guarded, and her eyes were full of suspicion as she glanced at the old man.

"What can I do? No one in the family wants to make midnight snacks, but some of our relatives insisted on having one, so I had to find Shuang," the old man said, as if it were a matter of course.

"So that little girl wants seven hundred coins? Old man, are you crazy? A midnight snack, at most two tables, and you give that little girl seven hundred coins?" Old Mrs. Mu shrieked.

"What are you saying? What's wrong with Shuang? She stopped her own work to help us, giving seven hundred coins is already considered little," the old man scolded Old Mrs. Mu.

"Insane, you crazy old man must be insane, turning against your own for an outsider, bullying me, the old woman, I tell you, there's no money, there's only my life. If you want it, go ahead and take it!"

"You... if you don't give it to me, I'll go ask the eldest for it! We can't afford to lose face in front of those relatives."

The so-called relatives weren't something the old man wanted to acknowledge.

His son was a scholar, and if we're talking about family, then it should be Mu Dabiao's branch that's the real family.

But of course, the old man wouldn't say this to those people; some things are best kept to oneself.

His mention of asking the eldest infuriated Old Mrs. Mu, shaking with anger.

She pointed at the old man, saying, "If you dare to impede the eldest, I'll never let you off!"

In the end, though, it was Old Mrs. Mu who compromised.

After all, a man is one's sky, and what a man says is everything, is law!

The old man took the seven hundred coins and invited Mu Shuangshuang to make a midnight snack, which left the relatives quite satisfied.

They kept praising the old man for his capability.

The old man held his head up high, as if he'd done some remarkable feat.

After bustling about for half the night, the people of the Old Mu Family finally went to sleep.

Once it was quiet, Mu Dalang and Huang Bitao over there also finally had some alone time.

Though, some were still up to no good, not willing to sleep.

For instance, Mu Danian, who was sneakily eavesdropping outside Mu Dalang's room at this moment.

Huang Bitao's beautiful appearance when she lifted her veil constantly replayed in Mu Danian's mind, whether eyes open or shut, it was her panicked expression.

Mu Danian prided himself on having seen plenty of young maidens and newlyweds in the village.

The women he's slept with are countless, but none left him so smitten as Huang Bitao did.

Besides, Huang Bitao was initially meant to be his match, which made Mu Danian even more convinced that she belonged to him, while Mu Dalang was merely a placeholder to take care of Huang Bitao. Soon, she'd return to him, Mu Danian.

Inside the room, the two nearly burnt-out red candles flickered and crackled.

Huang Bitao and Mu Dalang looked at each other, both faces flushed, their breaths quickened.

The cotton handkerchief in Huang Bitao's hand was nearly torn apart, and her face seemed like it could drip water.

Mu Dalang stared at Huang Bitao's lovely face, always thinking of something to say to distract her.

Suddenly, he noticed a piece of white cloth on the bed, meant to test a woman's purity.

Mu Dalang found it somewhat glaring and just as he was about to toss it aside, Huang Bitao grabbed his hand.

"No, Matchmaker Sun said... we can't throw it away, otherwise my in-laws will look down on me."

This was Huang Bitao's first marriage, so she wasn't worried about not having any 'flower blossom'.

"Bitao, don't... don't be afraid, I'll take care of you," Mu Dalang bravely assured her.

Neither had much experience, and what little they knew was taught by matchmakers and elders.

Mu Dalang had guidance from Mu Dazhong, and Huang Bitao had Matchmaker Sun by her side.

Ordinarily, at this point, shyness wouldn't be an issue.

But the two respected each other, making neither dare to take a step further.

Outside, Mu Danian was growing impatient from waiting.

It wasn't his first time eavesdropping, but never had it taken so long with Mu Dalang and Huang Bitao, over an hour without a sound.

Could it be Da Lang is, um, incapable?

Thinking of this possibility filled Mu Danian with glee, and just as he was about to use his tongue to moisten his finger to poke a hole in Mu Dalang's window to peek inside...

Suddenly, a shriek rang out from behind.

"Oh dear, there's a thief!"

It was Mrs. Lin, who, after a particularly hearty meal, found herself caught short in the middle of the night and happened to pass by Mu Dalang's room.

The shout was enough to alarm everyone in the Old Mu Family, along with some guests, who all hurriedly dressed to catch the thief.

