

Folly 841

Chapter 841: The Younger Aunt Rekindles the Flames

Suddenly, Mrs. Lin spoke up, "No way, I have to go to town and get you some of that medicine, so that you can secure Liu Zian before he ends up in your aunt's pocket."

Mrs. Lin wasn't worried about Mu Shuangshuang and Liu Zian being involved.

After all, if Mu Shuangshuang, who was already betrothed, was caught with Liu Zian, the villagers would drag her to be dunked in a pig cage for sure.

But Mu Xianxian was different.

Her daughter, Cao Miaomiao, was engaged to the Liu Family, and perhaps any day now they would settle the betrothal.

"What should we do?" Mu Qingqing was a bit anxious.

"Why rush? Your mother is here," Mrs. Lin reassured Mu Qingqing.

Her shifty eyes flashed a glimmer, and after a while, Mrs. Lin said, "We have to use that brat to make Liu Zian break off the engagement with Miao."

"So, I'll go to your aunt and say Liu Zian is involved with the brat. You go to Miaomiao and have her beat up the brat. Once this escalates, Liu Zian will surely break off the engagement."

Mrs. Lin finished sharing her idea, feeling it was just perfect.

Who in this world is smarter than her?

Hehehe, the brat and Aunt Dog Egg, neither is a match for her; she wants them to tear each other apart.

Mrs. Lin and Mu Qingqing set off separately, Mrs. Lin to find Mu Xianxian, Mu Qingqing to find Cao Miaomiao, neither of which were easy to locate.

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At the Old Mu Family's main house, inside Mu Xiangxiang's room.

Pretending to be crazy and playing dumb for days had worn Mu Xiangxiang out.

Her hair was dull and yellow, and her eyes were lifeless.

Old Mrs. Mu felt pangs of heartache looking at her daughter in such a tormented state.

Today, while no one was paying attention, she prepared plenty of good things for Mu Xiangxiang.

Cured meat, winter bamboo shoots, braised pork, ribs—these were all bought with Old Mrs. Mu's private savings, not even Mu Dade had any.

The kang table was placed on Mu Xiangxiang's kang bed, and she stared at the food drooling with wide eyes.

Her hands, dark and dirty paws, were already on the cured meat, waiting for Old Mrs. Mu to finish speaking to start eating.

"My precious daughter, if I had known you'd end up this miserable, I shouldn't have agreed to your father's plan to marry you off to the town.

Seeing you like this now, my heart aches." Old Mrs. Mu said with full face of heartache.

"Mom, if you don't have anything to say, I'll eat now, I can't hold back." Mu Xiangxiang responded in a coarse, male voice that was even gruffer than a man's.

Old Mrs. Mu nodded.

As soon as she let go, Mu Xiangxiang seemed to be released from a wicked prison.

One hand was already in the pile of cured meat and winter bamboo shoots, immediately greasy all over, grabbing a handful of meat and stuffing it into her mouth.

Her mouth made chomping sounds, oil flowing all over her face.

The first bite wasn't even swallowed before she went for the second, her cheeks about to burst from fullness, yet unwilling to stop.

Old Mrs. Mu watched with full face of heartache.

How long has it been since her daughter had eaten well?

She shouldn't have listened to the old man's nonsense about dietary restrictions; being able to eat is a blessing, others want to eat and can't even manage it.

"Xiangxiang, eat slower, no one is fighting you for it. If it's not enough, I'll prepare more for you." Old Mrs. Mu said from beside.

"Mom, stop nagging beside me, I'm hungry..." Mu Xiangxiang said incoherently.

Only then did Old Mrs. Mu stop talking.

But it wasn't long before Old Mrs. Mu asked again, "Xiangxiang, is there enough oil in the food I made? I know it must have been uncomfortable drinking plain porridge for so long, so I deliberately used half a bowl of lard to cook for you."

Mu Xiangxiang kept stuffing her mouth, the front not yet swallowed, the back already came.

Suddenly, Mu Xiangxiang felt her throat tighten, half a rib slipped into her throat, and a sense of nausea surged.

Mu Xiangxiang was reluctant to have the meat in her mouth be vomited out, attempting to swallow that piece of rib, but this attempt triggered her throat.

"Ugh..."

All the food in her mouth went down the esophagus, reached the throat, and then out of the mouth, vomiting all over the kang.

An overwhelming sour stench assaulted the senses, but this did not affect Mu Xiangxiang's appetite at all.

With a calm expression, she reached her hand into the bowl again, continuing to turn to other dishes.

As for Old Mrs. Mu, there's no way a mother would despise her own daughter.

She was standing by watching Mu Xiangxiang eat with gusto, feeling a lot better herself.

"Good girl, after you finish eating, let Huang Bitu come over to clean it up. That little tramp keeps getting scolded by your second sister-in-law, supposedly really not very clean."

Old Mrs. Mu had shown some leniency towards Huang Bitu, never having hit her.

Normally, these things were done by Mrs. Lin, and she only needed to turn a blind eye.

"Mom, don't bother with Huang Bitu, go find my second sister-in-law, she's nothing good, beat her to death."

Mu Xiangxiang hated Mrs. Lin in particular, even cutting Mrs. Lin's hair so she couldn't face others, still couldn't make Mu Xiangxiang want to spare Mrs. Lin.

