

## Folly 831

Chapter 831: Making a Living

A big table full of dishes, the whole family sitting around together, the atmosphere indeed warm.

Huang Bitā and Mu Dalang occupied the lower side of the table, occasionally glancing at each other.

Then, they both turned their heads away with flushed faces.

Mu Shuangshuang raised her eyebrows at Lu Yuanfeng, hinting for him to look at the two.

Both Huang Bitā and Mu Dalang were shy; after Mu Dashan announced the start of dinner, neither dared to pick up food for half a day.

"Brother, sister-in-law, there's no outsider here, no need to be polite!" Mu Shuangshuang whispered.

This made Huang Bitā and Mu Dalang feel much more relaxed and brought a smile to Lu Yuanfeng's face.

"Dalang, Bitā, you two are already husband and wife, there's no need to be so restrained in getting along, treat each other like family, and everything will be fine," Yu Si Niang stood up and put a big piece of meat in Huang Bitā's bowl.

"Thank you, third aunt, thank you!" Huang Bitā whispered, gratefully.

Just as everyone started eating, only halfway through the meal, Mrs. Lin was sent over to cook.

Knowing that Huang Bitā was enjoying delicious food at the third branch, Mrs. Lin shouted outside, "Huang Bitā... Well, you, this daughter-in-law, your mother-in-law hasn't eaten, and you started eating, what kind of daughter-in-law are you?"

Huang Bitā lowered the chopsticks in her hand, just as she wanted to go out to help, Mu Dashan stopped her.

"Bita, don't go out, this matter, your grandmother must have told Shuangshuang's second aunt to deal with; it's her job, you don't need to endure it."

Mu Dashan said sternly.

Huang Bita was completely stunned, not only her but even Mu Shuangshuang found it hard to believe.

This is confronting Mrs. Lin directly, her father is indeed getting bolder.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't know how big of an impact the event from last night had on Mu Dashan - it wasn't ordinary.

The brothers all evaded even the smallest things, fearing like death, not daring to step forward.

Not to mention anything else, based on Mu Dashan's own experiences, the Old Mu Family would sooner or later have issues.

He understood deeply that he couldn't change the Old Mu Family, couldn't change his parents, but he would put forth his greatest effort to protect the next generation of the Old Mu Family.

Dalang is a good kid; he deserves better days.

In the kitchen, Mrs. Lin yelled for a while without seeing Huang Bita come out, and started pounding on Mu Dashan's door fiercely.

Her behavior was no different from a bandit, being unreasonable to a certain degree.

Mu Shuangshuang stood up, picked up the thorny stick from the door crack, and opened the door.

Upon opening the door, Mrs. Lin saw Huang Bitu sitting not far from the door, and the big table of dishes exuding delicious aromas.

Mrs. Lin's eyes shone brightly, instinctively wanting to walk into the third branch.

Mu Shuangshuang blocked Mrs. Lin with the thorny stick.

"Second aunt, the third branch doesn't welcome you! Please stand back a bit, don't interfere with our meal!"

Mrs. Lin rolled her eyes, clearly not taking Mu Shuangshuang seriously.

"Move, I'm here to call my daughter-in-law Huang Bitu." Mrs. Lin said.

"Second aunt, tonight my eldest cousin and cousin-in-law are eating at the third branch. As for you... the third branch is short on rice, I'm afraid you'll have to go back to cook at my place." After saying that, Mu Shuangshuang slammed the door, causing Mrs. Lin to jump back in fright, nearly smashing her nose.

"Alright, Huang Bitu, you just wait, see how I won't deal with you." Compared to the ease of the third branch people and Mu Dalang, Huang Bitu felt immense pressure, always thinking about the last words Mrs. Lin said.

Mu Dalang held her hand, softly saying, "Bitu, don't think about it, my mother is just like this, even if Shuangshuang doesn't offend her today, she will still find trouble for you.

I went to town today, and already talked with my master, paid the money, in spring we'll bring back some dairy goats to raise, and pigs, Wang Erma has been caught, the village has no pig slaughterhouse, I'm planning to take over doing this, we won't starve."

After all, Mu Dalang has seen the world, compared to the fourth branch, he is more daring, ready to take risks.

However, the pig slaughtering matter was still a hint from Mu Shuangshuang.

Wang Erma was the only butcher in the village, even though his pork was more expensive than what's sold in town, but town was more than ten miles away from the village, without special events villagers wouldn't think of covering that distance, and the journey was far, tiring to walk, if it was winter still alright, but if summer.

It's hot and tiring, and the pork might even spoil on the way, so pig slaughtering in the village is definitely a good job.

"Hmm!" Huang Bitu finally felt relieved.

...

After dinner, Mu Dalang took Huang Bitu to Zhang Huai Shu's home and fetched ointment for treating burns, as instructed by Mu Shuangshuang.

This was the second night the young couple spent together; the previous night Mu Dalang was too tired and fell asleep, doing nothing.

Tonight, Mu Dalang felt sorry for the hardships Huang Bitu endured during the day; even the foot washing water, he personally fetched for Huang Bitu and placed it by the bedside.

Huang Bitu struggled to get up from the bed but was held down by Mu Dalang on her shoulders.

"Bitu, when you agreed to marry me, I said I would take care of you for life.

In the past, you had three brothers to care for you, now that you are married, I not only am your husband but will also care for you like your three brothers."

Mu Dalang said seriously.

Women in the Da Ning Dynasty actually never had much status, mostly being men's appendages.

Before marriage, fathers were the decision-makers at home, after marrying, husbands became their world.

Everything had to revolve around the men's preferences, meals allowing men to eat first, or preparing bowls and chopsticks for them, or serving them meals.

At night, no need to mention, fetching foot washing water, massaging feet, and back hitting were common occurrences.

Even assertive women like Old Mrs. Mu and Mrs. Lin, behind closed doors, had to fulfill these tasks.

"Dalang, I... I just knew, I chose the right person back then, even when Grandma treated my brothers like that, or when Mother-in-law treated me that way, I just knew marrying into the Old Mu Family would mean hardships.

Even my brothers said I would suffer, but I thought, if with someone you love, no matter how tough things are, they're sweet."

After washing her feet, Mu Dalang helped Huang Bitu with the blisters on her wrist, pricking them with a needle, applying Zhang Huai Shu's medicine to each wound.

In the chilly night, Mu Dalang embraced Huang Bitu just right.

The quilt was warm, as the two nestled together, slowly they fell asleep.

In the dark, gradually all that could be heard were their rhythmic breaths.

Outside the door, Mu Danian craned his neck, pressing tightly against the door frame, listening for ages without hearing any sound from inside the room.

Mu Danian stomped his foot angrily.

"Darn, what's that Dalang kid doing, two nights and apart from having me sell frozen meat, nothing's happening!"

Chapter 832: Peeping Night After Night

"Damn, could it be that this kid is impotent?"

Mu Dalang speculated maliciously.

Only then would it make sense. Dalang is just a young guy; with such a pretty wife, how could he not be moved in bed?

Surely, they'd be doing it day and night.

But regardless of whether Mu Dalang is impotent or not, Mu Danian was feeling repressed.

Ever since Chen Hong was kicked out of the Old Mu Family by Old Mrs. Mu, Mu Dalang hasn't had a partner for a long time, and it's been difficult for him. But at this late hour, where could he find a young wife?

In the village, young wives who had a fling with Mu Danian and also looked good were really rare. After searching for a long time, Mu Danian finally remembered Lu Yuanfeng's stepmother, that flirty Gu Jiulian.

Familiar with the path, Mu Danian sneaked to the Lu Family and staked out at their outhouse.

Gu Jiulian liked to hang out at the outhouse at midnight. After a few times, Mu Danian had already grasped this routine, and this time, he caught Gu Jiulian again.

But this night, it was just too cold; unlike summer when you could just find any place, whether it's the cotton field or hemp field, to take care of business.

"Danian, come to my room, there's nobody in my room!" Gu Jiulian seemed to know what Mu Danian's concern was, she volunteered.

"Are you crazy? Your man is in the room; I'd be walking to my death if I went in."

Mu Danian was not afraid of anything else but death.

Earlier today, the old man even wanted him to put out a fire, as if that's possible.

"You fool, that bastard isn't in; he went to town to gamble again. Hasn't come back in days."

