

Folly 821

Chapter 821: The Restaurant Opening Got Exposed

As soon as Mu Shuangshuang finished speaking, Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan came out from the backyard.

Both of them had satisfied smiles on their faces, suggesting that they were quite pleased with the restaurant's kitchen and backyard.

Mu Shuangshuang went up to them and mentioned wanting to go shopping, to which Mu Dashan immediately nodded in agreement.

"Indeed, we do need to buy some things, our academy needs quite a bit of food."

Fortunately, the third branch grew a lot of vegetables this year, and they can't finish all the greens themselves.

"Alright then!" Mu Shuangshuang paid the steward, although Brother Xiu Xiu initially disagreed, but Mu Shuangshuang said the restaurant wasn't hers yet, they'd talk about it later when she took over.

Only then did Yu Dahai accept Mu Shuangshuang's silver without any deductions and helped her pack up the leftover food, carrying it in a food box.

They all left through the front door of the Fulin Restaurant, none of them noticed Mu Jia's eldest daughter, Mu Xianxian, who had come with Cao Miaomiao to drink, staring at them wide-eyed as they left.

Cao Miaomiao, with an oily chicken leg in each hand, noticed her mother suddenly stopping and acting suspiciously.

So she loudly asked, "Mom, why are you squatting here like a thief?"

Mu Xianxian was startled and turned to Cao Miaomiao, "Shh! You little mischief, keep your voice down, do you want your uncle to find out that I'm spying?"

Cao Miaomiao was puzzled for a moment then snorted like a pig, "Mom, what did you say, where's my uncle, I didn't see him."

Seeing Cao Miaomiao's innocent face, Mu Xianxian felt both anxious and helpless.

Fortunately, she found a good family for her daughter to marry into.

The Liu Family, which has produced a scholar, so even if her daughter isn't great, she won't have to worry about food and clothing for the rest of her life.

"If you didn't see him, then never mind, but your uncle just came out of the restaurant, and I haven't heard of any relatives from the Old Mu Family holding a banquet there.

Your uncle is also known to be extremely stingy and frugal, he wouldn't willingly spend money to eat at a restaurant. Miaomiao, you wait here for a bit, I'm going in to find out what's going on."

With that, Mu Xianxian entered the restaurant, where a waiter quickly approached and asked, "What would you like to eat, guest? We have chicken, duck, fish, and meat, all with special flavors."

"I'm not here to eat, just wanted to ask if the country bumpkins who just took a packed meal were eating here?"

The so-called country bumpkins must be the family from the third branch.

Mu Xianxian didn't expect that as soon as she said that, the waiter's expression turned sour.

"Who are you calling a country bumpkin, that's our future owner, if you don't know, don't speak nonsense. We're not doing business with you, get lost!"

Fulin Restaurant always had a rule set by Yu Dahai long ago: anyone insulting Fulin Restaurant or the shopkeeper would never get served here in their lifetime.

"Heh, just a little broken restaurant, what's there to be smug about? Future owner, my foot, your crappy restaurant will probably shut down tomorrow!"

Mu Xianxian threw her silk handkerchief at the waiter's face, almost hitting his eye.

Seeing this, Yu Dahai came over from the backyard to ask what was going on.

"Steward, this woman called our owner a country bumpkin, I told her to leave, but she refused and even swept her silk handkerchief at my face..."

The waiter reported the situation to Yu Dahai without daring to lie.

Yu Dahai's face also looked grim; he figured this person might know Mu Shuangshuang and was probably here to snoop.

"Hmph, as the steward, tell me, isn't your staff too arrogant? I suggest you pack him up and throw him out, this kind of person isn't fit to be a waiter,"

Mu Xianxian kept on cursing when Yu Dahai arrived.

"Madam, if you think he's not fit to be a waiter, why don't you give it a try? Everyone's trying to make a living; you insulted our owner first, our waiter was only rude to protect our owner.

Besides, even if our owner is a country bumpkin, he's the shopkeeper of a restaurant. As for what you are, you should think about it yourself, don't use disdain for our owner's silver just because it's not a chicken egg!"

Yu Dahai's words were heartening to everyone.

The nearby waiters all felt their blood boiling with fervor.

Mu Xianxian gritted her teeth in anger, her entire body trembling before she finally spoke, "Just wait and see! You just wait for me..."

As soon as Mu Xianxian left the restaurant, Yu Dahai instructed the waiter, "In the future, if anyone comes asking about the new owner, just say you don't know.

Also, if our restaurant is going to operate with these new methods as the new owner suggested, we have to keep our mouths shut, that's the only way to make money, understand?"

The waiter nodded repeatedly.

"And remember what this woman looks like, when the new owner comes visit, make sure to mention this incident."

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Furious, Mu Xianxian left the Fulin Restaurant, looked around, and couldn't find her daughter Cao Miaomiao.

Mu Xianxian felt a bit panicked; her daughter had always been raised carefully by her side and had never been out alone, she always accompanied her.

Oh heavens, Miao Miao might be lost!

Mu Xianxian's hands and feet felt weak, and she started shouting loudly, "Miaomiao, where are you..."

Her throat was almost hoarse, and she didn't see Cao Miaomiao, just as she was about to head back, she saw at the street corner, where someone was selling sugar cakes, Cao Miaomiao being pulled by a brute with arms like tree trunks.

Mu Xianxian rushed over and knocked away the man's hand.

"Molesting my daughter in broad daylight, you're way too bold, I'm going to report you and have you in jail for life."

The man was stunned by the sudden scolding from Mu Xianxian, and after a moment, came back to his senses.

"Bullshit! Your daughter ate eight of my sugar cakes and didn't pay a dime! I haven't even complained about her face being bigger than a dinner plate, and you call me a molester? Woman, you must be trying to run from the bill."

The moment the man finished, the hawkers around dropped their work, glaring at Mu Xianxian threateningly, as if ready to pounce if she dared not pay.

But Mu Xianxian was no pushover; these people were all from poor backgrounds and didn't really have the gall.

"What? Harassing and now trying to extort money? Let me tell you, my brother is a scholar, and my daughter's future husband is also a scholar. If you dare touch me, you'll regret it!"

The sugar cake vendor was quite an experienced hawker in this area and had never come across someone like Mu Xianxian before.

"Aren't you afraid of biting your tongue with your lies? With your daughter's arms thicker than my thighs, a face like a pig, and greasy enough to cook a meal with, what kind of dimwitted scholar would ever fancy her?"

If there is one, he's probably a cripple, or lame, otherwise, just plain stupid, and even a fool wouldn't take her!"

Chapter 822: Hope It's Not Those Worn-Out Shoes Again!

A single word, "fool," made Cao Miaomiao throw away the sugar cake she was eating and burst into tears, yelling, "Mom, look at what he said, he... I can't live anymore!"

Cao Miaomiao cried as she sat down heavily on the ground.

The spot where she sat, coincidentally, was right on the sugar cake she had tossed away.

The sugar cake was crushed into crumbs!

Mu Xianxian took eight coins out of the money pouch and fiercely threw them onto the ground.

Then she said to the man, "Remember this, I won't spare you!"

After speaking, Mu Xianxian went to pull Cao Miaomiao.

"Miaomiao, be good, let's go home!" Mu Xianxian consoled patiently.

But Cao Miaomiao had had this strange temper since childhood; even the granny in the Cao Family didn't dare to scold her.

Whoever dared to criticize her would surely cause an uproar at home, making it chaotic for half a day.

"Miaomiao, haven't you always wanted to visit Grandma's house? Get up, I'll take you to see Grandma!"

And she planned to visit the Old Mu Family to ask why the third branch opened a restaurant.

Mu Xianxian still held a grudge deep in her heart.

She, Mu Xianxian, was the first in the Old Mu Family to leave the farm, and she had worked hard to establish her shoe store.

But what did the third branch do?

A filthy, smelly daughter, and the third son was an honest, useless brute.

Shouldn't such a family spend their lives farming in the countryside?

The more she thought about it, the angrier Mu Xianxian became.

The seated Cao Miaomiao stopped crying when she heard her mother was willing to let her go to the countryside.

Mu Xianxian had always restricted Cao Miaomiao from going to Er Gui Village, simply because she felt the people there were low-class, all dirt farmers, and couldn't be of any help to her.