"Don't worry, I'm torturing that old bitch. By then, your brother has gone off to the Capital, I'll let your second brother divorce her, let her show off at home for a few days first."

Old Mrs. Mu was famous for being protective.

Since Mrs. Lin dared to mess with Mu Xiangxiang, she would certainly make Mrs. Lin pay.

"Thanks, Mom, I knew you loved me the most." Mu Xiangxiang grinned at Old Mrs. Mu.

The cured meat and winter bamboo shoots, braised pork, ribs on the table were quickly consumed, even the full three large sea bowls of rice were eaten with lard by Mu Xiangxiang.

"Burp~" Mu Xiangxiang finally burped.

Her belly was round, barely distinguishable from a few months pregnant woman, but Mu Xiangxiang was finally satisfied.

"Mom, I want to sleep for a while, can you clean the kang bed?" Mu Xiangxiang licked her lips, still looking like she wanted more.

"Xiangxiang, didn't you say to let Huang Bitu clean it?" Old Mrs. Mu asked in shock.

"Mom, I can't wait, I need to rest!"

With that, Mu Xiangxiang was ready to lie down and sleep, but in such a dirty place, Old Mrs. Mu couldn't bear it.

She had to fetch water herself and clean up Mu Xiangxiang's kang bed thoroughly.

She took down the sheets to replace them, threw them aside, planning to bring them later to the Old Mu Family's main house and let Huang Bitu and Mrs. Liu wash them.

"Mom, hurry up and go wash the sheets, I want to sleep." Mu Xiangxiang drove Old Mrs. Mu away from her own room.

Old Mrs. Mu didn't want to wash the sheets, but she couldn't ignore her daughter's words.

Thinking over it, she decided to stay at the main house for a while, let Mrs. Lin call Huang Bitu to wash the sheets, and then come back to check on Xiangxiang.

"Then I'm going." Old Mrs. Mu opened Mu Xiangxiang's room door, leaving Mu Xiangxiang's room.

As she stepped out, she didn't lock the door; Mu Xiangxiang wasn't crazy after all.

Mu Xiangxiang followed closely behind Old Mrs. Mu, heading towards the Old Mu Family's latrine.

The first thing Mu Xiangxiang did entering was to inspect around the latrine, seeing no one was around, she comfortably stirred up her throat.

A wave of nausea overwhelmed her.

Another avalanche of vomiting released from her mouth, spewing all the contents out.

"Ugh, finally comfortable, but still so hungry..." Mu Xiangxiang mumbled.

Chapter 842: Sharing Weight Loss Methods

Mu Xiangxiang lay weakly by the latrine, looking too tired to even lift a finger.

After resting for a moment, she finally got up.

As soon as she turned around, she saw Cao Miaomiao behind her, looking curious.

Mu Xiangxiang had been staying at Mu Xianxian's place for a long time and had a decent relationship with Cao Miaomiao, at least better than with Mu Qingqing and Mu Xiaxia.

"Aunt, why were you throwing up in the latrine?" Cao Miaomiao asked.

"Oh, just ate too much! By the way, why are you here? Is my eldest sister here too?"

Mu Xiangxiang hadn't seen Mu Xianxian for a long time, and she did miss her a bit.

"Yes, yes. Aunt, I'm so hungry..." Cao Miaomiao said as her stomach growled in agreement.

"If you're hungry, go eat, what's the big deal." Before, Mu Xiangxiang was unwell, but now her throat was ruined, though she had recovered.

She could eat whatever she wanted now.

"My mom won't let me eat, she says I'm... too fat. Aunt, you're so skinny and eat so much, how do you do it?"

Cao Miaomiao was frustrated because her family used to say she wasn't fat.

But ever since coming to the Old Mu Family, after her second aunt scolded her for being a "fat pig," her mom wouldn't let her eat freely anymore.

Everything came with restrictions.

For example, she used to be able to eat without stopping, eight bowls of rice, four plates of dishes, all cooked in lard.

But now, she could only have one bowl of rice, not even enough to fill the gaps in her teeth.

"Fat?" Mu Xiangxiang covered her mouth, chuckled, and said, "Let me teach you how to eat without getting fat."

Back then, Mu Xiangxiang was also fat, but she heard that if you throw up the food you ate, you won't gain weight.

And it's true, over the years, her appetite grew, but she stayed skinny enough to wear whatever she liked without a problem.

"Really?" Cao Miaomiao's eyes lit up, looking at Mu Xiangxiang expectantly.

"Of course it's true, come with me!"

Mu Xiangxiang led Cao Miaomiao to the kitchen, where Old Mrs. Mu would often leave some food in the pot for Mu Xiangxiang, who would frequently get hungry.

Before, whenever Mu Xiangxiang opened her mouth, Old Mrs. Mu would serve her immediately, and now that Mu Xiangxiang had recovered, Old Mrs. Mu returned to her old routine.

She prepared meals for Mu Xiangxiang daily, caring only that her daughter ate comfortably.

The remaining food in the pot was completely fished out by Mu Xiangxiang.

Cao Miaomiao was full of joy, thinking Mu Xiangxiang was going to let her eat till she was full.

Just as her hand was about to reach the bowl, Mu Xiangxiang slapped it away, making Cao Miaomiao wince in pain.

"Aunt, what are you doing? Weren't you going to let me eat?" Cao Miaomiao complained loudly.