The way Gu Jiulian talked gave the impression that her man, Lu Yuanfeng's father, was nothing but a prop.

And he really was just a prop.

Back when Gu Jiulian was a widow, she got entangled with the men from the village. After getting discovered, she married Lu Yuanfeng's father just to save her life.

Let's not even talk about liking him.

Who would like a gambler anyway?

Not at all, compared to Lu Yuanfeng's father, Gu Jiulian liked Mu Danian a bit more, at least Mu Danian was sweet-talking.

"Well, little sister-in-law, seems like you've been ready for a while, so what are we waiting for..."

Mu Danian and Gu Jiulian sneakily entered the house, closed the door, and did their thing openly without worrying about being found out.

Gu Jiulian was now staying at home with her youngest son, who was still a baby in his swaddling clothes back then; now, he was over a year old, slept a lot, and hardly needed Gu Jiulian's care.

So Gu Jiulian was having quite a free ride, neither needing to feed herself nor work.

"Gently, damn you!"

On the bed, Gu Jiulian held down Mu Danian who acted like a beast.

Mu Danian, like a cat spotting a fish, was restless, insisting on showing Gu Jiulian his prowess.

After a bout of venting, the two lay on the bed, chatting for a while.

After suffering several setbacks in front of Mu Shuangshuang, Gu Jiulian barely dared to cause trouble in Lu Yuanfeng's yard anymore.

And with Xia Guagua gone, Gu Jiulian didn't even have someone to discuss things with, every day, she could only babble in front of her uncomprehending son.

But the child was, after all, just a child, completely unaware of what she was talking about.

Fortunately, Mu Danian came along, and Gu Jiulian naturally revealed everything to Mu Danian.

"Hey, Danian, you don't know how I live now. In the past, that stinky kid would even send some food to the Old Lu Family.

The game he hunted in the mountains and anything he could get his hands on, he'd send some to the Old Lu Family; but now, there's nothing anymore.

I haven't even had a taste of meat for ages." Not only have I gone without meat, but I haven't even seen a shadow of it.

Previously, Lu Yuanfeng would also secretly slip some silver to the two old foxes, who would then use that money to fill out the household expenses. But now, since Lu Yuanfeng severed his ties with the Lu Family, all of that is gone too.

"Alas, it's all because of that smelly girl from your family. Before she appeared, that stinky kid was so obedient, even if he didn't like me, he was still respectful, giving the Old Lu Family everything they deserved. And now..."

Gu Jiulian's words hit Mu Danian right in the heart.

It wasn't just the change in the Old Lu Family; the Old Mu Family was no different.

Back then his third brother was such an honest person, doing so much work for the family. Now, his whole mind and heart are filled with that girl from the third branch and his own wife.

A man shouldn't be shackled by women in thoughts and body.

"Complaining won't do any good; that smelly girl used to be a fool, but now? Not only did the third branch buy land, although not much, it's still impressive.

To think of academies and inns now... those things, I never even dared to dream."

Mu Danian was deeply envious of the third branch, but what could be done? They just made it.

"What did you say? Open an inn?"

Gu Jiulian was utterly shocked.

The so-called starting an academy seemed to her just child's play. In a village so impoverished, who would be foolish enough to send their kids to school when they could save money for their son's future marriage instead?

For a wife to bear grandchildren.

The more people, the more power; the more they bear, the more labor forces, the more money they save up.

"You probably didn't know, my big sister only brought back this news today! That smelly girl is probably going to the town and behind our Old Mu Family's back too."

Gu Jiulian's face twisted a bit.

"No way, why should I be here suffering while that smelly girl enjoys a good life! "

Jealousy often easily arises.

Especially when two jealous people get together, they start plotting nasty things.

"Danian, isn't the third branch planning to open an inn? Why don't you do something bad?" Gu Jiulian suggested.

Doing something bad meant nothing more than ruining the third branch's reputation and the like.

Doing such things was Mu Danian's specialty.

"Little sister-in-law, shall we have another round..."

The night grew deeper, and soon, it was dawn.

Early in the morning, the Old Mu Family hired some people to rebuild the kitchen, it was very noisy, clattering away.

Mrs. Lin hid indoors, not daring to show her face, so in the yard, only the busy figures of Huang Bitā and Mrs. Liu could be seen.

The Old Mu Family was still relatively harmonious.

This time, the Old Mu Family hired three craftsmen, all from the village, but they weren't good craftsmen, those willing to work had all gone with Mu Dashan.

There was plenty to eat and drink every day and a lot of good stuff to enjoy.

The Old Mu Family hired three men who were more like hooligans, with nothing to do on regular days.

They started complaining about a raise almost immediately.

"Uncle Mu, Aunt Mu, what's with your kitchen, look at the state it's in, and these broken things, aren't you going to clear them out?"

The men shouted in unison.

Huang Bitā stood up from doing laundry in the yard when she heard the shouting.

"I'm sorry, I'm Da Lang's wife, if you have any problems, you can talk to me."

Huang Bitā was good-looking and her voice was gentle, the three men were practically drooling at the sight of her.

### Chapter 833: Mu Danian's Thoughts

"Can I really talk to you?" One of the men stared at Huang Bitao and asked.

His gaze was so undisguised that even Huang Bitao felt it was a bit abnormal.

She took a few steps back, her expression unnatural, and said, "You better wait until my grandparents come."

But the three men wouldn't let Huang Bitao leave.

One of the men signaled to the other two, and when they saw no one around, they quickly surrounded Huang Bitao.

"I must say, Dalang's wife is really pretty, with a fairy-like face. Tsk, tsk, tsk... Young lady, how about chatting with us for a while?"

The more the man spoke, the more uncomfortable Huang Bitao felt.

Not just his words, but his expression was also extremely unpleasant.

Huang Bitao's heart was pounding; she couldn't retreat, her escape was blocked.

She couldn't advance; there was a lewd-speaking man ahead.

"What are you doing? If you don't let go, I will shout for help!" Huang Bitao mustered up the courage and said.

"Go ahead, call anyone you want, your grandparents, your mother-in-law, and we'll just say you seduced us! Then let's see if anyone in the Old Mu Family would still want a dishonest wife like you."

It's no wonder those three men were so bold; it was Mu Dazhong who called them, they were truly unreliable.

Usually, they would engage in petty thefts around the village, stealing a chicken from one house, a piece of clothing from another, with incredibly thick skin.

Huang Bitao's scoldings at that level had no effect on them at all.

Instead, it made them feel more complacent.

Huang Bitao's face instantly turned pale.

Just as the leading man was about to surround her, maybe even do something even more outrageous, suddenly Mu Danian jumped out, pointed at one of the men, and cursed, "Qian the Fourth, you're pretty gutsy, bullying someone from our Old Mu Family!"

Mu Danian's timing was uncannily perfect.

It was as if he had been lurking in the dark all along.

Qian the Fourth didn't have time to think, instantly wilted, and sycophantically said, "So it's Fifth Brother Mu, haha, we were just joking with Dalang's wife, we're working on the kitchen for your Old Mu Family, those scraps, you see..."

Qian the Fourth pointed at the debris in the ruins and asked.

"How would I know? My second brother hired you to finish the kitchen. If you don't do it, why did we hire you? To freeload?" Mu Danian had a bad attitude, but at least managed to stop Qian the Fourth and his men.

The three men rolled up their sleeves, and reluctantly said, "We'll clean up, but about the wages... Could you increase them?"

"Hmph, Qian the Fourth, you've got some nerve, I haven't even settled with you about bullying my niece-in-law, and you want more money? You sure have guts!

If you don't want to work, then don't. I'll find someone else. Or maybe I'll go to my elder brother, he's a scholar, he knows how to deal with you lazy, conniving bunch."

With Mu Danian's scolding, Qian the Fourth didn't get more money; instead, they ended up with more work.

The three men, unwillingly, picked up hoes and dustpans, busying themselves over the ruined kitchen of the Old Mu Family.

Mu Danian donned a righteous expression and said to Huang Bitao, "Bitao, if you encounter such situations in the future, you must shout loudly. Our Old Mu Family stands up for its own, I, Mu Danian, won't let anyone who bullies you off easily!"

Huang Bitao was full of gratitude after hearing Mu Danian's words.

She said, "Thank you, Fifth Uncle... If there's nothing else, I'll just go back to washing clothes."

Mu Danian looked at Huang Bitao in front of him, swallowing hard.