Mu Xianxian and her daughter returned to the Cao Family. Mu Xianxian discussed with her husband about going to the countryside, and Miaomiao's father agreed without hesitation.

After all, now that the Old Mu Family had a scholar, regardless of its utility, it was certainly a reputable matter if mentioned.

Mu Xianxian found a carriage, skipped her afternoon nap, and took Cao Miaomiao to Er Gui Village.

As soon as the carriage arrived at the Old Mu Family, it was surrounded by onlookers.

Everyone knew that since Mu Dade became a scholar, whenever he was home, carriages would often come with piles of gifts; it was impossible not to be envious.

Mu Xianxian descended from the carriage, proud under the envious gazes of the crowd.

Behind her was Cao Miaomiao, wearing a bright red silk skirt, her face squeezed into a mass due to excessive weight, resembling a moving meatball from afar.

Mrs. Lin was the first to come out, spotting Mu Xianxian immediately, and hurried over.

"Oh, Aunt Dog Egg is here? And Miaomiao too?" Mrs. Lin greeted warmly; Mu Xianxian, however, wore a disdainful expression, pretended not to see Mrs. Lin, and headed straight for the backyard of the Old Mu Family.

Mrs. Lin's face naturally darkened; she was planning to marry her daughter to the scholar. But Mu Xianxian's attitude was nothing short of contempt.

Mrs. Lin stormed into the yard angrily. Inside the living room, everyone was gathered, talking about Mu Xianxian's return, even Mu Dade seldom smiled.

Mrs. Lin had always disliked this aunt; she herself was the first to marry into town, often bragging to the daughters-in-law about her husband's skills, how prosperous her shoe business in town was.

Yet over the years, despite her visits, she was never generous.

Her dog egg was almost seven or eight years old now, and in all that time, the aunt had never spared a single penny.

"Aunt Dog Egg, what gifts have you brought today?" Mrs. Lin asked.

Old Mrs. Mu looked displeased because no one asks guests for gifts upon meeting them.

"Second daughter-in-law, if you can't speak properly, then don't speak. Shut up for me!"

Mrs. Lin pouted, feeling wronged, "I just wanted to ask, Dog Egg was very happy to hear Aunt was coming just now."

"Mom, don't be like that to Xiao Zao. We seldom have guests, so it's normal for Xiao Zao to misunderstand me!" Mu Xianxian tried to mediate, while secretly berating Mrs. Lin for her ignorance.

Mrs. Lin's face turned steel-blue, she retorted bluntly:

"Aunt Dog Egg, aren't you just bringing a few pairs of outdated, unsellable shoes again? Our Old Mu Family might be farmers, but we can still afford those broken cloth shoes. They're only a few coins a pair at most!"

It was Mu Shuangshuang who discovered Mu Xianxian used unsellable shoes from the store and passed them off as good ones, talking to Yu Si Niang, Lin happened to overhear while picking vegetables.

In the past, she dared not challenge Mu Xianxian, but things were different now.

Her daughter was becoming more capable; if she truly befriended the Song Family, she wouldn't even need to consider the old lady.

"Xiao Zao, do you have some misunderstanding with me? What I brought are the best shoes from our store, each costing a tael of silver."

When pinpointed on the matter, Mu Xianxian still refused to admit, instead firmly stating that Mrs. Lin misunderstood.

"Whether it's a misunderstanding, Aunt Dog Egg knows in her heart. As for me, Lin Xiaozao, I can't hold back my thoughts."

While Lin argued with Mu Xianxian, the rest of the Old Mu Family watched the drama unfold.

Mrs. Jin from the first branch knew exactly what was going on, for it was undoubtedly true, yet Mrs. Jin remained silent since she wouldn't want such unsellable shoes anyway.

"Hmph, since you don't believe me, I won't bring shoes anymore! And Miaomiao always said she wanted to come see Grandpa and Grandma; I spent so much time persuading my mother-in-law.

Forget it, if no one appreciates it, why should I make it so I'm caught between a rock and a hard place!"

"Big sister, that's not what we mean." Mu Dajiang said sheepishly.

He was the only one in the Old Mu Family willing to stand up, for a simple reason: every time Mu Xianxian brought shoes, even if they didn't last as long as Lin said, it was still new shoes for his daughter and son.

The children always anticipated Aunt's visits.

Having new shoes, improving their life, was enough for the fourth branch.

Mu Xianxian's expression softened slightly.

"At least the fourth brother knows to care for me as the big sister!"

"By the way, today in town, I saw the third branch; I heard they opened a restaurant in town. Dad, Mom, did you know?" Mu Xianxian asked.

"What? The third branch opened a restaurant? Haha, big sister, don't joke around. We know well how the third branch's land was acquired; where would they get the money for a restaurant?"

That fertile field was taken to save second sister's life by that stinky girl, and the dry land in Tie Dao Village is worthless!" Mu Dajian expressed disbelief to Mu Xianxian.

Chapter 823: Tipping Off

"Fifth, what do you mean by that? Are you saying I'm lying?" Mu Xianxian said displeased.

"Big sister, I didn't mean that, I'm just telling the truth! We all know what the third branch is like, how could they suddenly be so lucky and afford to open a restaurant." Mu Danian insisted that it was impossible.

Even if someone else had said it, Mu Xianxian wouldn't have believed such a thing existed.

But this matter, she personally went to ask, how could it be wrong?

"Hmph, you still think the third branch is the same as before, you forgot about that stinky girl's cold noodles recipe? Back then, that stinky girl asked us for over a thousand Silver Tael.

Maybe she sold the cold noodles recipe, made money, and bought the restaurant with it," Mu Xianxian said.

Mu Xianxian's words not only made the Old Mu Family realize but also made Mu Dade, who was quietly drinking tea and watching the fun, realize.

He had forgotten! Back when he just returned from the county, he encountered a restaurant in town coming to the third branch to buy the cold noodles recipe. Mu Dade then had the Fourth's family help, found a restaurant's shopkeeper, drafted a contract, put a fingerprint on it, and casually sold the third branch's cold noodles recipe.

Mu Dade didn't think this method would necessarily put the third branch at a disadvantage, after all, that stinky girl from the third branch was not easy to fool.

It's just that the relationship between the third branch and the fourth branch has always been good, and the third brother is very protective, maybe because of the relationship with the fourth, he might give up the good stuff from the third branch.

"So, the third branch really has a restaurant? It's no joke," Mu Dazhong was also full of surprise.

"How is the third branch so lucky, quietly opening a restaurant without a word? I said, this morning, I asked Yu Si Niang what the whole family was going to town for, and she hesitated and didn't say anything for a long time," Mrs. Lin said angrily.

Now, the third branch has become the object of envy and jealousy in everyone's eyes, as everyone thinks the third branch quietly went off to make a fortune and didn't take them along.

"I think, back then, I was too merciful, giving the third branch a chance to turn things around, and now they're buying land, preparing to build an academy, and now even have a restaurant," Mu Dajian thought more and more angrily.

The third branch was clearly the worst among all the branches, living the worst and without money, how come they are living better than any of them.

In the end, it was because Mu Dade passed the scholar examination and didn't give any benefits to his brothers.

Everyone was still poor, those who couldn't afford clothes still couldn't, and even what they wore was not as good as those families in the village who hadn't passed the scholar examination.

Mu Dade and they didn't dare complain, because everyone knew that in the future, they'd have to rely on this big brother to live.

But the third branch could complain, without power, even if they have money, so what, the scholar was in their hands.

Except for the fourth branch, which didn't get involved in the Old Mu Family's business, the other branches basically thought the third branch should pay up.

"So what to do now? The third branch opened a restaurant, doesn't that mean they have money now and can live well?" Mu Dazhong asked.

"What can we do, now Xiangxiang is crazy, surely no one will come to propose, and we brothers will inevitably have to support Xiangxiang.

And in the future, when parents get old, everyone will have to take turns to support them, the third branch can't be allowed to not contribute anything! Even if they agree, the villagers won't agree," Mu Dajian said.

Speaking of Mu Xiangxiang, Old Mrs. Mu naturally had no objections and wholeheartedly agreed.

She doesn't care if the daughter is pretending to be crazy or will recover in the future, the main thing is to get some dowry money first.

"It's decided. When the third brother comes back, we'll make him pay up for my and the old man's retirement, and also for taking care of Xiangxiang."