"Who said you could eat? I'm here to show you how I eat and still don't get fat," Mu Xiangxiang said.

"I haven't eaten enough myself. If I let you eat, what about me?"

This time, Mu Xiangxiang grabbed a pair of chopsticks, started eating directly from the bowl.

Soon, her mouth was glistening with oil.

Cao Miaomiao watched, drooling, but Mu Xiangxiang had no intention of sharing her meal.

A whole pot of food was eaten by Mu Xiangxiang, even the bowl was licked clean.

Not long after, Mu Xiangxiang dragged Cao Miaomiao to the latrine, and in front of her, stuck her fingers down her throat, vomiting again.

After cleaning up, Mu Xiangxiang's voice became even more hoarse.

Even her eyeballs protruded abnormally.

But Mu Xiangxiang didn't care about any of that.

"See, after eating, just go to the latrine and use your fingers to get it out, and you won't gain weight no matter how much you eat."

Mu Xiangxiang shared her method without reservation with Cao Miaomiao.

Cao Miaomiao was shocked, but she nodded heavily.

Although Mu Xiangxiang seemed to suffer, being able to eat more tasty food was worth a bit of pain.

Before they could talk much, Old Mrs. Mu came to take Mu Xiangxiang away.

On the way, Old Mrs. Mu told Mu Xiangxiang, "Xiangxiang, you can't let others know you're not crazy. If your father finds out, he might divorce me."

What Old Mrs. Mu had done was deceitful, deceiving the head of the Old Mu Family.

The consequences were predictable.

"Hmph, it's not like I agreed to marry someone from the Qin Family, so it has nothing to do with me." Mu Xiangxiang threw a tantrum, making Old Mrs. Mu coax her.

Promising to get her some delicious food and admitting her error, only then did Mu Xiangxiang respond to Old Mrs. Mu.

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Mu Qingqing searched around the Old Mu Family but didn't see Cao Miaomiao, so she had to postpone the plan to cause trouble for the Third Branch.

But Mrs. Lin found Mu Xianxian bragging at the village chief's house.

Mu Xianxian had spread the news about her daughter being engaged to the scholar, letting everyone in Er Gui Village know.

The villagers were both envious and jealous of the Old Mu Family.

Especially seeing Cao Miaomiao, who's built like a mountain, able to become a scholar's wife, everyone felt it was unfair.

But what could they do?

Unfair or not, the marriage was set.

At the village chief's house, Mu Xianxian was telling the villagers about her business acumen at the in-laws' house when Mrs. Lin barged in.

Originally, Mrs. Lin planned to speak privately.

But recalling how Mu Xianxian embarrassed her before, and now making her trek so far with a scarf on her head,

Mrs. Lin maliciously said, "Bad news, Eldest Sister... that Liu Zian, Liu Zian went to see Shuang."

"I heard that he's breaking the engagement with your family for Shuang."

As soon as Mrs. Lin finished, Zhao Yun stood up and pointed at Mrs. Lin's nose to scold her.

"Aunt Shuang, what nonsense are you spouting! Everyone knows Shuang and Fengzi are close, the engagement is set, and you dare to slander her, are you even human? Shuang is your own niece?"

"How am I not human? What I'm saying is true. Don't believe me? Go and check the Third Branch to see if Liu Zian is there." Mrs. Lin deliberately muddled the waters.

"Hmph, I say Lin Xiaozao, stop spreading rumors. Fengzi went home early today to help Shuang, do you not fear your tongue getting twisted saying such things?"

Mrs. Lin's face turned pale.

She hadn't seen Lu Yuanfeng.

When Mu Shuangshuang went to do laundry, the Third Branch had only Mu Shuangshuang, even the kids were out playing.

"I say, Da Zhong's wife, stop making trouble here. When will you change your malicious ways?"

They say, it's better to tear down a temple than ruin a marriage, especially when it concerns your own niece's wedding." A villager fond of justice said.

"Xianxian, don't listen to Mrs. Lin's nonsense, Shuang is not like that." Zhao Yun spoke to Mu Xianxian.

Mu Xianxian smiled and nodded.

But she quickly added, "I have some errands today, let's talk another day!"

Chapter 843: Skilled at Throwing Mud

Mu Xianxian is extremely hypocritical.

She says she's not worried, not anxious, that she believes Shuangshuang wouldn't get involved with her cousin-in-law.

But in reality, she found an excuse, wanting to go back and take a look at the situation.

Everyone secretly knew, but no one felt right to speak up and stop her.

After all, this is a family matter.

But Mrs. Lin was in a miserable state, everyone's gaze scanned her back and forth, full of disdain and dislike.

Mrs. Lin, sweat dripping under those piercing stares, thought for a moment, then dashed out of the village chief's house to go to the third branch with Mu Xianxian.

"Big sister, don't get physical with that brat later, that brat is not simple, even mom has been set back by her."

Mu Xianxian snorted coldly, "Do you think our Cao Family is afraid of that brat? Today, I'm going to peel that little witch's skin, coming to flirt around my place."

Mu Xianxian, angrily headed to the third branch, Mrs. Lin followed beside her, sneaking a laugh.

What she was thinking about was the upcoming confrontation between Mu Xianxian and Mu Shuangshuang.

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Liu Zian arrived at the third branch when Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng were coming out of the room, ready to go find the village chief's wife to discuss the matters of the school.