Huang Bitao didn't have many clothes in the Huang Family, each piece was faded from age, yet they still looked exceptionally good on her.

"Dalang's wife, why don't you wear new clothes? Didn't Dalang buy you any? Why not come to my place, I have a piece of new fabric that's perfect for making clothes for you."

Mu Danian didn't actually have any fabric, he just saw that Huang Bitao was pretty and had crooked thoughts, wanting to lure her to his room.

But he would never tell Huang Bitao these thoughts.

"No... it's not necessary, Fifth Uncle, I still have things to do. If I don't finish washing these clothes, my mother won't let me off."

Huang Bitao shook her head firmly.

Though she didn't dare say that Mu Danian's words were strange, she would still try to avoid him.

Unfortunately, Mu Danian was too shameless. He grabbed Huang Bitao's wrist and said softly, "Come on, your Fifth Uncle has no use for that fabric. Besides, don't women love beautiful clothes?"

Think about it, wearing beautiful clothes, standing with Dalang..."

Mu Danian spoke of Mu Dalang, but in his mind, he imagined it was himself. He always thought Huang Bitao belonged to him.

Otherwise, he wouldn't be crouching outside Mu Dalang's room every night.

"Fifth Uncle, let go, I don't want anything... I just want to wash clothes." Huang Bitao tried to break free from Mu Danian's grip.

But Mu Danian held on too tightly, soon leaving red marks on Huang Bitao's wrist.

"Dalang's wife, your Fifth Uncle won't harm you. If it weren't for me, Qian the Fourth would've bullied you badly." Mu Danian said.

Saying that, he almost dragged her along for a long distance, almost pulling her into his room.

Suddenly, a hand knife chopped down, separating their hands.

Mu Danian grimaced in pain, about to shout, when he saw it was Mrs. Lin with a scarf over her head.

"Well, you little slut, daring to seduce your own uncle, see if I don't beat you to death!"

Mrs. Lin slapped Huang Bitao, leaving her stunned.

More slaps followed, making Huang Bitao cry out in pain.

Recalling what Mu Dalang said last night, she started running desperately towards the third branch's direction.

Mrs. Lin chased after her.

"You damn brat, daring to run, if I catch you, I'll skin you alive!"

Mrs. Lin cursed loudly, her voice was heard throughout the neighborhood.

But no one dared to intervene, as it happened in the backyard.

Mu Shuangshuang was busy preparing for the New Year, but upon hearing the commotion, she dropped everything and rushed out.

She met the fleeing Huang Bitao.

Without a word, she pulled Huang Bitao behind her, blocking Mrs. Lin.

"Second Aunt, please stop! You are not allowed to enter the third branch's territory!" Mu Shuangshuang said angrily.

"Well, that's why that brat dared to hook up with Mu Danian, because she has you to back her up. You get out of my way!"

Chapter 834: Grandma, It's This Person

"Second Aunt, can't you understand human speech? You are not allowed into the third branch." Mu Shuangshuang emphasized again.

"You brat, don't talk nonsense with me! Huang Bitu is my daughter-in-law, I will teach her however I want, it's none of your business!"

Mrs. Lin was as domineering as ever.

However, she probably forgot that in the entire Old Mu Family, there weren't many who could stand up to her, but Mu Shuangshuang definitely counted as one.

"This is my home, whoever I want to come in can come in.

As for you, Second Aunt, sorry, you just happen to be someone who is not welcomed by Mu Shuangshuang.

If you dare to take another step, don't blame me for being rude!"

Mu Shuangshuang blocked Mrs. Lin's path, not willing to move an inch.

Mrs. Lin stood there, contemplating how she could take down both Mu Shuangshuang and Huang Bitu at once.

Her eyes turned shrewdly, "Shuangshuang, you and I are the real relatives here. That little tramp is just an outsider, not really part of the Old Mu Family.

Why don't you give Second Aunt some face, let me take this little tramp away, so she doesn't annoy you here. What do you think?"

Mrs. Lin smiled ingratiatingly, speaking as if it were a good deal.

Behind Mu Shuangshuang, Huang Bitā was already scared stiff, afraid to even breathe.

She clung desperately to Mu Shuangshuang's clothes, terrified that Mu Shuangshuang might throw her out to Mrs. Lin.

Mu Shuangshuang gently patted Huang Bitā's wrist, trying to reassure her.

"Second Aunt, your words sound really nice, if sister-in-law isn't part of the Old Mu Family, then Aunt shouldn't be either, right? After all, we're all outsiders, so there isn't much difference, is there?"

In my opinion, we should find Second Uncle to divorce you too!" Mu Shuangshuang sneered sarcastically.

Mu Shuangshuang was truly impervious to persuasion or pressure, no matter what Mrs. Lin said, she refused to budge.

Mrs. Lin was so angry that her eyes widened, trembling uncontrollably.

"Alright, you brat, just wait, wait for me..."

After shouting, Mrs. Lin ran off towards the main house, probably to complain to Old Mrs. Mu.

Behind her, Huang Bitā didn't feel reassured, but instead started sobbing.

Her appearance was indeed heart-wrenching.

But it also aroused some irritation.

"Sister-in-law, this matter is over, don't cry. Tell me what exactly happened! Why did Second Aunt accuse you and Fifth Uncle..."

Mu Shuangshuang used the word 'accuse', clearly not believing there was anything between Huang Bitu and Mu Danian.

Mu Danian was quite handsome, more so than most men in Er Gui Village, and his sweet talk made him the village women's friend, getting along well with young girls and daughters-in-law.

However, his lousy character, Mu Shuangshuang couldn't admire.

"Fifth Uncle... Fifth Uncle grabbed my hand, wanted me to go to his room, said he'd give me fabric for new clothes, then my mother saw..."

Huang Bitu gasped, recounting the matter.

"Fifth Uncle giving you fabric? New ones?" Mu Shuangshuang found it amusing.

She had searched Mu Danian's room before; it was filthy, forget having new fabric, even if there was, it would have long been ragged.

Besides, with Old Mrs. Mu's greedy nature, would she let Mu Danian have anything good in his room?

It was probably just an excuse to lure Huang Bitu into his room for something improper.

This Old Mu Family really was not a place to stay.

Mu Danian, as an uncle, had such shameless thoughts.

Disgraceful!

"Yes, that's what he said. Earlier, three men came home, talked indecently, and Fifth Uncle chased them away, then spoke with me..."

Huang Bita also mentioned Qian the Fourth's incident to Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang heard and frowned deeply.

People dared to bully their way into their home, yet Mu Danian was still thinking about those things.

"Sister-in-law, come with me!"

Mu Shuangshuang rushed into the house, grabbed a wooden stick, and headed straight for the Old Mu Family's kitchen.

Huang Bita was timid but knew Mu Shuangshuang was standing up for her, so she followed along.

Qian the Fourth and two other men were loafing in the ruins above the Old Mu Family's kitchen, with no realization of having taken people's money yet not working for it.

Especially Qian the Fourth, always thinking about Huang Bita's exquisite figure, he couldn't focus on anything.

The two brothers saw this and asked quietly, "Qian the Fourth, are you interested in Mu Dalang's wife?"

These three men were all involved in sneaky dealings, they knew each other's characters well.

Qian the Fourth was nearly thirty and hadn't married, probably wouldn't in his lifetime, having some thoughts was normal.

"Who... who's interested in that woman, I'm just thinking about how Mu Daniao doesn't give our three brothers any face." Qian the Fourth retorted.

"Alright, don't pretend in front of us, we know what kind of person you are, Qian the Fourth. If you like that woman, just take her home.

Anyway, she's a woman from another village, and I heard she doesn't have parents. Even if something happens, she wouldn't dare speak up outside.

By then, if her family doesn't want her, you can take her home as a wife, and someone will care for you!"

One of the two men remarked.

The more Qian the Fourth listened, the more it seemed feasible.

Women, as long as their reputation's ruined, nobody would want them.

Qian the Fourth happily thought about causing a scene with Huang Bita and letting the Old Mu Family witness it.

Just as he thought this, a loud smack landed on his head.

He heard someone shout, "You good-for-nothing Qian the Fourth, how dare you steal from my granny, you have some nerve!"

Qian the Fourth hadn't figured out what was happening, but the stick rained down like drops, hitting him hard.

Pain made Qian the Fourth grimace in agony.