Old Mrs. Mu made the decision, and everyone else in the Old Mu Family nodded in agreement.

Mu Dajian looked at the sly smiles on everyone's faces in the room and, for some reason, suddenly didn't want to be associated with them.

"Dad, Mom, the water tank at home is out of water, I'm going out to fetch some!" Mu Dajian said.

"Mom, you asked me to clean the kitchen, I haven't finished yet, I'm going to do it now," Mrs. Liu followed.

Old Mrs. Mu rolled her eyes and grumbled, "Clueless things, still thinking about siding with the third branch! Just waiting to die together with the third branch!"

Old Mrs. Mu's words were exactly heard by Mu Dajian and Mrs. Liu.

Though uncomfortable, they insisted on leaving the Old Mu Family's main room.

Once outside, Mu Dajiang didn't even take his tools, heading straight for the village entrance.

He wanted to wait for his third brother to come back at the village entrance.

Mrs. Liu sighed, "We said we'd split the family back then, but now we're still not split. If it goes on like this, we might never split in our lifetime."

Mu Dajiang said, "Xiaxia's mother, don't worry, we'll split the family sooner or later, but not now."

"Dad just told me a couple of days ago, when spring comes, we'll arrange a marriage for Xiaxia, find a good family. We'll think about splitting the family after Xiaxia is married."

"Sigh, I also don't know if Dad's word is trustworthy! Last time he clearly promised us, letting us split the family," Mrs. Liu said bitterly.

"Whether it's trustworthy or not, we'll find out come spring. If by then, Dad hasn't found a good match for Xiaxia, then we'll leave; just as well, there are a lot of things to do in spring, we can do some farm work for the villagers to earn Silver to support the two kids.

If it's really not possible, then we'll go find the third brother, didn't he open a restaurant? We can be runners delivering dishes there.

But the most important thing now is to talk to the third brother about what just happened, Mom and Dad will surely ask them for Silver, let them prepare early."

The couple both had a balance in their heart, knowing exactly what to do and when.

At such a time, if they still allowed the third branch to be bullied and acted as if they didn't know, they'd feel embarrassed to ask the third branch for help later.

Mu Dajiang and Mrs. Liu waited at the village entrance for an hour before they saw the ox cart borrowed by the third branch slowly approaching the village entrance.

Mu Dashan saw his younger brother from afar and quickly jumped off the ox cart, running to the village entrance.

"Fourth, why are you here?"

"Third brother, your opening of the restaurant in town was found out by big sister, and she came to tell Mom and Dad this afternoon.

Mom and Dad might ask you for money for their retirement and for Xiangxiang's medical and medicine expenses."

"What? For Mom and Dad's retirement? Didn't they say that once the brothers were capable, when Mom and Dad couldn't work anymore, they'd pay for their retirement?" Mu Dashan was full of shock.

As for the retirement expenses, there's no way Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang could avoid it, even Mu Dade, now a high-ranking official, couldn't shirk it.

Though, the Old Mu Family had many sons, and supporting them didn't cost much.

Mu Dajiang said, "I don't know either, anyway, you should be careful. Mom and Dad aren't easy to deal with, as for big sister..."

Chapter 824: The Most Poisonous Is a Woman's Heart

"Fourth brother, I know this must be hard for you! Thanks for coming over to tell me these things."

Mu Dashan looked at his brother in front of him, feeling quite emotional.

No one knows better than him how tough it is for the fourth branch.

It's not just about money, but staying in the Old Mu Family means being ordered around and treated unfairly by your parents.

Being ordered around isn't even the biggest problem; the biggest problem is a lifetime without hope.

"Third brother, it's getting late, I'll go back with Xiaxia's mother, you all figure out a strategy, and if there's anything, ask Shuangshuang and Fengzi, they're young and know more than us!"

Mu Dashan nodded repeatedly.

He watched Mu Dajiang return to the village, unable to pull himself together for a long time.

After Lu Yuanfeng drew close with the ox cart, Mu Shuangshuang also jumped down from the cart.

"Dad, what did my fourth uncle say to you in such a hurry?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Ah, the thing about us opening the restaurant was found out by your eldest aunt, who then told your grandparents. Your grandparents want to demand their retirement money early!"

Mu Dashan explained.

Asking for money, this matter can be big or small.

Besides, with his mother's temperament, who knows how much she'll ask for this time, like a lion opening its mouth wide.

Mu Dashan's worried face seemed to be somewhat distorted. He sighed deeply, unsure for a moment what to decide.

"This is simple—if grandparents want retirement money, it's not impossible. Whatever the other branches contribute, we'll contribute the same. Whenever they give, we'll give!"

As for the younger aunt... don't even think about getting a penny from our branch. Who's ever heard of the eldest brother needing to support the sister? And my younger aunt isn't mad at all; she's perfectly fine, so why should everyone support her?"

Mu Shuangshuang squinted her eyes at everyone.

It's not that Mu Shuangshuang doesn't have money now; even if she did, she wouldn't use it to support a worthless person like Mu Xiangxiang.

The old lady and old man just can't stand seeing the third branch doing well, so she won't foolishly let the third branch be the scapegoat.

"Your younger aunt hasn't gone mad? How could that be? If she's not mad, why did she cut your second aunt's hair? I saw your second aunt this morning, and she had black cloth wrapped around her head. When she saw me, she rushed back to her own room." Mu Dashan asked.

"It's precisely because she cut the second aunt's hair that I'm sure the younger aunt isn't mad! She hates the second aunt because during her illness, the second aunt found ways to torment her, making her voice sound like a man's."

"Using the excuse of feigning madness to torment the second aunt is a legitimate move, a strategy my grandma used to keep her from marrying into the Qin Family."

"Dad and Mom, Yuanfeng, think about it... On the day the younger aunt made such a big mistake at the wedding banquet of cousin Da Lang, why didn't anyone blame her? Isn't it because grandma said my younger aunt was 'mad'?"

"Grandma crafted the most pitiful scenario for the younger aunt, displayed it for everyone to see, and garnered sympathy. Everyone was too busy feeling sorry for the younger aunt to blame her."

Mu Shuangshuang calmly analyzed the situation for Mu Dashan and the others.

Listening to her words, everyone agreed that Mu Shuangshuang's statement was indeed reasonable.

Mu Dashan said, "Ah, truly, your grandma came up with such nasty tricks just to stop your younger aunt from marrying into the Qin Family."

"If it was like this, shouldn't they have never agreed to let your younger aunt marry into the family in the first place? Foolish, truly foolish!"

Mu Shuangshuang shook her head, "This plan didn't come from my grandma. The best she could come up with was to let the younger aunt escape. The idea of feigning madness, she wouldn't think of."

Mu Shuangshuang knew Old Mrs. Mu well, even if others didn't.

Despite her bad nature and unreasonable behavior, Old Mrs. Mu had her own style. Her ideas were quite primitive and crude.

This plan was refined, not something just anyone could conceive.

At least from Mu Shuangshuang's perspective, within the Old Mu Family, only three people might come up with such a scheme.

She was one, the other two were Mu Dade and Mrs. Jin.

The couple from the first branch couldn't wait for Mu Xiangxiang to get married and leave, and she herself wouldn't do it either.

Mu Shuangshuang, after some deduction, ended up attributing the matter to Liu Zian's mother, Mrs. Song.

On the day Mrs. Song came over, she gave the impression of being no pushover; yet Mu Shuangshuang couldn't quite figure out why she would help the Old Mu Family.

"If not your grandma, then who?" Mu Dashan asked.

"I know who came up with this plan..." Mu Shuangshuang elaborated her suspicions and thoughts with clear reasoning to Mu Dashan, his wife, and Lu Yuanfeng.

Yu Si Niang was so shocked she covered her mouth.

"Oh my, Shuangshuang, Liu Zian seemed like such a good person. What's wrong with his mother? Our branch hasn't offended her!"

"Mom, liking someone doesn't need a reason, but disliking someone definitely has one. Liu Zian's mom is naturally petty-minded and she's always misunderstood the relationship between Liu Zian and me.

She must be worried that I might drag Liu Zian down, wanting Liu Zian to distance himself from me."

Mu Shuangshuang in this matter has really suffered a big loss.

She barely even talked to Liu Zian, and she once did a good deed by saving up travel expenses for his exams.

If she had known there'd be so much trouble today, she definitely wouldn't have lent a hand.