Inside the room, Mu Dalang dashed out, running toward the noise, but not before reminding Huang Bitao to lock the windows and doors and not to join the commotion.

Huang Bitao nodded repeatedly, gripping the quilt tightly in her hands.

Chapter 817: Predatory Gazes

The crowd followed the direction Mrs. Lin pointed and went after Mu Danyan.

Mu Danyan was terrified, fleeing in a panic without choosing a path, eventually reaching the third branch's toilet.

The voices shouting "catch the thief" grew closer and closer, and were about to break through the toilet.

What Mu Danyan did wasn't honorable; if caught, he would surely be soaked in a pig cage.

Thinking quickly, Mu Danyan jumped into the cesspit, enduring the stench, and plunged headfirst into the muck.

The crowd searching for the thief flashed their torches around the toilet, didn't see anyone, and then left.

When Mu Danyan rose from the cesspit, he was entirely covered in filth, smelling foul beyond belief.

Fortunately, he wasn't caught.

Mu Danyan thought with relief.

Unable to catch the thief, everyone resigned themselves to doing their own thing. After a night's chaos, Mu Dalan was utterly exhausted. He returned to his room, cut open his finger with a knife on a silk handkerchief, and fell asleep holding Huang Bitu.

The next day, the people from the third branch were awakened by a sharp scream from Yuanbao.

He pointed at the toilet, crying mournfully to Mu Shuangshuang, "Sister Shuangshuang, your toilet was blown up!"

Mu Shuangshuang's hand, wrapped in a quilt, twitched, almost dropping the quilt.

Kids from farm households don't have many entertainment projects; the stuff everyone plays with is pretty primitive.

Spinning tops, catching crickets, the most famous being blasting cow dung and such.

Whenever there's a red or white event, there will always be little ones scavenging the unfinished firecrackers outside the courtyard.

Everyone would bundle the firecrackers together to blow up small ditches or directly in cow dung, usually scattering dung far and wide.

But blowing up someone's toilet, this was the first time Mu Shuangshuang saw that.

She went into the house to change her jacket, following Yuanbao into the toilet.

Once inside, she was nearly overwhelmed by the stench.

The ground was covered with that stuff, spreading quite a distance, looking nothing like firecracker damage, more like someone jumped into the toilet and crawled out afterward.

The more she thought, the more Mu Shuangshuang believed this was likely.

But cleaning up was problematic; her toilet was made of mud, without flushing, everything had to be shoveled out.

With no one else around, Mu Shuangshuang had to do it herself. When the work was done, she was utterly worn out.

Faced with such hard labor, Mu Shuangshuang naturally wanted to find out who had troubled her.

Finally, from several guests, she learned a thief was around last night.

Right outside the door of Mu Dalan and Huang Bitu.

Upon hearing this, Mu Shuangshuang immediately understood.

No thief, must be her own family eavesdropping.

If it were a real thief, they'd surely steal from Old Mrs. Mu's room. All the bride price was kept by Old Mrs. Mu. Outside her room, there's something to gain, but outside others' rooms forget it.

Mu Shuangshuang might listen to this herself, but couldn't tell others.

Or she'd invite trouble, and bring trouble to Mu Dalan as well.

Forget it, she decided to change clothes and go to town with Yuan Feng to check out the restaurant, and tidy the courtyard a bit.

Changing clothes, Mu Shuangshuang found Lu Yuanfeng who had arrived, helping Yu Si Niang cook breakfast. Mu Shuangshuang discussed her thoughts with Lu Yuanfeng, and he immediately nodded.

He said, "Shuangshuang, should we invite Aunt and Uncle to town to have a look? The restaurant was leased; they haven't seen it, nor the courtyard."

Mu Shuangshuang thought it was right, the courtyard had been cleaned a bit a few days ago but inside it remained in chaos; more hands would speed up the cleanup.

"Why not bring the three kids along, borrow a cow cart, what do you think?"

Lu Yuanfeng naturally agreed, as usual going to borrow a cow from Wang Fugui's house. Speaking of which, Wang Fugui lay on the bed for over a month now, growing thinner, and daily ginseng soup was forced down by Fu Gui Niang.

Though not dead, he was hardly different from being dead.

The Wang Family's cousin returned home after the incident and never appeared in Er Gui Village again.