He wailed incessantly.

The other two men had never seen such a commotion before, hitting right across the head and face, they froze in fear beside him, not moving.

Mu Shuangshuang shouted several times about the money theft, with Old Mrs. Mu from the main house hearing the commotion, rushing over.

Before Old Mrs. Mu could speak, Mu Shuangshuang exclaimed, "Granny, didn't you lose money last time? And the chickens, Qian the Fourth stole them, I just heard him admit it!"

Mu Shuangshuang fabricated a few sentences.

The Old Mu Family's chickens weren't stolen by Qian the Fourth; Mu Danian was the one who stole them initially, along with taking a jar of lard from Mu Shuangshuang's house.

As for the money, Little Black stole it, the money bag was stuffed into Mu Dazhong's room, but it had never been discovered.

Old Mrs. Mu always dwelled on these matters.

When Mu Shuangshuang said those were stolen by Qian the Fourth, she rushed up, regardless of anything, clawing at Qian the Fourth's face.

Qian the Fourth's face was scratched so badly by Old Mrs. Mu that a piece of skin came off.

"You damned thief Qian the Fourth, stealing from me, an old woman, I'll have your life!"

## Chapter 835: Forced into the Cesspit

Old Mrs. Mu flailed her hands, pulling and tugging at Qian the Fourth's hair, pulling out quite a few clumps, yet he couldn't resist at all.

Mu Shuangshuang tightly held down Qian the Fourth's arms, with one foot stepping on his waist.

Unable to exert strength in his waist, naturally, he could only let this old lady teach him a lesson.

Qian the Fourth wailed continuously, muttering, "You damn girl, you're wronging me!"

However, Old Mrs. Mu was convinced that it was Qian the Fourth who did this; therefore, it was indeed Qian the Fourth's doing.

By the end of the beating, Qian the Fourth was barely breathing.

The two men observing were so frightened they wet their pants, trembling all the while.

"Grandma, what should we do here?" Mu Shuangshuang pointed to Qian the Fourth, who had become limp on the ground.

"Throw him into our latrine, this son of a bitch needs to be taught discipline, or he won't understand the power of this old lady!"

Old Mrs. Mu didn't care who said this, she only knew that she needed to vent her emotions.

Mu Shuangshuang nodded with a smiling face, signaling to Huang Bitu.

The two of them joined forces to drag Qian the Fourth toward the direction of the latrine.

Mu Shuangshuang did this after careful consideration. Qian the Fourth had a notorious reputation in the entire village and might resort to tricks to frame Huang Bitu.

Now that they ruined his reputation first, no one would believe anything Qian the Fourth said about wronging Huang Bitu in the future.

It was a way to protect Huang Bitu while also helping Old Mrs. Mu resolve the knot in her heart.

Haha, it really killed two birds with one stone.

Mu Shuangshuang dragged Qian the Fourth to the latrine, squatting down to warn him.

"Qian the Fourth, remember this, my elder sister-in-law is not someone you can mess with. If you dare to harm her or even think of something you shouldn't, I, Mu Shuangshuang, will make you understand what it means to wish you were dead rather than alive!"

After saying this, Mu Shuangshuang grabbed Qian the Fourth's head, which was already like a bird's nest, and shoved it into the latrine.

Having been beaten and then choked by the latrine, Qian the Fourth fainted completely, unresponsive to any further discipline from Mu Shuangshuang.

After tossing him aside, Mu Shuangshuang patted the dust off her clothes.

Huang Bitu watched Mu Shuangshuang closely, her eyes flickering with various emotions.

She hesitated for a moment before asking, "Shuangshuang, don't you... aren't you afraid?"

Without thinking, Mu Shuangshuang immediately answered, "Afraid, but not afraid. After all, I'm human too, afraid of retaliation, afraid of being hurt. But these things can't be avoided just by fear."

If someone hates me, and I hide and cower, they'll still retaliate when they want to. So I'd rather seize the opportunity, teach him a good lesson, beat him until he's scared, and then he'll naturally avoid me."

Mu Shuangshuang didn't believe that avoiding things would keep them from happening.

Moreover, one might avoid something for a while but not for a lifetime.

Since Qian the Fourth dared to verbally harass Huang Bitu at the Old Mu Family's, he surely dared to do worse things outside.

Can Huang Bitu avoid Qian the Fourth for her entire life?

No, she can't!

Huang Bitu seemed to understand a bit more.

"Shuangshuang, I think you're right." Huang Bitu clenched her fists.

"Sister-in-law, you should talk to my cousin about this, and be on guard against my Fifth Uncle in the future."

After Mu Shuangshuang said this, Huang Bitu quickly shook her head.

"No... Shuangshuang, don't tell your cousin. In the eyes of the Mu Family, I was introduced to Mu Danian as a wife, but now...

If Da Lang finds out about this, he will really get angry."

Huang Bitu always had a knot in her heart.

Initially, Matchmaker Sun introduced her to Mu Danian, and she didn't refuse.

Especially when she heard that Mu Danian had a brother who was a scholar.

She even thought about how, by relying on Mu Danian, her brothers could all find wives.

Mu Shuangshuang understood what Huang Bitu was thinking.

She and Yu Si Niang were both influenced by ancient thoughts, that women should be devoted to one man for life.

When a man was present, listen to him; when he was gone, live a life of purity and die maintaining chastity.

Yet if the wife died, the man could continue to have multiple wives, with a house full of children and grandchildren.

To her, this was unfair, but to the people of the Da Ning Dynasty, it seemed normal.

"Shuangshuang, I'm begging you as your sister-in-law, okay?" Huang Bitu tugged at Mu Shuangshuang's sleeve, her face full of red marks also full of pleading.

She stared at Mu Shuangshuang, her eyes showing utter humility.

Mu Shuangshuang felt a heavy weight pressing on her chest.

It seemed like the remarks she made earlier had no effect.

Huang Bitu was still in avoidance mode.

"Alright, then... sister-in-law, be cautious in everything, never be alone with my Fifth Uncle, and firmly refuse when any situation arises."

Mu Shuangshuang felt somewhat resigned and defeated.

There were some things she didn't agree with, but was powerless to change.

She couldn't make decisions for anyone else, so all she could do was give her best effort to support Huang Bitu and gradually instill modern thinking in her.

"Also, let my cousin handle things with my aunt, mothers will always listen to their sons more than their daughters-in-law. Just avoid my aunt when you see her, like today, don't get involved, just come to the third branch, understand?" Mu Shuangshuang said.

Huang Bitu nodded firmly.

"Thank you, Shuangshuang!"

Mu Shuangshuang meticulously examined the injuries on Huang Bitu's face.

They were all surface wounds but very apparent, and when Mu Dalang returned, it was unavoidable that he would also throw a fit and cause trouble for Mrs. Lin.

It was excessive for a person like Mrs. Lin to beat her to this extent.

Perhaps Mu Dalang's previous consideration about separating the family was indeed timely.

"Sister-in-law, let me get some medicine for you!"

...

In the blink of an eye, it was midday, and the men who were helping on the worksite returned.

These few days, Mu Shuangshuang had nothing to do, so she cooked by herself, and the location changed from the small shed on the worksite to the Mu Family's Third Branch.

A large number of good dishes were made by her and Huang Bitu together.

Mrs. Lin came by a few times in between, always trying to take advantage of Mu Shuangshuang's inattention to take Huang Bitu away, but Mu Shuangshuang saw through her every time.

Now Mrs. Lin just stood outside the courtyard waiting.

After all, she needed to use the Third Branch's kitchen to cook.

Before resolving the kitchen issue at the Old Mu Family, all the meals needed to be handled by Mrs. Lin on her own, as ordered by Old Mrs. Mu.

These few days, Mu Dalang didn't go to the town anymore, as he was waiting for spring to collect the dairy sheep from the master. In the meantime, he was doing odd jobs at Mu Shuangshuang's construction site, earning twenty coins a day, which included three meals.

The prices set by Mu Shuangshuang were relatively high, mainly because the hired hands were exceptionally hard-working.

Over a few days of work, much had been accomplished, and the progress exceeded Mu Shuangshuang's expectations.

Others only paid twelve coins with one meal included, but she included three meals with meat in every meal, making everyone happy to work for her.

Chapter 836: Second Aunt Took a Fall

The dishes had just been prepared, and Mrs. Lin twisted her waist, heading towards the third branch.