Even if Qingshan Town ends up losing such an outstanding scholar!

"The most venomous hearts are those of women; we should still be cautious!" Mu Dashan expressed feeling.

Unexpectedly, it amused Mu Shuangshuang and Yu Si Niang into laughter.

The two looked at each other, finding Mu Dashan's comment rather funny.

"We should head back first and hear what grandparents have to say. Anyway, we've already come up with our plan; when the time comes, we'll adapt to the circumstances!"

Lu Yuanfeng's ox cart boldly headed towards the village, directly into the third branch.

Naturally, this couldn't escape the notice of the Old Mu Family.

Front feet Lu Yuanfeng returned the ox to Wang Fugui, and the members of the Old Mu Family moved in.

At that moment, the goods bought in town were still on the cart.

Rice, salt, oil, together made quite a lot.

"Hey, Shuang, heard you even have a restaurant now? Tell your second aunt how much you spent on the restaurant, what's left from it? Did you sell that lousy recipe?"

Mrs. Lin rushed forward, being the first to eat the crab and ask questions.

"Second aunt is well-informed, how did you know our branch bought a restaurant? Let Shuangshuang guess, maybe second aunt dreamt about it?" Mu Shuangshuang grinned foolishly, showing no fear of being caught.

"Shuang, don't joke around with us. We came today to ask for mine and your grandpa's retirement money from your branch. The restaurant's already opened, surely you won't mind such a small sum!"

"Third brother, Si Niang, we're not asking for much, just fifty taels of silver for retirement and twenty taels for Xiangxiang's treatment!"

Chapter 825: The Scheme Backfired!

Mu Dashan took a deep breath, seemingly trying to gather his courage. After a while, he said, "Mother, the restaurant belongs to Shuangshuang and Fengzi. Si Niang and I have no share. We haven't saved enough for your retirement yet!"

"What? It's not yours? Are you fooling this old lady? What's the difference between it being Shuang's and yours?" Old Mrs. Mu jumped with rage, pointing at Mu Dashan's nose as she spoke.

Mu Shuangshuang looked at Old Mrs. Mu's fierce expression, and she wasn't pleased.

"Of course there's a difference. I'm going to marry Fengzi, so the restaurant will eventually be Fengzi's property. You should understand this, right Grandma?"

Mu Shuangshuang felt a sense of relief saying this.

The Old Mu Family always eyed the third branch's belongings. Whenever the third branch had anything nice, they were eager to snatch it away.

When they couldn't get what they wanted, they would cause trouble. Mu Shuangshuang had become immune to Old Mrs. Mu's old tricks.

"Well! You dare to say such things, you ungrateful brat! Watch how this old lady deals with you today!" Old Mrs. Mu raised her hand, about to slap Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Dashan hurried over to block in front of Mu Shuangshuang. "Mother, Shuangshuang isn't wrong. Everything we have in the third branch now is earned by her and Fengzi. It's reasonable that it will belong to them in the future.

Your and father's retirement money will be earned by Si Niang and me with hard work. When our brothers have money, we'll all contribute together."

These words made Old Mrs. Mu tremble with anger.

She pointed at Mu Dashan, her mouth trembling, "You...you..."

"Mother, this is all I have to say. If you think it's too much, then take my life to repay it!"

"Smack!" Old Mrs. Mu lifted her hand, jumped up, and slapped Mu Dashan hard across the face.

The slap left Mu Shuangshuang and Yu Si Niang stunned.

Especially Yu Si Niang, whose tears started falling like beads, one after another.

Mu Shuangshuang then rushed over, dragging Mu Dashan into the house.

"Dad, Mom, leave this to me. You go inside!"

An honest person shouldn't confront such a fierce old thing like Old Mrs. Mu.

In her eyes, there's only money, no feelings.

With Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang inside, Mu Shuangshuang was left to face everything alone in the yard.

Old Mrs. Mu jumped and scolded Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang for being unfilial, wanting to attract villagers to watch the drama and point fingers at Mu Dashan.

Unfortunately, Old Mrs. Mu overestimated her standing.

"Aunt Mu, we all know what's going on with the third branch now. Although Dashan is planning to build a school in the village, whether it will be profitable is yet to be seen. Besides, matters of scholars shouldn't be measured with money.

You claim Dashan doesn't support you now, but have you thought about it? Your Da De is a scholar; he alone could take care of you for life. Why bother the third branch to support you?"

Zhang Yutou said bluntly.

The villagers chimed in, "Exactly, Dashan put so much effort into Da De's exams back then and didn't gain anything. Now you still want them to pay. Isn't this just sucking them dry?"

The more the people spoke, the more unreasonable Old Mrs. Mu seemed to them.

She had a scholar son she could rely on but instead targeted her honest third son; no one understood what she was thinking.

"What are you all saying? My son, I decide who supports me! Otherwise, why did I even bother having sons?" Old Mrs. Mu put her hands on her hips, displeased that the villagers sided with the third branch.

At this time, the third branch should be the one being scolded by the entire village for being unfilial.

"Your son should support you, but the issue here is, you are healthy and have a scholar son. If you need anything, go to Da De. Why bully the third branch?"

The villagers' discussions grew wilder, with some even suggesting favoritism has its limits, and Da De being a scholar should still set an example in filial piety.

The conversation started drifting towards Mu Dade.

Mr. Mu tapped on his dry tobacco pipe a few times and said, "Everyone, please go back. We won't ask the third branch for retirement money anymore. This matter, in fact, has nothing to do with Da De. He always hoped the third branch could return, so..."

"Mr. Mu, there's no need to explain, we've seen the situation."

The more Mr. Mu explained, the more the villagers thought something was amiss.

The more he tried to clarify, the more evident the issue seemed, and eventually, Mr. Mu couldn't handle the growing suspicion and quickly pulled Old Mrs. Mu towards the main house.

Mrs. Lin kept staring at the bag of rice in Mu Shuangshuang's cart, reluctant to leave until Mu Shuangshuang personally chased her away.

Only when the members of the Old Mu Family had left did Mu Shuangshuang say, "Thank you, everyone. Today's matter is noted in my heart. If there's any chance in the future where I can help, please feel free to tell me!"

"Alright, alright, everyone, let's disperse!" Zhao Yun waved her small cotton scarf, shouting to the villagers.

Only then did the crowd slowly disperse.

Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang came out from the house again, and neither looked happy, still seemingly upset over what had transpired earlier.

Mu Shuangshuang stepped forward to comfort them: "Dad, Mom, didn't we agree before we came here to use the simplest, most effective way to solve the problem? Don't worry, I have ways to stop Grandma from troubling the third branch!"

Mu Shuangshuang was never worried about Old Mrs. Mu.

As long as Mu Xiangxiang was around, Old Mrs. Mu wouldn't dare to do anything outrageous to the third branch.

"Ah, thinking about it, as a father, I'm really useless. Every time something happens, it's always my daughter who stands up," Mu Dashan said, feeling ashamed of himself.

Just now, his daughter's first reaction was to push him and Si Niang into the house, but he could do nothing.

"Dad, it's just our Old Mu Family's business. You and Mom are Grandpa and Grandma's son and daughter-in-law; there are things you can't say.

I may be from a younger generation, but sometimes words coming from me might be more effective!"

Actually, Mu Shuangshuang wanted to say that as long as she's around, at least the Old Mu Family wouldn't dare to use force.

She knows when to run if the situation becomes dangerous.

"Da Shan, stop worrying about trivial things, you're fortunate to have such a sensible daughter! At Old Mr. and Mrs. Mu's place, you can't really do anything outrageous.

But at other times, in other situations, you can still protect your daughter and wife. For example, when you sleep at night, with us men around, they can have a good rest.

No need to worry about thieves; you still say you're useless?" Zhang Yutou said with a smile.

Mu Dashan thought for a moment and realized it made sense; he wasn't completely useless.

"Hehe, that's right! I'm not that useless! But I should still talk to my sister and ask about the situation. She started today's trouble, so she has to settle it for me!"

Chapter 826: Struck to the Heart (Part 1)

"Dad, you'd better not bother with Auntie. If she dares to say those things, she obviously doesn't care what you say or do.

Let's just shut the door and live our own lives in peace; no need to upset ourselves because of her!"

Mu Shuangshuang stopped Mu Dashan, preventing him from going to seek so-called justice from Mu Xianxian.