Liu Zian originally felt wronged, but now seeing Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng coming out together, his mood suddenly turned sour.

Especially as the two were holding hands when they went out, that sight deeply hurt Liu Zian.

"Shuangshuang, why... is Fengzi in your room?"

Liu Zian probably went mad, and the words he spoke were somewhat senseless.

Coincidentally, Mu Shuangshuang was not one to be polite either.

"Fengzi is my fiancé, going to my room to help with a small matter, isn't that proper?" Mu Shuangshuang said.

"Do you... do you realize that you're not married yet? If people see this... they will gossip behind your back." Liu Zian said with a flushed face.

"We didn't do anything shameful, why would we be gossiped about? But you, what's your intention repeatedly coming to Shuangshuang?" Lu Yuanfeng frowned, displeased with Liu Zian's words.

"I... I'm here to apologize to Shuangshuang!" Liu Zian replied.

"I don't accept your apology, you better leave now!" Mu Shuangshuang didn't want to waste more words with Liu Zian, she really didn't want to get involved in the Liu Family's messy affairs.

Besides, Liu Zian was considered her cousin-in-law, always coming to her, if people saw this, then it truly would be gossip behind her back.

"Shuangshuang, my mother made a mistake, can't I even apologize for it? My mom is strong-willed, she didn't think about your feelings, I've talked to her, she knows she was wrong..."

Mu Shuangshuang thought this matter couldn't be clarified today.

She opened her mouth, smiling lightly at Liu Zian, "Just assume I've forgiven your mom, if there's nothing else, Fengzi and I are heading out."

Mu Shuangshuang's patience and kindness have always been reserved for those who treat her well.

Liu Zian might not be bad, but as someone who helped Liu Zian earn travel expenses, she got nothing in return but manure thrown on her, if she still spoke to Liu Zian kindly, then what's the difference between her and those pushovers like Huang Bitu.

Friends can be found again, but trust, once lost, is hard to regain.

"Shuangshuang..." Liu Zian looked at Mu Shuangshuang in front of him, his gaze unfamiliar.

He always felt he'd never seen this side of Shuangshuang.

Very cold, like there's no hint of warmth.

Suddenly, Liu Zian thought of something, he said, "Is it because of my engagement with your eldest aunt's daughter Cao Miaomiao that you don't like me? I've told my mom we'll break off the engagement with Cao Miaomiao, she agreed.

Will this mean we can still be friends in the future?"

Mu Shuangshuang thought Liu Zian was probably possessed.

The meaning behind his words was too deep.

If it were an average person, they would've misunderstood long ago.

Mu Shuangshuang turned her head to look at Lu Yuanfeng, noticing he wasn't angry, after making eye contact with Mu Shuangshuang, she saw trust in Lu Yuanfeng's eyes.

Mu Shuangshuang took a deep breath and said to Liu Zian, "It's not that I don't like you, please use your scholarly brain to think about it.

First, your engagement with Cao Miaomiao doesn't concern me, if you marry Cao Miaomiao, you'd be my cousin-in-law, it's just that simple.

Second, I'm not a petty person, nor am I overly generous, I wasn't upset because your mom caused trouble, but because you could've told her about how I helped you.

Even not mentioning me in front of her, if you didn't, your mom would have no impression of me at all, right?"

Liu Zian looked at Mu Shuangshuang in shock.

He never knew what Shuangshuang thought, assumed she was upset because his mom came to cause trouble.

But... the truth doesn't seem to be that way.

What to do now?

Liu Zian's mind raced, thinking of ways to make Mu Shuangshuang forgive his mother and himself.

He didn't notice Mu Xianxian and Mrs. Lin had arrived.

It was Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng who, upon seeing Mu Xianxian entering the third branch yard, instinctively narrowed their pupils.

"Ha, you two are indeed involved, you little slut, daring to steal Miao Miao's man." Mu Xianxian immediately started cursing.

Mu Shuangshuang said, "Aunt, watch your mouth, you can't just say whatever you want.

If you keep making up things, be careful I tear your mouth apart."

Mu Shuangshuang absolutely didn't want to tolerate anymore.

Mu Xianxian was completely blind, clearly Lu Yuanfeng was right there, yet she's spewing such disgusting words.

"You brat, you're looking for death!"

Mu Xianxian rushed up, but before she could get close to Mu Shuangshuang, her wrist was grabbed by Lu Yuanfeng.

Lu Yuanfeng's face was cold, his grip strong.

"Let go, you little devil, let go..."

Mu Xianxian's mouth was unhindered, cursing whoever she could.

Mu Shuangshuang couldn't bear it any longer, raising her hand, she directly gave Mu Xianxian a slap.

Mu Xianxian was stunned from the hit, staring at Mu Shuangshuang in disbelief.

"You... you dare hit me..." Mu Xianxian asked.

"Not only will I hit you, I'll tear your mouth apart." Another slap was swung.

Mu Xianxian was held tightly by Lu Yuanfeng, unable to move, she just had to endure the slap.

"This slap is to teach you to be a proper person, not everyone can be defamed by you."

"Slap!" Another slap, Mu Xianxian's mouth was crooked from the hit, her face marked red, with the white powder falling, covering Mu Shuangshuang's hand.

Her eyes were filled with panic and fear, her mouth kept wailing.

"Someone, help, I'm... the brat is killing!"