She looked at the people of the third branch with hatred, over and over.

In front of Mu Shuangshuang, she entered the third branch's kitchen.

To be honest, Mu Shuangshuang regretted lending the kitchen to the Old Mu Family. Mrs. Lin had bad cooking habits; every time she finished cooking, she didn't clean up.

Every time she came, Yu Si Niang had to spend time cleaning up, otherwise the mess left behind would be unbearable for anyone.

Mrs. Lin cooked very slowly and still hadn't served the meal for a long time.

In the backyard of the Old Mu Family, Cao Miaomiao moved around as if she had ants in her pants.

She asked Mu Qingqing beside her, "Qingqing, why hasn't your mom cooked and served the meal yet?"

Cao Miaomiao and Mu Qingqing were about the same age, but the terms "sister" and "sibling" had never been used between them.

Especially after Mu Xianxian mentioned Cao Miaomiao's engagement to Liu Zian, Mu Qingqing regarded Cao Miaomiao as a thorn in her side!

"How would I know? I'm not helping cook. Besides, my mother isn't a servant. It's good enough she's cooking for you; stop whining or I'll send you home!"

Mu Qingqing's attitude was far from pleasant.

"Is that how you talk? You country bumpkin, you don't even have nice clothes. Your parents are so poor, they'll end up selling their daughters!"

Cao Miaomiao wasn't one to be trifled with, especially after Mu Xianxian fell out with Mrs. Lin. These days, various tales from the second branch were instilled in Cao Miaomiao.

Every casual remark from her made Mu Qingqing uncomfortable.

"You..." Mu Qingqing rushed forward, trying to slap Cao Miaomiao.

But Cao Miaomiao was stronger, and as soon as Mu Qingqing raised her hand, Cao Miaomiao hit her stomach, making her grimace in pain and fall to the ground.

Cao Miaomiao patted her chest and sneered at Mu Qingqing, "Where is your mom? Tell me, so I can get her to cook! Dragging on all day; people might think your mom is an idiot, a fool, or a lunatic."

Like mother, like daughter.

Most of Cao Miaomiao's words were learned from Mu Xianxian, and she was certainly no novice.

Mu Qingqing gritted her teeth, remembering Mu Shuangshuang was in the third branch.

She told Cao Miaomiao that her mother, Mrs. Lin, was in the third branch.

Dragging her sizable body, Cao Miaomiao walked towards the kitchen in the Old Mu Family's third branch, just in time to meet Mu Shuangshuang carrying a bowl towards Mu Dashan's room.

Mu Shuangshuang and Cao Miaomiao had clashed on the street before.

So Cao Miaomiao recognized Mu Shuangshuang immediately.

Seeing Mu Shuangshuang holding a bowl, Cao Miaomiao realized that Mu Shuangshuang's family was eating alone.

Without thinking, Cao Miaomiao rushed up, wanting to argue with Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang saw it was Cao Miaomiao, and calmly blocked the door with a wooden plank, clearly not wanting Cao Miaomiao to come in.

Mu Xianxian had been at the Mu Family for a while, refusing to leave until Old Mrs. Mu and Mr. Mu came up with a plan against the third branch.

She stayed at the Old Mu Family all day.

Cao Miaomiao ate a lot too, and after a few days, the Old Mu Family's grain reserves were noticeably depleted.

Old Mrs. Mu had been in a foul mood for a long time, but couldn't find a reason to make Mu Xianxian and Cao Miaomiao leave, so she had to comfort herself by thinking she was raising a lazy, gluttonous pig.

"Little brat, come out! My mom and I have been here so long, why haven't you made something nice for us?" Cao Miaomiao shouted angrily.

Cao Miaomiao's face was all fleshy, and when she talked, her features were squished together by the fat, resembling a sticky mass; those tiny, bean-sized eyes, even when wide, were smaller than others when squinting.

Despite being young, Cao Miaomiao was extremely vicious, constantly plotting how to crush Mu Shuangshuang underfoot.

"Haven't you woken up?" Mu Shuangshuang sneered.

"You're the one who hasn't! Get out here. Watch me beat you!" Cao Miaomiao shook her chubby arm and yelled at Mu Shuangshuang.

"Where did this country girl come from? Looking like that, and talking to our leader?" Huang Er suddenly jumped up from a long bench, moving towards Cao Miaomiao.

Then came Huang Da, followed by the two men Zhang Yutou and Zhao Gouzi.

The men had just finished working and weren't wearing much.

It was just enough to let Cao Miaomiao see their solid muscles.

They were all big and burly, and Cao Miaomiao cautiously retreated a few steps, staring at the group that was shouting.

People before weaker individuals become strong, but in front of someone stronger, they slightly restrain themselves.

"You... just wait!" Leaving behind harsh words, Cao Miaomiao backed down and went to trouble Mrs. Lin.

In the kitchen of the third branch, Mrs. Lin was making fire and picking vegetables, busy enough to smoke, unaware of when Cao Miaomiao came in.

"Auntie, what's with your speed? The vegetables will be cold soon, if you don't finish the meal, I'll starve to death!" Cao Miaomiao started scolding with a barrage of criticism.

Mrs. Lin's expression instantly changed; she looked at her niece, who was as fat as the pig in the third branch's pen, and couldn't contain her anger.

"Just eating. All you know is to eat. Look at yourself, as fat as a pig. In the Old Mu Family, who's as ugly and fat as you? If I were you, I'd rather die, than be such a hindrance." Mrs. Lin said bluntly.

Among the women in the Old Mu Family, none were fat, as they ate little and did a lot.

Unlike Mu Xianxian's family in town, selling shoes and making some money.

Sufficient to easily maintain a Cao Miaomiao.

But Cao Miaomiao had grown up accustomed to eating well, and Mu Xianxian always spoke nice things in front of her.

Old Mrs. Cao, although she didn't like Mu Xianxian as a country daughter-in-law, loved both grandchildren as if they were treasures.

No one ever spoke to Cao Miaomiao like this.

With rage in her little bean eyes, Cao Miaomiao glared, emitting sounds like a pig's "wang wang," a precursor to her anger.

She muttered under her breath, "Go die..."

Her hard head hit Mrs. Lin's stomach, knocking her down, followed by a crushing weight.

Mrs. Lin's cries echoed from the kitchen.

The men eating in the room all heard it, each holding their breath, craning their necks to peer into Mu Shuangshuang's kitchen, wanting to see what's happening.

The most anxious among them were Huang Bitu and Mu Dalang.

After all, Mrs. Lin was Mu Dalang's mother; unless Mrs. Lin was troublemaking, anyone bullying her meant Mu Dalang had to help, otherwise he wouldn't be a fit son.

Mu Shuangshuang naturally noticed; she didn't want Mrs. Lin to be bullied by Cao Miaomiao either.

After all, Mrs. Lin was an Old Mu Family member; Cao Miaomiao was merely an outsider.

"Everyone continue eating! I'll go check with Brother Dalang."

Chapter 837: Fengzi Told Me Everything

"I'll go with you," said Huang Bitu.

"Bitu, you stay here with Third Uncle and Third Aunt. We don't know what's going on in the kitchen."  
Mu Da Lang shook his head, not allowing Huang Bitu to go.

Yu Si Niang said, "Bitu, listen to Da Lang, wait here. With so many of us, Da Lang and Shuangshuang won't be at a disadvantage."

Only then did Huang Bitu pull a smile toward everyone.

Mu Shuangshuang stood up and went to the kitchen with Mu Da Lang.

...

In the kitchen, Cao Miaomiao was sitting on Mrs. Lin, who was struggling beneath her, out of breath.

All she could do was plead for mercy.

Seeing Mu Shuangshuang, Mrs. Lin looked like she'd found a lifeline and shouted at Mu Shuangshuang, "Shuangshuang, quickly... quickly get this fat pig off me, it's going to crush me."

Mrs. Lin kept calling her a fat pig, which made Cao Miaomiao's face flush with anger. She slightly lifted her behind and applied more pressure.

This time, Mrs. Lin shouted even louder, "Oh my waist, hey, fat pig, get up... Someone's going to die here...!"

Mrs. Lin had been dominant for half her life and rarely bowed to anyone except Old Mrs. Mu.

With the pain reaching this point, she was almost kneeling before Cao Miaomiao.