Only Old Man Wang and Old Mrs. Wang stayed with their son, watching over the house. Even the fields would have been desolate without the long-term worker.

Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Shuangshuang had no sympathy for Wang Fugui, whose heart was too wicked, causing harm to many. Now turning into a vegetable was heaven's retribution.

Once the cow was borrowed, the family was set to head to town but hadn't left the courtyard before Mu Dalan stopped them.

He asked, "Shuangshuang, may I join you?"

After getting married, Mu Dalan no longer roamed far alone. Now he wanted to save some time to spend with Huang Bitu.

"Hurry up and get on!" Mu Shuangshuang pointed to a spot beside her. The whole group set off for town.

As soon as Mu Dalan left, Mrs. Lin approached like a cat who stole fish, and knocked vigorously on Mu Dalan's door.

"Wake up, wake up, the sun's already at mid-morning, why are you still sleeping, you lazy woman?" Mrs. Lin's abrasive voice echoed through the Old Mu Family.

They had just finished breakfast; relatives and neighbors had already left.

Only the Old Mu Family remained.

Mrs. Lin became even more unabashed in her actions.

Huang Bitu groggily awoke, opening the door in a daze, only to have a bucket of cold water thrown onto her face.

In the winter, water felt like needles piercing her face, bringing her to instant awareness.

Seeing Mrs. Lin, she didn't dare refute.

"I told you yesterday, rise with the first rooster crow, what? Do you treat my words like the wind?" Mrs. Lin berated.

"Mother, I did get up this morning, but..." Huang Bitu began to explain but was interrupted by Mrs. Lin.

"But what? You little fox, don't tell me it was my son who stopped you from getting up. I'm warning you, my son is young; if you dare keep him from doing shameless things all day, I'll peel off your fox skin and parade you through the village, soaked in a pig cage!"

"Disgusting little witch!" Mrs. Lin finished, rudely bumping Huang Bitā to the floor, striding to the kang bed of Huang Bitā and Mu Dalan, examining the bloodstains on the white fabric. Her face finally relaxed slightly.

"Good thing, you're not used goods someone else touched, or I'd make you pay dearly!"

With those words, Mrs. Lin strutted out of Huang Bitā's room like a peacock.

Each of Mrs. Lin's words felt like sharp knives leaving Huang Bitā bleeding all over.

She closed the door, wanting to cry but not daring.

After a while, Mrs. Lin's shout echoed from the courtyard.

"Why are you still in the room, should I as the mother-in-law do the wife's work? Get out!"

Chapter 818: You Have to Listen to Me (Part 1)

Mrs. Lin shouted angrily, calling Huang Bitā out of the room, who hadn't had time to wipe her face.

Huang Bitā looked timidly at the unfamiliar courtyard before her, thinking of her three brothers at home for some reason.

"Mom, what... should I do?"

"Hmph, you still ask what to do, can't you see that pile of clothes?" Mrs. Lin snorted coldly, pointing at the wooden basin under the big tree in the courtyard and shouting at Huang Bitā.

The wooden basin was filled with a full load of clothes, both men's and women's, even women's undergarments and bellybands.

Huang Bitā had washed clothes at home for more than ten years, even washing her three brothers' underwear herself.

She opened her mouth, just about to ask Mrs. Lin something, when Mrs. Lin rushed back into her room and came out with another pile of clothes, throwing it on the ground next to the wooden basin.

"These need to be washed as well. Also, from now on, if anyone's clothes in the house get dirty, you must wash them! Don't say that as a mother-in-law I didn't warn you! In this house, you must be observant and know the people you should serve. Otherwise, we at Old Mu Family would rather not have you as a daughter-in-law and let you and your three brothers live a lifetime of poverty."

Huang Bitā was so chastised that her head almost fell to her chest.

She did not dare to refute Mrs. Lin. Even though her parents had died early, the elders around her always said that women must marry in this life, and once married, must listen to their mother-in-law.

The mother-in-law is like heaven, the things the mother-in-law tells the daughter-in-law to do, the daughter-in-law must do.

"Got it!" Huang Bitā replied, but her voice was as soft as a mosquito's buzz.

"If you get it, then go do it. Don't stand there like a fool; one might think my son married a simpleton."