Chapter 844: Persuading the Village Chief's Wife

"This slap is to let you know that whoever messes with me, I'll never let them off, not even the King of Heaven."

Several slaps later, Mu Xianxian screamed in pain.

Seeing Mu Xianxian's combat power was negative, Mrs. Lin tried to sneak away after Mu Shuangshuang started beating, but was caught by the sharp-eyed Mu Shuangshuang.

"Second Aunt, you're quite good at stirring things up. Should I reward you with a few slaps too?"

Mrs. Lin was scared, her face turned pale. She laughed awkwardly, "Shuangshuang, this matter is not Second Aunt's fault. It was Aunt Dog Egg who insisted on coming and said you had something with Liu Zian. I couldn't help it!"

"If you want to blame, blame Aunt Dog Egg. She should be responsible for this matter."

Mu Shuangshuang snorted coldly and turned to Mu Xianxian, "Aunt, you heard what my Second Aunt said, she said it's all your fault."

Mu Xianxian's eyes glared at Mrs. Lin with anger, realizing she had been played by this little wretch, Mrs. Lin.

But it was all too late, she had already been beaten, and now her wrist was grabbed.

Several times Mu Xianxian tried to break away from Lu Yuanfeng's grasp but failed each time.

No matter how she moved or pulled, Lu Yuanfeng wouldn't let go.

This is when Liu Zian stepped forward.

He said to Mu Xianxian, "Aunt Cao, my engagement with your daughter is officially canceled. Later, I'll ask my mother to bring back the belongings from the Liu Family to break the engagement."

"What, cancel the engagement?" Mu Xianxian couldn't care about the pain, she jumped up shouting.

"You good-for-nothing Liu Zian, the engagement was agreed by your Liu Family, and now you're saying the cancellation is up to your Liu Family too, why?"

Mu Xianxian was about to explode, not only had she been beaten, now her daughter was about to have her engagement canceled.

"That affair was agreed by my mother, she was the one mediating. From beginning to end, I never agreed." Liu Zian confronted Mu Xianxian's accusations, "Zian always felt, no matter who it is, marrying a wife should be someone he likes."

"If the two people don't have feelings, being together just adds to each other's burden."

Liu Zian shared his thoughts with Mu Xianxian.

Yet Mu Xianxian just couldn't understand.

"Feelings can be cultivated. If you don't believe, ask your parents, see if they liked each other when they got together, now, aren't they in love?"

"I know what you're thinking, boy, you just became a scholar and want to marry someone wealthy."

"Let me tell you, you will marry, you must, otherwise I'll go to the government and accuse your mother of fraud!"

In some way, Mu Xianxian was indeed capable.

Even in such a situation, she knew to threaten Liu Zian.

"You can go ahead and do it. I refused the engagement with the Prefect's daughter at Qianzhou Prefecture, I don't believe I, Liu Zian, can't even have the freedom to marry!"

Leaving this harsh statement, Liu Zian left the third branch's courtyard, heading to the Liu Family Village, apparently to prepare for canceling the engagement.

"Liu Zian, stop... stop!" Mu Xianxian stomped her feet on the spot, but her wrist was held by Lu Yuanfeng, unable to move.

The fiery pain on her face couldn't compare to the fact her daughter was about to lose the title of scholar's wife.

Mu Shuangshuang signaled to Lu Yuanfeng with a glance, the two grabbed one each and threw them directly out of the third branch's courtyard.

Mrs. Lin and Mu Xianxian were thrown out simultaneously, not caring about the pain in their buttocks, they chased after Liu Zian.

Mu Xianxian was trying to stop the engagement cancellation, Mrs. Lin went to confirm if it was happening, once confirmed, if the Liu and Cao Families canceled, she'd drug Liu Zian for her daughter.

The two women quickly ran out of sight.

Mu Shuangshuang turned to Lu Yuanfeng earnestly, "Fengzi, let's proceed with our original plan to find the village chief's wife!"

Lu Yuanfeng squinted, smiled, "Okay!"

The presence of Mrs. Lin and Mu Xianxian was a small interlude to Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, without any influence.

The two arrived at the village chief's house, a crowd of women who loved watching dramas clustered around, all asking about Mu Xianxian's situation.

Many wanted gossip on what happened between Mu Shuangshuang and Liu Zian.

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't foolish, naturally guessed Mrs. Lin found Mu Xianxian at the village chief's house.

"Thanks for everyone's concern, there's nothing between me and Liu Zian, he came to the Old Mu Family not looking for me, but for Aunt."

"My second aunt knows nothing, just talks randomly, but no worries, the matter is resolved."

Mu Shuangshuang said.

Everyone laughed and chatted for a while, once they left, Mu Shuangshuang approached.

The village chief of Er Gui Village was an old man over fifty, quite attentive to village matters, not a tyrant.

His wife had a similar nature, normally hoping the village could stay harmonious and peaceful.

"Dear madam, there's something Shuangshuang would like to discuss with you, is that okay?"

The village chief's house wasn't ordinary, so Mu Shuangshuang used the respectful terms used by the wealthy on the town.

"Go ahead, we were just talking about how capable you are, young lady."

The village chief's wife smiled, her attitude towards Mu Shuangshuang was quite nice.

But due to less interaction, naturally not overly familiar.

"You know, Fengzi and I have opened a private school in the village, are you willing to send your grandson there for elementary education?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"I understand you might plan to send him to the town, but after all, he's just a few years old, suddenly leaving home, he might not adapt well."