Mu Xianxian is just like a troublemaker; she sees the third branch getting some benefits and sends the people of the Old Mu Family to suppress and trouble the third branch.

When it comes to such meddlers, Mu Shuangshuang has only one principle: if you can't see them, it doesn't matter.

If you see them, beat them up until they have no teeth left to find.

"But this time your Auntie has gone too far. I'm afraid there might be more issues in the future."

Deep down, Mu Dashan felt that this was an issue he needed to resolve himself; the longer it dragged on, the more harm it would cause his daughter and wife.

Back then, when his elder sister got married, the dowry was earned by him, so in a way, she owed him a favor.

Now, it's time for him to collect on that favor.

At the very least, he can't let her harm the ones most precious to him anymore.

"Shuangshuang, you and your mother go inside first. I'm going to find your Auntie!"

Mu Dashan was determined to go, and Mu Shuangshuang didn't say more. She could only let Mu Dashan give it a try, even though it was even harder to make Mu Xianxian understand than for the sun to rise in the west.

"Dad, should I go with you? Just now, Grandpa and Grandma didn't benefit from us. If you go alone, they might scold you, trying to get back at you for the earlier advantage they lost!"

Mu Dashan shook his head: "No need, this is something best solved by a man. Once I make my stance clear, they will know that our third branch is not to be bullied."

Mu Dashan arrived alone at the main house of the Old Mu Family and headed straight for the reception and chatting room.

When Mu Dashan entered the hall, he was a bit reserved, but after seeing Mu Xianxian, he calmed down.

Mu Dashan said, "Big Sister, can you come out for a moment? I have something I want to discuss with you!"

Mu Xianxian was sitting in the center of the Old Mu Family's hall, with Mu Dade and Mr. Mu at the main seats, while Mrs. Lin and the daughters and children of each branch sat scattered around the edges, including Cao Miaomiao, who was holding onto a pile of sweets.

Xiao Chu from the fourth branch was sitting on the doorstep playing with Gou Dan and smiled sweetly when he saw Mu Dashan: "Third Uncle!"

Gou Dan from the second branch acted as if he didn't see Mu Dashan, not even giving a glance.

Like mother, like son!

Mu Dashan wasn't really bothered because he was already used to it.

"I say, Old Third, if you have something to say, say it in front of everyone instead of hiding. That's not something I'd do!"

Mu Xianxian gave Mu Dashan a condescending look and refused to move an inch.

Knowing Mu Xianxian wouldn't discuss matters privately, Mu Dashan didn't insist.

"Big Sister, the dowry money for your marriage was money I earned moving goods at the dock. You've never once thanked me over the years.

I'm not asking for repayment. All I ask is that you refrain from doing shady things in the future, manipulating our parents to harm my wife and daughter!"

Mu Dashan laid it all out, not caring how his words might affect those present.

He's a straightforward person who doesn't like beating around the bush.

If he thinks it, he says it, not caring if the person in front of him is a stranger or his elder sister.

"Old Third, what nonsense are you spouting? What do you mean by 'shady things'? What have I done? Clarify it for me!"

Mu Xianxian sprang up and marched toward Mu Dashan with a fierce aura.

"Does Big Sister really not know what she's done? I don't need to elaborate! But I've said my piece: if it happens again, don't blame me for being ruthless!"

With that, Mu Dashan quickly stormed out of the Old Mu Family house.

Even after leaving, his heart was still pounding, not settled.

Mu Xianxian chased after him, cursing, showing none of the propriety she exhibited in town, looking no different from Old Mrs. Mu, who spent her life in the village.

Mu Xianxian cursed until her lips cracked, yet she refused to stop.

Everyone in the Old Mu Family stared at one another, speechless.

The whole affair was indeed shocking.

Everyone knew Mu Dashan worked tirelessly at the docks to gather dowry money for Mu Xianxian's marriage.

Apart from that, when Mu Dashan asked Mu Xianxian to lend some dowry money and got refused, he never once in all these years mentioned his efforts, even when Mu Xianxian returned with fanfare.

People would try to please her, but Mu Dashan never joined in, nor spoke of the help he rendered Mu Xianxian.

Bringing it up now must have truly struck a nerve.

Mu Xianxian walked back into the hall, still fuming inside.

She asked the Old Mu Family: "Did you all hear how Old Third spoke just now? He accused me of scheming to harm Yu Si Niang and that brat."

"What does that brat have worth harming, and Yu Si Niang? Just because her family has a lousy tea garden, she thinks she's something. When she married into our Old Mu Family, she was dirt poor!

"People really shouldn't lose their conscience. Folks like the third branch will get their comeuppance eventually, just wait and see."

Having vented, Mu Xianxian felt relieved.

This time, part of Mu Xianxian's visit to the Old Mu Family was to have Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu put pressure on the third branch, to squeeze some effort out of them.

The other reason was to show off!

Mu Xianxian forced a smile and said to the Old Mu Family: "Mom and Dad, I've got some good news. Our Miao Miao is engaged.

Soon, you might be attending her wedding banquet!"

"Oh, Miao Miao is engaged? Who's the man? Is he handsome?" Mrs. Lin asked casually, hardly taking Mu Xianxian's words to heart.

In Mrs. Lin's eyes, given Mu Xianxian's daughter Cao Miaomiao's looks, no wealthy family would be interested.

Probably she found some poor man to be a live-in son-in-law.

"Actually, he's not a wealthy man, just an ordinary family." Mu Xianxian covered her face and giggled.

The way she giggled was devoid of charm and somewhat eerie.

Women in the Da Ning Dynasty, after reaching thirty, were like withered eggplants, both old and unattractive.

No matter how much care Mu Xianxian took of herself, her age was showing.

Moreover, with the crow's feet around her eyes, imitating the looks of young girls seemed a bit too much.

Chapter 827: Liu Zian Is My Daughter's Betrothed!

Although Mrs. Lin disdains Mu Xianxian's behavior, it's hard to directly criticize her. After all, Mu Xianxian owns a shop in town, so if there's any scolding to be done, she has to do it indirectly.

Mrs. Lin chuckled and asked, "Big sister, how could you say that? Isn't your in-law's family wealthy? How could they allow Miaomiao to marry someone without money? Surely you're joking!

I heard that your mother-in-law, Old Mrs. Cao, despises the poor and favors the rich. This simply can't be true!"

Mu Xianxian listened with a displeased expression.

The old lady at home might be stingy, but no matter how stingy she is, she treats herself better than Lin Xiaozao does, right?

Everything Mu Xianxian eats and uses comes from the Cao Family, and has nothing to do with Mrs. Lin.

"Second daughter-in-law, whether my mother-in-law despises the poor and favors the rich is something for us Cao Family members to determine! You're not a member of the Cao Family, nor have you interacted with my mother-in-law, so what makes you say such things about her?"

Mu Xianxian replied sarcastically.

Speaking of Old Mrs. Cao, Cao Miaomiao put down the sweets in her hand, pouted, and said to Mrs. Lin, "My grandmother is very kind. Second aunt, don't tarnish my grandmother's reputation!"

Surrounded by Mu Xianxian and her daughter, Mrs. Lin rolled her eyes and continued, "Big sister, this isn't the way to talk. When you came in the afternoon, you claimed you'd be part of the Old Mu Family your whole life. Now, suddenly, you're part of the Old Cao Family?

Are you trying to butter up my brother because he passed the exams, saying nice things to make dad, mom, and my brother happy?"

Mrs. Lin and Mu Xianxian exchanged sharp words, which grew increasingly unpleasant.

Mu Xianxian's face twisted with anger.

If she weren't holding a trump card, she would've already fought with Mrs. Lin.

Mrs. Lin's foul mouth was infuriating.

"Second family's, what are you talking about? How could I say one thing and do another just because of brother's success?

Let me tell you, although my Miaomiao is marrying into an average family, that man has great abilities!

He's the champion of this year's Autumn Examination in Qingshan Town and the top scholar of Qianzhou Prefecture—Liu Zian!"

The mention of Liu Zian's name stunned many in the Old Mu Family.

The teacup in Mu Dade's hand nearly spilled; if Mrs. Jin hadn't steadied him, it would've already scalded his hand.

Mu Dade had an impression of Liu Zian.