Mu Da Lang couldn't bear it. He stepped forward, but before he could touch Cao Miaomiao's hand, she shouted, "Someone help, he's molesting me..."

"Old Mu Family's grandson is molesting me!"

This dirty accusation made Mu Da Lang freeze, unable to take another step, only able to watch as Mrs. Lin was bullied.

"Shuangshuang, save me. I won't bother the third branch anymore, won't trouble you, alright?" Mrs. Lin said.

Mu Shuangshuang thoughtfully stroked her chin, speaking slowly, "I need to think about it."

"What is there to think about? While you're thinking, I'm getting crushed to death by this fat hag. Did you know, this fat hag is Liu Zian's fiancée, and aren't you close with Liu Zian?"

"Do you want your good friend to marry such an unworthy and ungainly hag? With Liu Zian's build, he'll be squashed to death at night by this fat hag!"

Mrs. Lin yelled loudly, not seeming pitiful at all, instead giving Mu Shuangshuang the impression that she was quite remarkable.

"Second Aunt, your attitude is bad, Shuangshuang doesn't want to save you!"

"You..." Mrs. Lin was exasperated, but realizing her situation, she could only bow her head further.

"Shuangshuang, tell me what to do, and I'll do it, just save me!"

Mrs. Lin squeezed out two crocodile tears, sounding pitiful, "I'm going to be killed by this fat hag."

As Mrs. Lin spoke, Cao Miaomiao's behind kept shifting around her waist, like clothes being rubbed on a washboard.

"I'm not asking much, just clean the kitchen for me afterward. I don't want my mom to clean up after you all the time," Mu Shuangshuang said.

Mrs. Lin nodded vigorously.

Just then, Mu Shuangshuang swiftly stepped forward and kicked Cao Miaomiao's hefty body.

Cao Miaomiao toppled over, letting out a series of pig-like squeals.

Mrs. Lin seized the chance to scramble up from the ground.

She hid behind Mu Da Lang.

"Da Lang, beat her to death, beat this little slut, this tramp!"

Mu Da Lang stood frozen, unable to bring himself to hit a woman.

"Da Lang, why are you hesitating? Are you not listening to your mother?" Mrs. Lin yelled at Mu Da Lang.

"Mom, I won't hit women. If you want to hit, do it yourself!" Mu Da Lang replied.

"You heartless child, you..."

Mrs. Lin still wanted to curse, but Mu Shuangshuang intervened, "Second Aunt, if you don't prepare lunch soon, Grandma will definitely flay you alive."

On hearing this, Mrs. Lin's face instantly turned pale.

But Cao Miaomiao was still in the kitchen, contemplating how to settle the matter when Mu Shuangshuang stepped forward, grabbing Cao Miaomiao and tossing her out like a chick.

With a loud "bang," a cloud of dust rose in the third branch's yard as Cao Miaomiao wailed endlessly.

"Second Aunt, I've cleaned the kitchen for you, so when my big aunt comes later, explain yourself, and by the way, tidy up our kitchen!"

In the kitchen, Mrs. Lin continued busying herself with lunch, clattering around as if there was something major happening.

Once lunch was ready, she called Old Mu Family's daughters to serve the meal.

The meal felt like a battle.

She even had to deal with Mu Xianxian's questioning.

Finally, Old Mu Family's lunch was over.

Meanwhile, everyone from the third branch had gone back to work, leaving Mu Shuangshuang happily busying herself with washing bedcovers and dirty clothes in the yard.

Just finishing a tub of laundry, preparing to go to the village creek to rinse it, she ran into Liu Zian coming toward her family.

After not seeing each other for a while, Liu Zian's face hadn't improved, looking thinner.

He immediately apologized to Mu Shuangshuang, "Shuangshuang, I'm sorry, about that incident... I wrongly accused you!"

It was all thanks to Lu Yuanfeng, who didn't want Shuangshuang to be misunderstood, and personally went to explain to Liu Zian.

He recounted all that Song Family said when they came causing trouble, even the parts where things got physical.

Liu Zian realized how badly he had treated her.

Originally, Liu Zian hadn't truly believed that Shuangshuang had hit his mother.

He just thought that if Shuangshuang apologized, his mother wouldn't blame her, and then he'd still have a chance with Shuangshuang.

"You wronged me? Not really, right! I'm Mu Shuangshuang: straightforward and blunt. If I dislike someone, I hit them, no need to consider anyone's opinion." Mu Shuangshuang lowered her eyes, looked at her feet, and spoke indifferently.

"Shuangshuang, don't lie to me. I know, I know everything! Fengzi told me."

Liu Zian's words shocked Mu Shuangshuang.

These days, Lu Yuanfeng spent every day with her, except at night after dinner.

If he went to Liu Family Village, it had to be after dinner, at night?

This silly boy must be crazy!

Da Ning Dynasty's winter was especially cold, with the piercing wind.

Especially at night, even indoors, you could hear the cold wind howling.

That silly boy actually went out at night to explain something she didn't even care about.

"Even if he told you, what of it? I owe nothing to you or your mom." Mu Shuangshuang sneered, sounding somewhat resentful.

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ps: Some say Huang Bitu is too weak, but she and Yu Si Niang are ancient women. They can't be as carefree as Mu Shuangshuang, ignoring all etiquette. Deep down, they're traditional women, and change won't happen in the blink of an eye.

The book's main setting tries its best to adhere to ancient customs and thoughts. When one is suppressed to a certain point, they'll rise against it, and who knows what situation that might lead to.

Chapter 838: Too Weak to Lift a Finger

"Shuang, can you not talk like that? I know you're not like that."

Liu Zian said with a resolute expression.

"Not like that, then what kind of person am I? Do you think you know me well?" Mu Shuangshuang replied.

"Shuang, aren't we friends? Can't you give me another chance? I know my mom and I were wrong; I'm here to apologize to you." Liu Zian said.

It would have been better if he hadn't mentioned being friends; as soon as he did, Mu Shuangshuang got angry.

Back then Liu Zian practically dragged her to apologize to the Song family, saying it didn't matter if she hit them or not, just apologize first.

Her friends didn't act so unreasonably, telling her to apologize without understanding the situation. She wasn't a pushover, why should she take the fall for something she didn't do?

"Say whatever you want! Anyway, I'm going to do my laundry."

Mu Shuangshuang picked up the wooden bucket and walked around Liu Zian. She hadn't taken two steps before Liu Zian grabbed the bucket.

"Shuang, will you listen to my explanation? After I explain, if you're still upset, I won't bother you anymore, deal?" Liu Zian refused to let go, still trying to get Mu Shuangshuang to listen.

Mu Shuangshuang felt she'd made herself clear.

But what can you do with a scholar like Liu Zian who won't listen to reason?

"Liu Zian, can you not waste my time doing laundry? I don't want to hear your explanation." Mu Shuangshuang said impatiently.

"Shuang, if you're going to do laundry, I'll go with you. Just listen to me on the way." Liu Zian said, taking the wooden bucket from Mu Shuangshuang's hands.

At this point, Mu Shuangshuang hadn't let go, so Liu Zian didn't feel the bucket was heavy.

Seeing his determined expression, Mu Shuangshuang simply released the bucket.

The bucket was filled mostly with bed sheets, three of them, plus some small clothes. The sheets hadn't been wrung out properly, so it was heavier than a bucket full of water.

Mu Shuangshuang was used to this kind of work; given her strong foundation, this was no problem.

But Liu Zian was different.

Usually a scholar who couldn't lift or carry anything heavy, he'd get tired just walking a bit farther than usual; now he had to carry such a big bucket of clothes.

It was clear this was quite a challenge for him.

Carrying a wooden bucket, Liu Zian struggled, while Mu Shuangshuang didn't lend a hand, letting him show off.

After a while, Liu Zian started panting and couldn't walk anymore.

He was too out of breath to explain anything to Mu Shuangshuang.

After a few more steps, Mu Shuangshuang couldn't stand it any longer, grabbed the bucket, and said to Liu Zian, "You'd better not follow me. Fengzi and I are engaged, so it's not appropriate for us to be alone together.

By then, it won't just be your mom misunderstanding; the people in the village will have plenty to say about me."

In front of Liu Zian, Mu Shuangshuang picked up the bucket and briskly headed to the creek.

Watching Mu Shuangshuang carry the bucket without breaking a sweat, Liu Zian suddenly felt a bit embarrassed.