"We've hired a scholar to teach, his knowledge and character are impeccable, his teaching isn't worse than those in town, this is something Shuangshuang can assure."

"The most important thing is the private school is right in our village, no need to worry about bullying from peers, or the child not having enough to eat."

Mu Shuangshuang listed all the advantages of their private school in one breath.

The village chief's wife's gaze began to flicker.

She seriously considered Mu Shuangshuang's words.

"Dear madam, think about it, for children, what is most important if not health? Three years might seem long, but for a child, these three years are crucial for physical growth."

"With a strong body, one can study more. Isn't that what you and the village chief hope for?"

To be honest, Mu Shuangshuang truly hit the village chief's wife's main concern.

The village chief's family had relatives in town.

But relatives weren't their own.

Children too young, being under someone else's roof, was generally not good.

Might as well wait until they're older, able to care for themselves, then send them to town.

Chapter 845: Still Missing One Person

"Can you guarantee that the teacher is as good as those in the town?" the village chief's wife asked again, still worried.

"I can guarantee it! That person is a scholar with solid knowledge, and it took a lot of effort to invite him here to teach.

Of course, there's another reason: his father passed away, and according to the Da Ning Dynasty's law, he must observe mourning for three to five years. This means for at least three years, he's not going anywhere bustling and will focus all his energy on self-improvement and teaching."

"Then what about the gift?" the village chief's wife asked.

"In town, it's three taels of silver, five strips of jerky, and four jugs of good wine."

The village chief's wife glanced at Mu Shuangshuang and nodded, "That's indeed the case."

"If the old madam is willing to send her grandson to our private school, no money will be charged, but you must do Shuangshuang a favor." Mu Shuangshuang said with a smile.

"What favor?" the village chief's wife asked.

Being able to save on the gift is indeed a good thing; in town, three years would be nine taels of silver, which is the price of two pieces of second-class fertile land.

"The village chief will guarantee the private school, helping me promote it in the local areas."

Mu Shuangshuang was well aware that village chiefs usually had some prestige in their areas, and with their guarantee, it's like modern advertising, avoiding many detours.

"You don't need to reply to me quickly; I can wait until you think it over," Mu Shuangshuang said thoughtfully.

Actually, this matter isn't unprofitable for the village chief's family.

Since her grandson would be sent to Mu Shuangshuang's private school, from their actions alone, it showed their trust in the school.

Plus, there's the exemption from the gift.

The village chief's wife thought for a while and said, "That's okay, this matter doesn't need to be discussed with the village chief; I'll decide!"

However, I need to see the effect. If my grandson is taught well, I won't leave Er Gui Village for three years. If not, I'll take my grandson away anytime."

The village chief's wife's intentions were already very clear.

Mu Shuangshuang agreed to everything she said.

Suppressing the excitement inside, Mu Shuangshuang winked at Lu Yuanfeng behind her.

Gestured to Lu Yuanfeng that the matter was settled.

Lu Yuanfeng also smiled.

"Thank you, village chief's wife. Later, I'll bring my completed plan and come find the village chief to tell him everything in detail," Mu Shuangshuang said.

After speaking, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng left the village chief's house together.

Glancing at the farmhouse courtyard of the village chief's house that they had entered and exited three times, Mu Shuangshuang felt a burst of joy in her heart.

She thought that if she saved enough money, when the third branch builds a large courtyard, it could follow this style, but it shouldn't be a mud brick house; it should be a brick house with blue bricks, like the mansions the landlords in town build."

"Shuangshuang, what are you thinking about?"

Mu Shuangshuang had walked far away but was still grinning foolishly.

After following her and smiling, Lu Yuanfeng became curious.

"Nothing much, I'm just thinking about when we can live in a courtyard as big as the village chief's. Raising chickens and ducks in the courtyard."

Speaking of raising chickens, the chickens Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng caught at Aunt Ge's house and fed medicinal feed didn't die; instead, they grew more robust.

Initially, the plan was to sell these chickens to pocket some money, but now Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng have opened a restaurant themselves.

These good things can't be sold to others anymore.

Moreover, regarding the menu of the new restaurant, Mu Shuangshuang wants to integrate many modern elements, so she needs to discuss with the new chef.

"Very soon... Once our restaurant opens and the school operates, in three to five years at most, we'll be living the life you want," Lu Yuanfeng said, clenching a fist seriously.

"Mm!" Mu Shuangshuang nodded.

...

Soon, it was New Year's Eve, and Fulin Restaurant was completely closed, with the shopkeeper leaving along with it.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, as the new owners of the restaurant, moved in.

For an entire day, the previous shopkeeper was busy moving his belongings—clothes, and antiques used to decorate the restaurant.

Once those slightly valuable things were moved away, the whole Fulin Restaurant was less colorful.

Even the Fulin signboard was taken down.

People on the street came out to watch the commotion.

They had long heard that Fulin Restaurant was being transferred, but didn't expect the successor would be a pair of young kids, looking to be only in their teens.

All laughed scornfully, thinking: At this age, at most they'll hold on for half a month before it shuts down.

Among the crowd, the mocking and dismissive glances all fell into Mu Shuangshuang's eyes.

She wasn't angry because she believed many things couldn't be explained just by talking.