After the Lu Ming Banquet, all the scholars, including him, left Qianzhou overnight, except for Liu Zian, whom the Qianzhou Prefect personally retained.

According to tradition, he's a strong candidate to become the Scholar in next year's Imperial Examination.

He's the only scholar to rise in all of Qianzhou.

Mu Dade felt both admiration and jealousy, but there was nothing he could do; Liu Zian was truly capable. Mu Dade, who passed by buying test questions, couldn't compare to him.

But that's fine; he'll continue buying exam papers in the upcoming Imperial Examination to secure a position as a Capital Official, which shouldn't be a problem.

Others equally shocked included Mrs. Lin and Mu Qingqing.

A few days ago, Mrs. Lin visited the Liu Family and gave some local specialties to Mrs. Song. Though Mrs. Song didn't treat her warmly, she inquired about her daughter.

Mrs. Lin had plotted to set up her daughter Mu Qingqing with Liu Zian, but now Liu Zian was to be Mu Xianxian's son-in-law?

"Big sister, are you talking about Liu Zian from Liu Family Village?" Mrs. Lin asked persistently.

"Yes, exactly the Liu Family. Mrs. Liu personally arranged the marriage with us, and we just need to wait for Liu Zian to head to the Capital for the exams, and once he becomes the Champion Scholar, he'll come back in a grand procession to marry our Miaomiao!"

Before Mu Xianxian had finished speaking, there was a loud crash in the main hall as Mu Qingqing suddenly collapsed.

Everyone rushed to help.

"Qing, what's wrong with you?" Mr. Mu asked.

Supported by Mrs. Lin, Mu Qingqing steadied herself and shook her head. "Grandfather, I'm fine... just have a bit of a headache!"

Mu Qingqing said with a pale face.

Mu Qingqing wasn't truly ill; she simply felt unfair after hearing Mu Xianxian's words. Why should ugly and foolish Cao Miaomiao, whose belly was as big as a pumpkin, have such luck?

And it's not even worth mentioning appearances; almost any girl in Er Gui Village would be prettier than Cao Miaomiao.

But why her?

Mrs. Lin understood her daughter's distress, as this matter would greatly affect her future status and prospects.

This fueled Mrs. Lin's distaste for Mu Xianxian even further.

"Speaking of which, big sister, you haven't given Da Lang and Bitu, the newlyweds, a red envelope yet. Yesterday was their wedding, and as their big aunt, you didn't show up; even the villagers asked.

"I'll call Bitu and Da Lang in to pour tea for their aunt, and sister, see if you can provide them with a red envelope, okay?"

Mrs. Lin's words were somewhat shameless.

But Mu Xianxian's shamelessness preceded hers.

Since leaving the Old Mu Family, Mu Xianxian hadn't attended the family events, not even for Mu Dashan's and Mu Dajiang's weddings; she didn't participate in them.

Everyone had grown accustomed to Mu Xianxian's absence.

But this time, Mrs. Lin couldn't let it go.

Not waiting for Mu Xianxian's response, Mrs. Lin left the hall and shouted toward the kitchen where Huang Bitu was cooking dinner.

"Da Lang's wife, why are you still cooped up in the kitchen? Are your eyes blind? Your aunt is here, and you haven't come out to serve tea. Are you waiting for your aunt to drop dead?"

Huang Bitā tossed the winter bamboo shoots in the pot and shouted to Yu Si Niang outside, "Mother, can you please wait a moment? I still have a stir-fry here, and the fire hasn't gone down yet..."

In farmhouses, the kitchen is typically a mud stove, using long firewood. When fires reach the stove's edge, logs can fall and ignite the grasses and pine branches on the ground.

So generally, when leaving the kitchen, whether just going outside or done cooking, people maintain the housework appropriately.

Huang Bitā's words were reasonable, yet they angered Mrs. Lin.

"Oh, you Huang Bitā, it's just the first day, and you're already defying me? Quickly bring me hot tea and come out. If you delay, I'll skin you!"

Mrs. Lin's rebuke was particularly harsh and was reminiscent of how Old Mrs. Mu once reprimanded Liu Shi from the fourth branch and Yu Si Niang from the third.

Huang Bitā trembled the hand holding the spatula, which fell into the iron pot with a clang.

Mrs. Lin's shouting was like a death toll.

Huang Bitā reached out, picked up the spatula, and hurried outside the kitchen.

"Mother, please watch the winter bamboo shoots for me in the pot, while I go pour tea for Aunt, and also the fire in the stove..."

"Are you going to rebel or what? I've told you, go quickly!" Mrs. Lin urged again.

Huang Bitā had no choice but to return to the kitchen, grab the hot tea, and head to the main hall to serve Mu Xianxian tea—

Chapter 828: Boss Can't Take Risks

"Aunt, have some tea!"

In the main hall, Huang Bitā respectfully held the tea, addressing Mu Xianxian.

Mu Xianxian's face wasn't looking too good. She had avoided paying tribute money to these relatives for a long time, but Mrs. Lin still kept bothering her about it, making Mu Xianxian uncomfortable.

Since Lin Xiaozao was being so thick-skinned, Mu Xianxian felt she didn't need to be polite either.

Mu Xianxian didn't even bother to raise her eyelids, nor did she reach out to accept the tea, leaving Huang Bitā standing awkwardly.

Huang Bitā was clueless and just stood there with the tea cup in hand, waiting for Mu Xianxian to take it.

Mu Dalang had not returned, and the other members of the Old Mu Family had no intention of helping Huang Bitā.

At that moment, Mrs. Lin walked in from outside the main hall and said:

"Why are you still standing here? Are you mute? If your aunt doesn't take it, can't you make her take it?"

Huang Bitā looked at Mrs. Lin in confusion, then after a moment, turned to Mu Xianxian and said, "Aunt..."

"Calling 'Aunt' won't help, a married daughter is like spilled water. I've said it before, I won't maintain ties with these relatives anymore.

I remember that Xiaozao had no objections at the beginning. Why are there objections now?"

Mu Xianxian wasn't someone to be trifled with; bringing up such matters showed a skillful tongue.

As for Mrs. Lin, among everything else, she was especially good at making indirect criticisms.

She stepped forward, pinching Huang Bitā's ear, twisting it 180 degrees, and said, "Why can't you even handle this simple task? It's just the new wife tea ceremony.

This can make your aunt angry, and you, since you're a married daughter, should behave honestly in the Old Mu Family. Just eat and drink without causing problems or you'll face the consequences!"

Mrs. Lin twisted Huang Bitā's ear until it turned red; Huang Bitā was in so much pain she almost cried and tried to pull her neck back to ease the stinging pain.

Mrs. Lin pulled her even tighter.

"Oh, still daring to resist? You little brat, don't even know your place. Maybe I don't hold much weight in this home, but against freeloaders like you, I've got plenty of tricks."

Mrs. Lin kept calling her a freeloader, clearly referring to Mu Xianxian.

Mu Xianxian turned to Old Mrs. Mu and said, "Mother, did you hear that? This is Old Two's good wife, calling me a freeloader! You must help me!"

Mu Xianxian rarely asked Old Mrs. Mu for help, as usually the people of Old Mu Family didn't dare provoke her.

But today, since she walked in, Lin Xiaozao acted like a mad dog constantly attacking her.

Mu Xianxian was momentarily unsure how to handle Mrs. Lin.

"Mother, Aunt Gou Dan's words are truly misleading. I was talking about Da Lang's wife. Da Lang is my son, and I'm the mother-in-law, right? Shouldn't I discipline her a bit?" Mrs. Lin said.

"Discipline if you must, but what you said was too much. For Old Two's family, just say less for Da Lang's sake, don't make things harder for Bitu," Mr. Mu spoke up.

This remark started a wave of support for Huang Bitu.

Mrs. Lin, dissatisfied, secretly pinched Huang Bitu's back waist. Huang Bitu winced and moved her elbow, causing her to inadvertently bump into Mrs. Lin.

Mrs. Lin, focused only on teaching Huang Bitu a lesson, hadn't expected to be caught off guard, and fell flat on the ground.

The cloth wrapped around her head fell off, exposing her bald scalp.

"Wow, Second Aunt, you're bald now! You have less hair than my brother!" Cao Miaomiao jumped up and pointed at Mrs. Lin, shouting.

Mu Xianxian covered her mouth and laughed heartily.