He, Liu Zian, a grown man, not even as strong as a girl...

Liu Zian felt dejected. He turned towards the third branch's courtyard, intending to wait for Shuangshuang there.

Before he reached the courtyard gate, Mrs. Lin, who had been observing secretly for a while, caught him.

Liu Zian had visited Er Gui Village a few times, and last time, while he was tutoring Mu Xiaohan, quite a few villagers came to watch.

Mrs. Lin had also watched, but back then she didn't know Liu Zian was a scholar.

If she had known, she would have had her daughter approach Liu Zian a long time ago, rather than waiting until now.

"Zian, do you know who I am?" Mrs. Lin approached, trying to get familiar.

Mrs. Lin had taken some small dishes to Liu Family Village, wanting to see Liu Zian, and incidentally mention Mu Qingqing. Who knew, Song's family was so sharp they didn't let Liu Zian out.

So, Liu Zian hadn't seen Mu Shuangshuang's second aunt at his own house, but he had met her a few times at Mu Shuangshuang's house.

"I know, you're Shuangshuang's second aunt!" Liu Zian answered honestly.

"You only know this part; your mom and I are good sisters. I've even visited your house a few times, but your mom said you're preparing for the Imperial Examination, needing to study.

Right, why did you come to our village?" Mrs. Lin asked knowingly, aware of Mu Shuangshuang's good relationship with Liu Zian.

To be honest, Mrs. Lin didn't think Mu Shuangshuang and Liu Zian were interested in each other, especially since that girl was always hanging around with the Lu Family's boy.

No way would she look at any other man.

"I... I came to find Shuangshuang." Liu Zian said.

"Because of your mom's incident last time? Actually, I think you can't blame Shuangshuang for this, but your mom is adamant. Is Shuang still mad at you?" Mrs. Lin asked tentatively.

Seeing that Liu Zian still treated her politely, without any familiarity.

Mrs. Lin straightforwardly said, "How about this, you come to my house, and I'll tell you how to make Shuang not mad at you, okay?"

"Really?" Liu Zian didn't think too much about it, he only knew that Mu Shuangshuang was still mad at him.

And what he needed to do was make Shuangshuang not mad at him.

"Of course, follow me! But be careful not to let Shuang's grandma see, she doesn't like Shuangshuang."

Mrs. Lin spoke with apparent sincerity, as if she was genuinely considering the relationship between Mu Shuangshuang and Liu Zian.

...

After washing the clothes, Mu Shuangshuang carried them back, expecting to still see Liu Zian at her house.

But to her surprise, he was nowhere to be found, not in the yard or the house.

Knowing Liu Zian as she did, he likely wouldn't leave easily; not seeing him at her house meant he probably went to Old Mu Family's place.

Perhaps he was called by Mu Xianxian to play the convenient son-in-law.

"It's just as well he's not here, saving me from any distraction!"

Mu Shuangshuang hung the clothes on the bamboo pole outside. In the winter, just after midday, the sun was quite strong; whether drying clothes or cured meat, it was a good time.

The third branch's cured meat was already complete after Lu Yuanfeng's several trips to the mountains.

The rest, as long as it was Lu Yuanfeng's game, was sold at a fair price to the villagers.

Luckily, with no butchers left in the village, Lu Yuanfeng's game was almost sold out as soon as it appeared.

Thanks to this, the two families were managing to get by.

A tavern and an academy had nearly spent all of Mu Shuangshuang's saved silver; she didn't have any extra silver taels for business now.

She only had about five taels in savings, most of which was earned by Fengzi through hunting.

So, to ensure both the third branch and Fengzi's family could enjoy hot meals before the next summer harvest, she had to start considering promoting the academy and collecting the students' gifts.

Due to financial concerns, Mu Shuangshuang had to be prudent.

The gifts couldn't be too expensive, or the villagers from miles around wouldn't be able to afford them.

Yet she also couldn't afford to run such a large academy without sufficient gifts.

#### Chapter 839: Matters of Opening the Academy

In the town's academy, the fees are tiered. For kids who are just beginning their studies, it's relatively cheap—three taels of silver a year, plus a few pots of good wine, and five pieces of cured meat.

For the kids in town, it's indeed not expensive, but for farming families, it's the result of long-term frugality and savings.

Moreover, going to town incurs additional expenses, including travel and food for the students, which are not covered.

Mu Shuangshuang calculated and decided to charge one tael of silver per student. As for the dried meat, three pieces per student, or families can work off the debt if they don't have dried meat.

The idea of working off the debt comes from Mu Shuangshuang's plan to plant some beans in the dry lands, which have a high yield and are easy to harvest.

Pickled beans made from them are very tasty.

Mu Shuangshuang plans to pair the pickled beans with some dishes to serve as special cuisine at her family's restaurant.

Since it's tied to the restaurant, the production needs to be more than just a little.

The academy Mu Shuangshuang built is a courtyard-style house. With all the costs of construction, including labor and various materials and furnishings, it came to eighteen taels.

Additionally, the fee for hiring Mr. Luo has to be deducted, so Mu Shuangshuang guesses that making a profit in the next few years isn't feasible.

Honestly, this time building a private school isn't just for Xiao Han or to make money, but to establish a foothold in the village.

Mu Dade as a scholar has a significant influence over Er Gui Village; everyone basically listens to Mu Dade.

Even Wang Erma's smooth capture was because he injured Mu Dazhong with a knife.

If it had been the third branch, Wang Erma might not have been caught so easily.

Therefore, without inherent advantages, for Mu Shuangshuang to deal with Mu Dade's tricks in the village, she must find a better identity for the third branch.

Analyzing this, Mu Shuangshuang has more than a few headaches.

Especially with no one to discuss her thoughts with.

Just thinking this, Mu Shuangshuang suddenly felt like there was a burning flame behind her.

She turned around and saw Lu Yuanfeng at the courtyard entrance, smiling at her.

Mu Shuangshuang's eyes widened in confusion.

Isn't this guy supposed to be helping at the construction site?

Why is he back?

"What's up? Is the construction site short of water or something?" Mu Shuangshuang went up to ask.

"Third Uncle said they didn't need me at the construction site anymore and told me to come back to help you out," Lu Yuanfeng said with a wide grin.

"Oh, looks like the progress has sped up a bit," Mu Shuangshuang responded with a smile.

"You came back at just the right time; I have something to discuss with you." Mu Shuangshuang dragged Lu Yuanfeng into her room.

This wasn't Lu Yuanfeng's first time in Mu Shuangshuang's room.

The room felt very cozy. Though there weren't many decorations, everything was arranged in an orderly manner.

Everything in Mu Shuangshuang's room was arranged according to the strict requirements of her past life in the police force.

Whether it was the blankets or the placement of items, even the shoes were neatly placed.

Lu Yuanfeng sometimes felt that Shuangshuang's love for cleanliness wasn't just that simple.

She gave off an air of strict discipline.

Very much like the feeling he got from the commander during his time in the army.

But he never mentioned this to Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang went over her ideas in her mind and shared them with Lu Yuanfeng.

Lu Yuanfeng thought for a moment and provided an answer that satisfied Mu Shuangshuang: "We should leverage Luo Juren's reputation, as Shuangshuang suggested, for publicity.

Luo Juren is a scholar, and in the entire Da Ning Dynasty, there's no doubt about his position, which is on par with your uncle's.

The only thing is, he's not from our village; people here don't trust him like they trust your uncle."

Mu Shuangshuang understood this well.

Nepotism comes first. In any case, Mu Dade is a local, born and raised in the village. Trusting Mu Dade is definitely more likely than trusting Luo Juren.

"So what does Fengzi suggest we do to make the villagers trust Luo Juren and send their children to our private school?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Shuangshuang, we actually don't need to confine ourselves to kids from this village. You should know, in every village, there aren't many willing to send their kids to school.

It's not just about the one tael per year but also the future. To truly nurture a scholar, just a scholar, costs no less than a dozen taels.

Someone like Liu Zian might not spend much, but your uncle has probably spent over two hundred taels over the years, right?"

Mu Dade's examination attempts could possibly have cost more than two hundred taels.

In the county, that would buy a three-courtyard house and even hire a few maids and servants.

But the Old Mu Family wouldn't think about these things.

They only see Mu Dade's current achievements, without considering future possibilities.