At this moment, Mrs. Lin finally somewhat understood why the old woman always had these daughters-in-law doing this and that, it came down to a sense of accomplishment.

She inherently didn't like Huang Bitā, now that Huang Bitā became her daughter-in-law, she could torment her however she liked, and nobody could interfere.

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Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng arrived in the county, and Mu Dalang got off the ox cart. He came to town this time to negotiate the price with his master to buy a few sheep to bring back, and to get some food for Huang Bitu.

As a newlywed couple, Mu Dalang always wanted to give Huang Bitu the best things.

Mu Shuangshuang watched Mu Dalang walk away, then let Lu Yuanfeng drive the ox cart to their own small courtyard.

Regarding the opening of the restaurant and the purchase of the property, Mu Shuangshuang was very low-key and hadn't mentioned it to anyone outside the family, while Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang were even more cautious.

They always adhered to the principle of not showing wealth, and since they dressed the same as before, no one could guess that the third branch now had an enterprise in town.

This time, with only ten days until the New Year, the atmosphere in the town was already particularly festive.

Sellers of spring couplets and New Year goods were everywhere you could see.

It seems that every year at this time, business was best, the ox cart had trouble getting through several times.

Finally arriving at their own property, everyone was sweating profusely.

"Shuangshuang, is this really our house?" Yu Si Niang was full of surprise.

The courtyard in front of them, though called a small house, still had quite a few rooms when viewed from outside, and compared to their house in the countryside, it wasn't small.

The third branch's house in the countryside was really quite rudimentary, without a main room or a utility room.

All the clutter could only be stored in the pigsty or the kitchen.

Luckily, when they built the kitchen, they knew to build it big enough, otherwise, many things would have to be left outside.

"Oh my, we finally have our own courtyard! We can finally... not be bullied anymore." This was something Yu Si Niang had held inside for a long time.

She didn't dare enter the courtyard, only dared to walk back and forth outside looking.

Mu Shuangshuang looked at Yu Si Niang behaving this way, feeling sweet-hearted, at last, she and Fengzi had stood up for the family, taking the first step toward prosperity.

Now the third branch had fields, land, the academy was being built, the restaurant was preparing, and in the future, the third branch's life would only get better.

"Dad and Mom, let's not stand outside any longer, if someone sees us, it would be laughed at." Mu Shuangshuang said.

After she spoke, Mu Dashan nodded: "Yes, no matter how good the house is, we need to look closely to appreciate it."

The three little children were also excited, unable to wait, rubbing their hands together, just waiting for the adults to give the order.

Now that Mu Shuangshuang said it was okay to go in, the three kids immediately ran inside.

Everything in the courtyard was unfamiliar, but the three kids didn't feel intimidated, they ran around the front yard in a circle, with the sounds of the children's laughter, the courtyard suddenly seemed more lively.

In this courtyard, there were two ginkgo trees, and quite a few ginkgo leaves were scattered on the ground, Yu Si Niang quickly picked up a broom and started cleaning, as if she were in her own yard.

The remaining few people went into the backyard, in the house, Mu Shuangshuang almost hadn't cleaned, and some of the stuff that was old and should have been thrown out hadn't been.

After working on it the whole morning, Mu Shuangshuang and the four of them finally cleaned up the inside and outside of the courtyard.

Looking at this huge task, even Mu Shuangshuang herself felt it was a bit unbelievable.

"Fengzi, several windows here need replacing, along with the back door, also the stove in the kitchen, the utility room leaks..."

Mu Shuangshuang listed all the problems with the property at once.

No wonder the owner of Fulin Restaurant sold this property so cheaply to Mu Shuangshuang, it turned out the property was too old.

The utility room needed refurbishment, so many doors and windows needed replacing, the roof also needed new tiles, calculating it all required three to five taels of silver to get it right.

"It's fine, I'll find someone to do it, in town I know two people who returned from military service, they still do some masonry work around here, finding them shouldn't take much time."

After all, it's fixing a house, not building one, once the materials are bought, in a day or two, it can be done.

Mu Shuangshuang felt reassured after listening to Lu Yuanfeng.

"By the way, Shuangshuang, when will our restaurant open?" Mu Dashan asked.

Currently, Mu Dashan needed to focus on the academy project in the village, if the timelines in the town clash, it could be problematic.