"Wow, Xiao Zao, what's happened? Did you get a skin disease? No more hair?"

Mu Xianxian laughed until her torso trembled; every time she looked at Mrs. Lin, she covered her mouth, laughing hysterically.

Even members of the main house joined in the laughter. Mrs. Jin took out a handkerchief to cover her mouth, but from her shaking shoulders, it was clear she was laughing.

Mrs. Lin lost all her dignity.

Mu Dazhong's face turned gloomy, and he looked away in disdain, unwilling to say a word in defense of Mrs. Lin.

"Good for you, you wicked woman, it's all your fault, you did it on purpose, didn't you?"

As she spoke, Mrs. Lin shoved Huang Bitu heavily...

The scorching tea in Huang Bitu's hands spilled completely, falling onto her hands, she screamed out in pain.

Mrs. Lin refused to let her go, raising a hand ready to slap her.

Suddenly, Mu Xiaohan's voice rang out in the courtyard.

"Fire! Fire... Grandfather, Grandmother, the kitchen's on fire..."

In the kitchen, the winter bamboo shoots Mrs. Lin was supposed to take out were left unattended and turned to mush.

And the fire in the stove, having burned through the stove opening, spilled out.

With the dry grass and pine branches on the floor not cleaned up, they caught fire quickly, even setting fire to the box filled with dry grass and firewood.

The stove room nearby erupted into flames, crackling with the burning of dry grass and kindling!

Mu Xiaohan, on her way to the bathroom, saw the smoke and fire and hurriedly ran towards the Old Mu Family's main house and called for Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu.

"Oh no, why is it on fire..." Mr. Mu stood up and urgently rushed outside.

Others followed suit, and the main hall was suddenly chaotic.

"Mother, did you forget to take the fire out of the stove?" Huang Bitu asked boldly, eyes red.

Mrs. Lin was dumbstruck, suddenly remembering Huang Bitu had mentioned it to her, but she had been too busy snacking in the kitchen to mind the fire in the stove or the bamboo shoots.

"You're talking nonsense! When did you mention the stove to me? You're the lazy one eager to impress your aunt, I won't even start with you. Huang Bitu, you little wench, you're not fit to be a daughter-in-law of our Old Mu Family, I'm gonna have Da Lang divorce you!"

Finishing her words, Mrs. Lin pushed Huang Bitu again and rushed out.

Outside the kitchen, the flames were visible, the wooden window of the Old Mu Family's stove room already ablaze, the fire growing larger with no one daring to rush in with a bucket to put it out.

Everyone glanced at each other, terrified of being the first to risk their lives.

Mu Xiaohan couldn't bear it anymore, and turned to Mr. Mu, saying, "Grandfather, the fire isn't that big yet, please ask Uncle and the others to go in to put it out, or else, we'll lose the stove room!"

Mr. Mu anxiously circled around, looking at the flames inside, hesitating before he said, "The eldest is a scholar, our family's future reputation will depend on him, the eldest can't go!"

"Old Two... Old Two, you go!" Mr. Mu was drenched in sweat as he called Mu Dazhong's name.

"Father... I... I'm not going, this is risky work, if I die, then the second house will be finished!"

Mrs. Lin, hearing this, hugged Mu Dazhong tightly.

"Daddy Gou Dan, you can't go, we can't lose you in the second house..."

Chapter 829: Shifting Responsibility

Mu Dazhong listened to Mrs. Lin's words and retreated continually.

He looked absolutely terrified.

Mr. Mu felt a surge of old blood stuck in his throat, almost choking himself.

"Second son..." Mr. Mu called out.

"Dad, no matter what you say today, I won't go in. Find someone else!" Mu Dazhong trembled all over, already half scared to death before even going in.

In the kitchen, the fire crackled and roared, seemingly ready to reach the roof beams, leaving Mr. Mu to call on Mu Dajiang and Mu Danian.

"Fourth, Fifth, go inside and use the water from the cistern to douse the flames!"

"Dad, don't fool around with me and Fourth Bro, if Second Bro doesn't want to do it, you expect us to go?"

In the face of disaster, the Old Mu Family truly demonstrated what selfishness meant.

Old Mrs. Mu jumped up and cursed at her sons, but not one was willing to step forward.

The crowd thought to themselves: What a joke, we're not going in to put out the fire, at worst we'll lose a kitchen, but if we go in, we'll lose half our lives.

Even a fool knows what's more important.

Mu Dajiang clenched his fists, wanting to go in and put out the fire, but seeing his brothers watching as if it were a show, with no one daring to step in.

All his enthusiasm was instantly extinguished, and his clenched fist was swiftly released.

Looking at everything before him, he felt somewhat numb.

The flames grew larger, the fire at the stove mouth gradually climbed to the roof beams, igniting the wood there.

At this moment, someone with a bucket of water dashed in from outside the kitchen.

Looking closer, it was Mu Dalang.

The first thing Mu Dalang did upon returning from the town wasn't to go to the Old Mu Family, but to the third branch, because he had bought a lot of food and gifts for Huang Bitu, which would be confiscated if he took them directly to the Old Mu Family.

But before he could set his things, smoke started billowing from the Old Mu Family.

Mu Dalang took a bucket of water from the third branch and rushed into the Old Mu Family.

Mu Dashan and Zhang Yutou also came along, and everyone started trying to put out the fire.

But the fire inside was already beyond control.

After Mu Dalang went in once, burning wood began falling from the roof beams.

Mu Dashan, who came along and wanted to go inside to fight the fire, was pulled back by Mu Shuangshuang.

"Dad, don't go in, this fire can't be saved!"

"But..." Mu Dashan hesitated a bit.

"No buts, the beams are falling inside, what if you get buried?" Mu Shuangshuang said.

"Oh... what a sin has been committed!" Mr. Mu sighed.

The fire was completely out of control.

...

The Old Mu Family lost a kitchen; everything inside was unusable, except for the big iron pot.

The cupboards, washbasins and everything else were all scrapped.

In the yard, everyone stood scattered, afraid to approach the still flickering kitchen.

Old Mrs. Mu put her hands on her hips, relentlessly spewing venomous curses.

But what good is cursing, what's gone is gone.

"Mom, stop cursing, just find some craftsmen to fix the kitchen." Mu Dade said.

The crowd agreed along.

Mu Dazhong said, "Yeah, Mom, it's burned, so be it. As they say, the old goes, the new comes! Big Brother is a scholar now, he has money!"

Mu Danian said, "Mom, let's listen to Big Bro, tomorrow morning we'll find someone to fix it. As for the pots, bowls, and basins, we'll just buy them again."

Old Mrs. Mu widened her eyes and furiously said to Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian, "You two speak so lightly, the old goes, the new comes, who pays for this? You two?"

Mu Dazhong reddened, waved his hand awkwardly and smiled, "Didn't Big Bro say it? Naturally, he will pay."

"Bah!" Old Mrs. Mu spat a thick phlegm directly onto Mu Dazhong's face. "You're talking nonsense! Your big brother's money is his own, why should he build a kitchen for you? Whoever is responsible for this mess will pay up!"

Old Mrs. Mu's shout made Mrs. Lin suddenly realize.

She quickly clamored, "Oh, Mom, this was all that little wretch Huang Bita's doing, she made dinner.

Just earlier, when I asked her to bring tea to Big Aunt, I reminded her to turn off the fire, she agreed but she fooled me. I'm telling you, such a daughter-in-law can't stay!"

"Wow, on her first day in here, she burns down my kitchen! Huang Bita, get out here!" Old Mrs. Mu was fuming, roaring toward the house where Huang Bita hadn't come out.

Having been scalded by Mrs. Lin earlier, Huang Bita was in pain and in cold sweat, staying in the house and not daring to come out.

Hearing Old Mrs. Mu's voice, she trembled even more.

"Grandma, why do you and mom blame this on Bita?" Mu Dalang heard Mrs. Lin and Old Mrs. Mu each wanting to reprimand Huang Bita so he stood up.

"Dalang, this matter is none of your business, go aside, this is between me and your grandma." Mrs. Lin boldly said to Mu Dalang.

"How is it not my business? Bita is my wife. I promised her three brothers in the Huang Family to take good care of Bita when I sought to marry her!"

Mrs. Lin was very displeased upon hearing this.

"Why would a woman need your care? It's not like she's a delicate little goldfinch from a golden nest. I'll tell you, a mother-in-law disciplining her daughter-in-law, you stay out of it!"