"I had also considered children from other villages, but it is indeed challenging. It's still a trust issue. However, since we've used the village head's connections before, we can again ask for his help.

Oh, and I remember the village head's grandson is also at the age for primary education. If he's willing, we can let his grandson study here for free. What do you think?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"It's a good idea, but the village head should prefer sending his child to study in town because it's bigger." Lu Yuanfeng replied.

"That might not be the case; young children should stay close. The village head's wife dotes on her grandson, so if we convince her, it shouldn't be an issue."

The two of them kept discussing, feeling more and more confident about the plan's feasibility.

Right then, Mu Shuangshuang couldn't wait to find the village head's wife to talk about it.

She didn't notice Lu Yuanfeng's gaze had changed.

The two were already dating, and in the somewhat closed setting, Lu Yuanfeng suddenly reached out and wrapped his arms around Mu Shuangshuang's shoulders.

"Fengzi, you..."

"Shuangshuang, don't say anything. Let me hold you for a while!"

Such bold words made Mu Shuangshuang's face turn bright red.

This guy is getting more and more improper.

"Fengzi, let's solve the problem first and then you can hug me for as long as you want, okay?" Mu Shuangshuang said.

"No!" Lu Yuanfeng firmly refused.

At this moment, he was reluctant to let such a soft figure leave him.

Holding Shuangshuang, Lu Yuanfeng felt particularly at ease, with warmth continually washing over his chest.

"Then... just one kiss," Mu Shuangshuang barely whispered.

It was almost inaudible.

But Lu Yuanfeng's sharp ears caught it.

He quickly released Mu Shuangshuang and, with a hint of amusement in his eyes, stared at her and asked, "Really... can I kiss you?"

Mu Shuangshuang glared fiercely at Lu Yuanfeng: "I was joking!"

Chapter 840: Learn from Your Eldest Aunt

"No way!" Lu Yuanfeng seriously held onto Mu Shuangshuang's hand, refusing to let go.

The seriousness made Mu Shuangshuang feel a bit amused.

"Fengzi, you can't just act like a rascal," Mu Shuangshuang said.

Lu Yuanfeng blushed, hesitating for a while before saying, "Even if I act like a rascal, it's only towards you, Shuangshuang."

After saying this, he sneaked a glance at Mu Shuangshuang. Seeing she wasn't angry, Lu Yuanfeng continued, "I don't care; anyway, you said it yourself, I heard it all."

Mu Shuangshuang didn't realize before how thick-skinned this man was—it was women who gradually made him this way.

Now she understood.

Before, wasn't Fengzi very shy?

Holding hands would make him blush, but now not only hand-holding but even hugging was a common thing.

Not to mention, now he even wants her to kiss him.

The more she thought about it, the more Mu Shuangshuang felt she couldn't indulge him like this.

Otherwise, all her tofu would be eaten up.

"Fengzi, I decide..." Before she could finish speaking, Lu Yuanfeng directly cupped her face and pinned her against the wall.

It felt like a century had passed. Mu Shuangshuang stared wide-eyed at the man in front of her, bold as a bull, with her hands already clenched into fists, yet she couldn't bring herself to punch that face.

But if she didn't get back at him, Mu Shuangshuang felt unsatisfied.

So, she simply jumped up, cupped Lu Yuanfeng's face, and gave it right back to him.

Lu Yuanfeng's mind went blank, and he stared at Mu Shuangshuang as if he was dumbfounded, his eyes even wider than hers.

The two young people were immersed in their world of love, each making attempts again and again, both cherishing this relationship deeply.

...

Liu Zian sat at Mrs. Lin's side for a long time, having several cups of tea, but Mrs. Lin hadn't mentioned any way to make Shuangshuang not angry.

Instead, since Liu Zian came in, Mrs. Lin had been introducing Mu Qingqing.

"Zian, that child Qing is kind, honest, and very filial. She doesn't let Daddy Gou Dan and me work at all on weekdays."

Mrs. Lin pointed at Mu Qingqing and said.

Liu Zian smiled awkwardly, not knowing how to respond, so he let Mrs. Lin boast about her daughter by herself.

"You don't know, before Qing's uncle passed the exam, our family had a lot going on, Qing helped with cooking, washing clothes, and farming..."

Mrs. Lin was putting every possible crown on her daughter's head, without any reservation.

Mu Qingqing cooperatively stood by with a shy smile.

In Mrs. Lin's view, all men love gentle and virtuous women willing to work, and if she has a good face, even better.

Just as well, her daughter looks good, more than suitable for Liu Zian.

"Our Qing is someone with good fortune; when she was born, there were beautiful auspicious clouds in the sky."

Being praised for so long, Mu Qingqing felt embarrassed listening to herself, especially when she found out Liu Zian didn't particularly care. She quickly put on a shy face, "Mom, stop it, I'm not that good."

"You child, why be shy? Mom's not lying, it's all true, what's there to feel embarrassed about? You're so excellent, whoever marries you might become a lord."

The more Mrs. Lin spoke, the more straightforward she became. If Liu Zian still didn't get it, he would truly be a fool.

"Auntie, I have something to do, I must go." Liu Zian stood up, wanting to leave.

But Mrs. Lin wouldn't allow it; she signaled Mu Qingqing with a look and added, "Look at you, child, why so impatient? How long have you been here? Last time your mom was here, she stayed all morning, at least stay for an hour."

"Auntie, I really have something to do. If there's a chance, I'll have my mom come to visit personally, okay?"

One can't hit a smiling face with a hand; Liu Zian couldn't speak harshly to Mrs. Lin.

Seeing Liu Zian insist on leaving, Mu Qingqing poured him another cup of tea, "Brother Zi'an, you should listen to my mom and sit for a while. It's very cold outside. If you want to study, I can borrow some books from my uncle for you, will that work?"

"No need, I... I'm not wanting to study; I have other things to do," Liu Zian shook his head.

"Then just sit for a bit longer. If you want to ask anything, you can ask me." Mu Qingqing spoke softly.

Liu Zian really didn't want to ask Mrs. Lin or Mu Qingqing anything by this point.

He decided to handle his own matters, alone.

"No, no, I have no questions, I just want to go back!"

Liu Zian was quite embarrassed to stay at the second branch, and hadn't said much, mostly being questioned by Mrs. Lin.

She asked about his future plans, whether it was to stay in the Capital or in the county.

Whether it was the county or the Capital, Mrs. Lin didn't mind, as long as it's not this small Mud Legs Village.

Having another cup of tea, Liu Zian insisted on leaving and Mrs. Lin couldn't stop him.

She could only watch as Liu Zian left the territory of the second branch and headed towards the third branch.

"Mom, that Liu Zian doesn't like me at all; his heart is with that wretched girl in the third branch. Mom, what should we do?" Mu Qingqing looked displeased.

She originally thought that her mom bringing Liu Zian over would help her gain an advantage.

Turns out, it wasn't.

He came only to make that wretched girl not angry.

"Qing, you don't understand this. All men are lecherous; they eat from the bowl while looking at the pot. He may seem indifferent to you now, but how do you know he's not harboring feelings for you deep down?"

Just like your uncle, at first, he and that Ruan Jiaojiao were childhood sweethearts, looking as if they were about to marry, appearing loving to everyone.

In the end, wasn't it your aunt who was one step ahead, directly drugging your uncle so the two were glued together? Your aunt had more skills than that Ruan Jiaojiao and could offer your uncle more things.

Your uncle didn't care about anything and married your aunt. All these years, haven't they been fine? Have you seen your uncle take a concubine?"

Mrs. Lin brought up Mu Dade's example with reason.

She had ways to deal with Liu Zian.

She just didn't want to use them before.

Since Liu Zian wouldn't do as she said, she'd learn from Mrs. Jin.

If Liu Zian, a scholar, really had something happen with her daughter and didn't marry her, she would make sure Liu Zian couldn't bear the consequences.

"Mom, you mean we should do like aunt?" Mu Qingqing asked.

"As expected of my daughter Lin Xiaozao, you understand right away! You are in a much better position than your aunt. Although your aunt's family claims to be scholarly, look, who truly passed the scholar exam there?"

Aren't they just passing time? You have your uncle as a backing, your status is not lower than Mrs. Jin was then. Moreover, Liu Zian is much more honest than your uncle; you wouldn't suffer marrying him."

Mrs. Lin's little schemes were clicking loudly.