Since Mu Shuangshuang had taken over, she had to make the restaurant successful and expansive.

Yu Dahai watched his first owner leave with a sour heart, but thinking about how they were going to do big business in the county, he wasn't too regretful anymore.

"New owner, after today, all the staff in the restaurant will leave. Have you decided... decided who to keep?" Yu Dahai asked.

The operation of a restaurant relies on the people working beneath it.

Similarly, Yu Dahai was the steward here because he had people under him.

"Now, how many people are willing to stay in the restaurant?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"In the store, only Erzhu and Ah Cai are left as the junior staff, the others found jobs long ago, either went to other restaurants or returned home to farm."

"There's no bookkeeper, and the chef needs replacement. What about the other junior chefs? How many are left?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Only one junior chef left, and a fire-stoker named Gouyazi, picked up by our shopkeeper on the street, a bit silly, the only work he can do is stoking the fire.

He lives with the junior chef Mu Tou, and the shopkeeper has always paid Gouyazi the same wages as us."

Listening to Yu Dahai, Mu Shuangshuang had a general impression.

That is to say, from management to workers, there are only Yu Dahai, Erzhu, and Ah Cai, plus the kitchen staff with Mu Tou and Gouyazi, making a total of five people.

For operating a restaurant, it's temporarily insufficient.

In the first-floor hall, there must be an attendant to serve as a host and three necessary runners.

And the kitchen needs a chef, two assistants, and one dishwasher.

With these calculations, the gap is quite considerable.

Especially when two core personnel were missing.

"By the way, didn't I ask Brother Yu before to find out if there are any good chefs? Did you inquire for me?"

Mu Shuangshuang mentioned that she didn't need years of experience—the most important thing is obedience, intelligence, and quick learning.

Of course, the most important is character.

What Mu Shuangshuang wants to do is definitely not ordinary, and no one can guarantee when she boosts her restaurant, the staff wouldn't betray her for small profits.

If that happens, she would indeed be making wedding clothes for others.

"Shuangshuang, I do know a chef," Lu Yuanfeng said.

Chapter 846: Quite a Decent Job

"Really?"

Mu Shuangshuang had never heard Lu Yuanfeng mention that he knew any chefs. It's normal to feel surprised upon first hearing about it.

"Yes, but that person has never been a head chef! Previously, he was a cook in the military camp. After returning from the camp, he found a small restaurant to work as a kitchen helper, making small dishes for the head chef.

If I remember correctly, he should be working at a restaurant in the neighboring Shigou Town. His knife skills aren't bad, and the food he makes is quite presentable.

He's older than us. When he went to the military camp, he already had a wife and kids, who should be in their teens now," said Lu Yuanfeng.

When Lu Yuanfeng joined the army, it was just when the Da Ning Dynasty was at war with a neighboring country, and many people weren't meeting the conscription standards of Da Ning. At that time, they were willing to take anyone who wanted to go to the battlefield.

Anyone from old men in their fifties and sixties to boys just twelve or thirteen years old.

Just like Lu Yuanfeng himself, his age for joining the military camp didn't comply with Da Ning's laws, but because of that, he met many friends of various ages.

"But would the man be willing to leave his hometown to come to our Qingshan Town?" Yu Dahai asked.

Having worked as a steward for years, Yu Dahai was knowledgeable about the ways of the world.

The brother, since he was already working as a helper in a restaurant in Shigou Town, was basically settled in that area.

If he moves to another place, wouldn't that count as leaving his hometown?

"That's not necessarily true. People strive to move up, just like water flows down. If he stays in Shigou Town, he might remain a kitchen helper all his life.

If he becomes a head chef at our restaurant, starting anew won't be difficult. Besides, Shigou Town isn't far from here, just about a day's walk," Mu Shuangshuang said.

Mu Shuangshuang always made sense, and this was something Lu Yuanfeng never doubted.

Among the people Lu Yuanfeng knew, Shuangshuang had the best logical thinking.

Sometimes, what he couldn't think of, Shuangshuang could easily figure out.

Without even needing much effort.

"So, as the saying goes, 'there's no better time than the present.' I'll go to Shigou Town tomorrow and ask that person what they think, how about that?" Lu Yuanfeng said.

"I'll go with you. I want to give him an assessment. To be the head chef at our restaurant, he needs to have something special," Mu Shuangshuang said with a mysterious smile to Lu Yuanfeng and Yu Dahai.

Yu Dahai's admiration for Mu Shuangshuang had grown even more.

He knew that Mu Shuangshuang always left some mystery with the restaurant.

The more it came to moments like this, the more curious Yu Dahai became.

Filling with curiosity, he said, "New owner, may I also go with you? I'll cover my own accommodation and food expenses, besides, I've been observing in the kitchen for some time.

I can roughly tell if someone is a good chef or not."

"Brother Yu, since you're going, it's naturally counted in the restaurant's operating expenses. With you coming along, Fengzi and I will feel more at ease."

Having decided on going to Shigou Town together, all the remaining matters were left to Yu Dahai.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng strolled the town market, and despite it being a small year (a lesser holiday before Lunar New Year), they still needed to buy some groceries to celebrate the holiday.

After a couple of rounds, Lu Yuanfeng spent money to weigh three pounds of five-flavor pork, planning to take it back to make dumplings.

Passing by the fireworks shop, Mu Shuangshuang, without a second thought, asked Lu Yuanfeng beside her, "Fengzi, should we buy some fireworks and firecrackers for the kids to play with?"