After Mrs. Lin finished speaking, Huang Bita staggered out of the house.

Seeing Huang Bita, Mrs. Lin excitedly wanted to rush up and hit her and make her stay silent.

Mrs. Lin knew in her heart that she was mostly responsible for this, and if Old Mrs. Mu found out, she would surely be beaten.

She was blocked by Mu Shuangshuang.

"Second Aunt, if there's something to discuss, let's talk it over, laying hands isn't a good habit!"

Mu Shuangshuang had been watching from the sidelines all along, observing everyone's expressions in the Old Mu Family.

In her mind, only one word came to describe the Old Mu Family.

Utterly heartless!

A perfectly good kitchen was burned down because they were all afraid of dying.

Such people, no matter how well they live in the future, will never hold onto their wealth.

They were utterly absurd!

"You brat, get out of the way, this is our branch's family matter, who I discipline is none of your business!" Mrs. Lin said stubbornly.

"Second Aunt, what's the excitement about? Whether the fire was caused by Big Sister-in-law is still a question!"

Mrs. Lin always shirked responsibility; her claim of reminding Huang Bitā was certainly false.

Huang Bitā, being meticulous, would not ignore something Mrs. Lin reminded her about, especially as a new daughter-in-law who wanted to please her mother-in-law.

"What are you implying? Are you saying the fire was caused by me, Lin Xiaozao? Is there no justice or law?" Mrs. Lin said.

Mu Shuangshuang said, "Whether there's justice and law, Second Aunt isn't the judge! Let's first ask Big Sister-in-law about the details of the incident!"

Chapter 830: Blisters All Over Her Hands

"What do you want to know? The events happened just like that, what else do you want?" Mrs. Lin said angrily.

Mu Shuangshuang glanced at Mrs. Lin and turned to ask Huang Bitā.

"Big sister-in-law, what's really going on here? Explain clearly to Grandpa and Grandma!

Don't worry, Grandpa and Grandma are reasonable people. If it's not your fault, they won't blame you, right, Grandpa?" Mu Shuangshuang turned to ask Mr. Mu.

Mr. Mu was startled and then nodded, but his face was full of embarrassment.

Mr. Mu wouldn't intervene in women's affairs unless things got too out of hand.

Moreover, it's only natural for a mother-in-law to discipline her daughter-in-law.

Similarly, Mrs. Lin disciplining Huang Bitu wouldn't even be questioned by Old Mrs. Mu.

As a father-in-law, he certainly shouldn't say anything.

But now he was in a bind, having been singled out by Mu Shuangshuang, Mr. Mu had to make a statement.

Even so, Huang Bitu was still afraid to look at Mrs. Lin.

Her expression was one of endurance, full of anguish.

"Bita, listen to Shuangshuang, we're all here, we definitely won't let you be wronged!"

Mu Dalang fully trusted Huang Bita, not to mention she didn't do it; he would seek justice for her even if she had.

"I..." Huang Bita looked at Mu Dalang, moved.

For a woman, the greatest happiness isn't her man believing in her?

As long as Mu Dalang was willing to face it with her, she feared nothing.

Huang Bita opened her mouth and said, "Just now, I was stir-frying in the kitchen, and Mother called me to pour tea for Auntie, I was cooking, I asked Mother to wait a bit, but then... Mother went into the kitchen.

Mother was calling so urgently that I had to do as she said, but when I went out, I asked her to watch the fire, about the remaining part, I don't know."

As soon as Huang Bita finished speaking, Mrs. Lin shouted excitedly.

"Don't throw dirt on my name, clearly you didn't speak up yourself, as a daughter-in-law, how dare you talk back to your mother-in-law!"

Mrs. Lin jumped up wanting to hit someone, Huang Bitā backed away in fear, Mu Dalang stepped forward to help her, accidentally bumping her wrist.

Huang Bitā gasped in pain.

Mu Dalang hurriedly pulled at the sleeve on Huang Bitā's wrist.

"Ah..." Huang Bitā exclaimed.

In the air, Huang Bitā's scalded, blistered wrist was exposed to everyone.

Mu Dalang was stunned, looking at Huang Bitā's wrist, he shouted, "Who did this? Who?"

Mrs. Lin's face turned pale with fear.

She knew her son's character all too well; if he found out this was her doing, she couldn't imagine how he'd react.

Huang Bitā quickly shook her head, "It was me, I was careless myself... nobody else is to blame!"

"Big sister-in-law, why speak for your mother-in-law, who pushed you to the ground!"

"Aren't those blisters on your wrist her doing?" Mu Xianxian seized the opportunity, speaking with a mocking tone.

"Mother, you've gone too far!" Mu Dalang said to Mrs. Lin, pulling Huang Bitā towards the third branch.

He intended to wash Huang Bitā's wound with cold water.

With Huang Bitā and Mu Dalang gone, everything naturally fell on Mrs. Lin's shoulders.

Old Mrs. Mu glared at Mrs. Lin with a fierce look, and before Mrs. Lin could react, two slaps sent her tumbling to the ground.

In the Old Mu Family's courtyard, Mrs. Lin's cries for mercy were heard.

"Mother, I didn't mean it, I didn't know the fire in the stove would turn out like that, I know I was wrong, please forgive me..."

Mu Xianxian watched excitedly from the side, shouting, "Mother, well done, burn our kitchen!"

Let her disrespect her elders, clearly making mistakes and blaming others!"

Old Mrs. Mu got more vigorous with each hit, the noises in the yard grew louder.

Mu Shuangshuang found it harsh, pulling Mu Dashan to return home.

Mr. Mu noticed and quickly called Mu Shuangshuang: "Shuangshuang, we'll get someone to make a kitchen tomorrow, can we borrow the third branch's kitchen for now?"

Without knowing from when, Mr. Mu habitually thought Mu Shuangshuang was the decision-maker of the Old Mu Family, not Mu Dashan.

Mu Shuangshuang frowned, it's understandable to borrow the kitchen, but Mrs. Lin is too jealous, she might steal things from her kitchen.

Seeing Mu Shuangshuang frown, Mr. Mu added, "Don't worry, we still have everything in Grandma's room, we'll use it separately!"

Mu Shuangshuang nodded at last.

It's not that she's stingy but really has no feelings for the Old Mu Family.

It was a minor issue, but it got so escalated, even burning a kitchen; if someone had gone in earlier to put out the fire, how big could it be?

"Then tonight..." Mr. Mu asked.

"The third branch's meal is ready, Grandpa can come over to cook anytime."

Mu Shuangshuang returned to the third branch, asking Yu Si Niang to clear out the kitchen.

Valuables were all moved to her own room, and the dining table was moved to Mu Dashan's room.

In the kitchen, Mu Dalang's eyes were red, helping Huang Bitu to rinse the burn with cold water, Huang Bitu softly hissed and then gripped her uninjured part tightly in his hand.

"It's all my fault, if I hadn't gone out..." Mu Dalang was full of self-blame.

"It's okay, just a burn, it's not a big deal." Huang Bitu smiled, trying to look as if nothing was wrong.

"Brother, sister-in-law, you'd better go eat first, after dinner, go to Grandpa Zhang's to get some burn ointment, help sister-in-law puncture the blisters on her wrist."

Mu Shuangshuang couldn't bear to break the harmonious moment.

But if she didn't speak, they'd catch the Old Mu Family coming to cook.

Mu Shuangshuang suspected that tonight would be Mrs. Lin cooking.

After all, Mrs. Lin made such a big mistake.

Mu Shuangshuang called for dinner, but Huang Bitu didn't react immediately.

She glanced at Mu Dalang, wanting to see what he thought.

"It's your first day as a bride in the Old Mu Family, we should celebrate, she made many dishes.

Also, I bought a lot of good things for you in town, later go to Shuangshuang's room to get them, as for food you come to Shuangshuang's place to eat every day, I've already spoken to her."

To be honest, Huang Bitu in the Old Mu Family really felt like she was sneaking.

One can hardly deal with Old Mrs. Mu, and now there's Mrs. Lin too.

Being a daughter-in-law isn't an easy task.

Thankfully, Mu Shuangshuang was willing to help them.

"Hmm!"

Dinner had fish and meat, both to welcome Huang Bitu over and to celebrate the third branch's tavern opening early.