"Dad, this will be handled with Fengzi, you just need to manage the academy well, today's lunch was done by Aunt Xiao Yun, tomorrow I plan to give her a day off and help out myself."

At the construction site, several people built a shed nearby, the shed had a stove inside, with tables and everything, after work, everyone ate there.

The cooks were Zhao Yun and Yu Si Niang.

Usually, one tends the fire while the other cooks, today with Yu Si Niang out on the street, Zhao Yun had to handle everything herself.

Preparing meals for seven or eight men was not a simple task.

Chapter 819: Restaurant Management

Mu Shuangshuang's proposal was agreed upon by everyone.

However, by noon, it was about time to have lunch.

Lu Yuanfeng always knew what Shuangshuang was thinking. Just as Mu Shuangshuang had this thought, he said, "Shuangshuang, why don't we go to Fulin Restaurant for a meal and take the opportunity to get to know the staff and how the restaurant operates?"

Mu Shuangshuang certainly had no objections, but she also wanted to see what Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang thought.

"Dad, Mom, what do you think?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Your mother and I have no objections. We also want to see what the restaurant is like. It's funny, we own the place now, but we know nothing about it."

"Checking it out will help us understand it better." Mu Shuangshuang blinked and said.

With laughter, everyone changed their spot and headed to the restaurant.

At this time, Fulin Restaurant was still in operation. Because it was noon, the business was better than when Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng last visited, yet it still seemed quite empty.

The people dining there were mainly drawn by Fulin Restaurant's nostalgic charm and the cheaper meals compared to other places.

Mu Shuangshuang glanced around and noticed that the shopkeeper was not there. Instead, there was a man in his thirties at the counter, whom she suspected was Brother Xiuxiu, as Xiuxiu mentioned her brother was a steward at Fulin.

Mu Shuangshuang looked carefully and noticed the man's facial features resembled Xiuxiu's.

Mu Shuangshuang approached the steward and asked, "Is your shopkeeper not here?"

The steward was slightly taken aback as he was unaware of Mu Shuangshuang's identity. On the day Mu Shuangshuang took over the restaurant, the steward was not present and later when she was introduced to the staff, he was still absent.

Therefore, he naturally did not recognize Mu Shuangshuang or Lu Yuanfeng, assuming she was just there for a casual chat or to inquire about some matters.

Being a steward, he had encountered many people like this, so he did not find it strange.

With a natural demeanor, the steward looked at Mu Shuangshuang without any signs of disdain.

"Our shopkeeper has already moved to the county, and the work here is managed by me. But after the Lunar New Year, I won't be here either," the steward said.

"Not here? Is it because the restaurant was taken over?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"No, I bought eight acres of land in the countryside and plan to farm it with my wife and several kids."

Eight acres of land in the countryside is at least sixteen taels' worth of property, possibly even thirty if it's good farmland.

Mu Shuangshuang was increasingly certain that the man in front of her was indeed Xiuxiu's brother. Xiuxiu had mentioned that her brother had earned some money at Fulin, but the rise of Jiu Si Xuan and First-class Residence took away Fulin's business, making it less profitable.

In Mu Shuangshuang's opinion, the basic salary should still be there. A steward like him would earn at least a few hundred copper coins a month, maybe even one tael of silver.

"Why not work at another restaurant? Given your experience as a steward at Fulin, finding another job shouldn't be a problem," Mu Shuangshuang said.

The steward shook his head, "I've been here at Fulin for so many years, and I've formed a bond. Going to another restaurant might not suit me. So, I'd rather farm some land and at least be with my family."

To explain, a restaurant can operate in two ways. If the shopkeeper only owns one establishment, they oversee it personally, without the need to hire a steward.

However, if the shopkeeper has several restaurants or other businesses to attend to, they would need to hire someone to manage the restaurant.

Take Fulin Restaurant, for example. Xiuxiu's brother was hired as a steward and has almost the same authority as the shopkeeper, with even better connections with the staff.

Currently, Mu Shuangshuang couldn't decide whether to continue hiring Brother Xiuxiu as the steward, because if she became the shopkeeper, she would be able to keep an eye on the restaurant.

Moreover, she didn't need to be there every day as long as she entrusted it to a reliable person.

"Do you know Yu Xiuxiu?" Mu Shuangshuang suddenly asked.

"You know my sister?" The steward looked surprised.

"Not only do I know her, but we are also sisters. It was Xiuxiu who told me that Fulin Restaurant was up for grabs, which is why I came over."

"Are you the new shopkeeper?"

At this point, the steward understood why Mu Shuangshuang was asking so many questions.

"Yes! Today I came with my parents and another shopkeeper to have a meal and get to know the restaurant's operations in advance. However, I still have a few questions to ask Brother Xiuxiu, if that's okay?"

Referring to him as Brother Xiuxiu moved the steward.

Being a friend of his sister, the steward was willing to give her this courtesy.

"My name is Yu Dahai, but you can call me Da Hai. I have worked at Fulin Restaurant for nearly ten years. It used to be a popular brand in this area, but unfortunately, it hasn't changed much over the years, whether in terms of the chef or the restaurant's decor.

It's nostalgic, but it tends to make customers lose interest," Yu Dahai said.

An old brand can't rely on its age alone to keep running; it needs competitiveness as well.

However, these modern business ideas might not be immediately understood by Yu Dahai even if he was told.

Still, it was evident that Brother Xiuxiu had put in great effort and truly knew Fulin Restaurant inside and out.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't want Yu Dahai to leave after all.

She was already thinking about how to keep Yu Dahai there and let him use his abilities.

In a restaurant, the front yard manages people, the office manages finances, and there's also procurement in the kitchen, which are all profitable positions.

For the kitchen, Mu Shuangshuang would definitely use her own people.

As for the front yard management, she could always give instructions, so Mu Shuangshuang decided to keep Yu Dahai.

"Steward Yu, are you interested in staying as the steward at the restaurant? The restaurant staff and the waiters will still report to you, and when I'm not here, you have decision-making authority. How about it?"

Yu Dahai nodded repeatedly after hearing Mu Shuangshuang's words.

If he could stay at Fulin, it would be the best scenario, even if the salary was lower, he didn't mind.

The land in the countryside could be rented out to support his wife and children.

"But... but I don't want to stay just because of Xiuxiu," Yu Dahai hesitated.

"It's simple. After the restaurant opens, I'll assess for three months. If business improves, you continue. If not, I'll find someone else.

Of course, I have a special business method, but how to implement it depends on you. Okay?"

The special business method was something Yu Dahai had never seen before.

For some reason, he instinctively trusted the young girl in front of him, as if what she said was very convincing.

"Okay! We'll do it as you said."

Chapter 820: We'll Talk When Things Slow Down

Mu Shuangshuang set an observation period for Yu Dahai, and the evaluation criteria were also established.

If he truly had the capability to aid in the restaurant's management, Mu Shuangshuang would naturally keep him on. If he didn't, Mu Shuangshuang would not hesitate to let him go.

This method avoids embarrassing both parties, indeed it's not bad!

"Shopkeeper, please go ahead and order some dishes. Whatever you need, just let one of the restaurant staff know."

Yu Dahai was also concerned that he might delay Mu Shuangshuang's meal, so he first let Mu Shuangshuang solve the eating issue.

Thinking she could chat with Yu Dahai after her meal, Mu Shuangshuang went to order some dishes.

The waiter, knowing Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, used the time when Mu Shuangshuang was speaking with Yu Dahai to explain the menu to Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan, detailing all the restaurant's specialties.

"By the way, do many of the diners who come to the restaurant understand the written menu?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

The waiter was slightly taken aback. After a moment, he sheepishly scratched his head and said, "I'm sorry, Shopkeeper, I can't really tell who can read or write!"

Although the waiter was familiar with delivering dishes and taking orders, it was indeed difficult to figure out which guests had school education and could read.

"Alright!" Mu Shuangshuang nodded with a smile, already forming a rough idea in her mind regarding the menu issue.

It seemed she would need to create paper menus with illustrations in the future.

Mu Shuangshuang then asked Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang, "Dad, Mom, have you decided on what dishes you want?"

"Shuangshuang, you and Fengzi decide, your father and I don't really know what to order," Yu Si Niang said, glancing at Mu Dashan. The couple rarely dined out, so it was better to let their daughter handle the ordering.

"Fengzi, what do you want to eat?"

"I'm fine with anything, it's better if you decide, Shuangshuang!"

Seeing that no one wanted to decide, Mu Shuangshuang concluded, "Alright, waiter, please ask the kitchen to prepare all the house specialties for us. Whatever we can't finish, we'll just pack and take home."

Mu Shuangshuang also wanted to assess the chef's skills. If they were satisfactory, she might not need to find another chef.

Even though Mu Shuangshuang had not yet taken over the restaurant, the staff regarded her no less than the shopkeeper.

After she spoke, the waiter hurried off to the back to discuss it with the chef.

Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang were looking around, finding everything exceedingly novel.

Even now, they still felt somewhat dazed, as if they were dreaming.

Their family now owned a few acres of land, a restaurant, and other businesses.

"Ah, we must work harder in the future! Brother is going to the Capital to take exams; when he returns, his status will certainly have changed. We, the third branch, can't be seen as taking advantage."

Mu Dashan believed his brother Mu Dade could achieve good results in the Imperial Examination, even becoming the Champion Scholar.

"Dad, don't worry. Our family will get better and better! With you, Mom, me, and Fengzi, with all of us, how could we not run a restaurant well?"

"Exactly, there is strength in numbers; if Shuangshuang says it can be done, then it surely can. Remember how tough things were? Who would have thought that after just a few months, we could enjoy a life with meat on the table every day?" Yu Si Niang added her thoughts.

Only then did Mu Dashan feel reassured; indeed, the third branch was no longer the same and must now stand tall.

At this moment, the waiter brought out the dishes, and the family started enjoying their meal.

When they were full, Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan took the children to the back courtyard to explore the restaurant, and Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng stayed in the main hall to discuss business matters with the steward.

The restaurant would operate until just before the New Year; after that, it would remain unused, unless Mu Shuangshuang reopened it.

But it wouldn't be that easy, at least the renovation Brother Xiu Xiu mentioned, and customers getting tired of the menu, would have to be reconsidered, as well as recruiting new staff.

Each of these matters needed to be addressed before reopening.

"Brother Xiu Xiu, which people in the restaurant do you think are useful or useless?"

Mu Shuangshuang spoke directly.

This was partly because she trusted Yu Dahai and partly because she didn't want to waste too much time. If selecting staff from within the restaurant took too long, she would simply post notices outside to recruit new staff.

"It's hard to say, really. There's no one bad here; the previous owner was very keen on character when hiring. Anyone with poor character was let go."

Yu Dahai was straightforward.

After a while, he added, "Chef Old Li told me that another restaurant has already tried to poach him, and he's also planning to leave. Also, accountant Old Bai is preparing to return to the countryside."

So, the positions of chef and accountant would soon be vacant.

These are quite crucial parts of a restaurant, aligning with what Mu Shuangshuang had been considering.

The only issue was that finding a chef could be difficult.

She needed someone she could trust, as she wanted to create some unique dishes to potentially compete with First-class Residence and Jiu Si Xuan.

In terms of scale and prestige, Fulin Restaurant was at best a small establishment, not even medium-sized. Otherwise, Mu Shuangshuang wouldn't have been able to acquire two properties for just over a hundred taels.

"Brother Xiu Xiu, can you help me keep an eye out for a chef who could work here? They don't need to have a lot of experience, but they must be willing to learn."

"Sure, I'll go around and ask about it in the next few days!" Yu Dahai readily agreed.

Mu Shuangshuang was quite satisfied with Yu Dahai for now; his demeanor and way of speaking gave a genuine impression, showing no signs of deceit.

Of course, time would reveal more through further interaction.

"Brother Xiu Xiu, I'll leave the restaurant to you for the time being. Once things quiet down, let's sit down together, have a meal, chat, and decide on the restaurant's management strategies, okay?"

Mu Shuangshuang spoke in a consultative tone, and Yu Dahai couldn't help but admire her.

He had once thought that as a young man, he'd have to spend his life in the countryside on a small plot of land.

And he had worried that the new shopkeeper would be difficult to deal with.

But now, all those concerns seemed unnecessary; he was confident that he would have a good working relationship with this shopkeeper.

"Shopkeeper, leave the restaurant to me, I can guarantee that those who remain here will be the best people." He assured.

Mu Shuangshuang smiled joyously, gently pursing her lips.

"Fengzi, it's about time. Let's call Dad and Mom and head to the market, get some New Year's goods ready in advance."