The kids had too few entertainment options, and now that winter had arrived, Little Black and Lai Mi spent all day lying in their nests, unwilling to move.

Without their usual playmates, the days naturally became harder for the children.

"Let's make them ourselves! Just buy some stuff for alchemy from the pharmacy," Lu Yuanfeng said.

"Buy them ourselves? You can make them?"

Mu Shuangshuang knew that many people in ancient times knew how to make fireworks and firecrackers, but it still surprised her a bit that Lu Yuanfeng knew how.

"Yes! I learned it from someone in the military camp, though they don't look good."

Sometimes, Lu Yuanfeng felt he really should be grateful for everything he learned during those years.

During that time, when everyone gathered, if they weren't training at the martial field or fighting on the battlefield, they'd share their skills: farming, carpentry, making fireworks and firecrackers, masonry, etc. All were high-skill jobs.

And after winning battles, the general would even give them time to practice what they'd learned, so the skills Lu Yuanfeng acquired far exceeded Mu Shuangshuang's imagination.

Speaking of the general, Lu Yuanfeng's mind drifted back to the desert, to that man clad in armor charging valiantly, and himself wielding a broadsword, confronting enemies.

Now with the world at peace, the general has probably retired his battle horse to live out its days.

At this moment, the smile on Lu Yuanfeng's lips was something Mu Shuangshuang had never seen.

To be a brave man, the most ardent place is the battlefield.

Since Lu Yuanfeng had experienced it, that feeling could never be forgotten.

"Fengzi, sometimes the life we choose isn't necessarily the life we want," Mu Shuangshuang suddenly said without warning.

"If you think there's a life you desire, then pursue it. Of course, no matter what life you choose, I will accompany you!"

Mu Shuangshuang always thought that Lu Yuanfeng still longed to return to the military camp.

It had been his companion for so many years.

Letting go, surely, wasn't something that could easily be done.

If one day, Lu Yuanfeng truly wishes to return, she would follow him without hesitation.

"Silly girl, I know what you're thinking. Now, the Da Ning Dynasty and the neighboring country are on very good terms, the border has long since had trade as North Star said, there won't be war for ten years.

The initial reason for me going to the camp was for livelihood and defending the country, with both threats gone now, there's no need for the camp anymore.

What I miss is merely the sky, the land, and those people from that time!"

Lu Yuanfeng's sentiment greatly affected Mu Shuangshuang.

She missed those old days too.

When she was part of the security team, that was the life she wanted.

As Lu Yuanfeng said, it was just the sky from those days.

"Fengzi, in many ways, we are very much alike," Mu Shuangshuang said.

However, Lu Yuanfeng was more mature and steady.

Mu Shuangshuang had long since let herself run free.

...

Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Shuangshuang turned to the pharmacy, gathering all the materials Lu Yuanfeng needed.

As for the bamboo tubes to make firecrackers, they could go cut bamboo themselves in the mountains.

All in all, Lu Yuanfeng said, collecting all materials, he could finish everything in just an hour.

It wasn't exactly a time-consuming task.

After buying a bunch of things, when they returned to Er Gui Village, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng managed to miss lunch.

Fortunately, the main event was in the evening.

Chapter 847: Ugly Thing

The Little Year's celebration was much livelier than usual, and according to the Da Ning Dynasty's customs, one must eat dumplings for the Little Year.

Throughout Er Gui Village, not only the third branch was preparing delicious foods, but even the Old Mu Family had changed their usual stinginess and started making dumplings.

Old Mrs. Mu gave money to Mu Danian early in the morning, and sent him to the town to buy meat for making dumplings.

So right after lunch, when Huang Bitao and Mrs. Liu from the fourth branch finished tidying up the kitchen, they began to busy themselves. The sound of chopping vegetables echoed far away.

Having been married into the Old Mu Family for several days, Huang Bitao hadn't yet shared any words of intimacy with this fourth aunt, their interactions mostly limited to simple greetings.

While waiting for the dough to rest, Huang Bitao wanted to sneak a peek at the third branch, but she was afraid Mrs. Liu would scold her.

Thus, she worked absentmindedly.

Mrs. Liu paused her chopping, thought for a moment, and then spoke, "Bitao, if you have something to do, go do it. I can handle things here!"

Huang Bitao was full of gratitude. She was just trying to figure out how to address Mrs. Liu.

"Thank you, Fourth Aunt!" Huang Bitao replied.

After speaking, she left the Old Mu Family's kitchen and headed towards Mu Shuangshuang's place.

At that time, Mu Shuangshuang was also in the kitchen preparing dumplings for the evening. Seeing Huang Bitao arrive, she immediately put down her tasks.

She said, "Cousin-in-law, is the Old Mu Family making dumplings too?"

What Mu Shuangshuang meant by asking was if the Old Mu Family wasn't, she would invite Mu Dalang and Huang Bitao over in the evening.

"They are. I was resting the dough when I came over. Shuangshuang, do you need help?" While speaking, Huang Bitao had already rolled up her sleeves and begun helping Mu Shuangshuang organize the vegetables and meat placed aside.

"Cousin-in-law, just sit for a while. Later, the Old Mu Family will still need you to help out." Mu Shuangshuang didn't want Huang Bitao to do any work.

"It's no trouble. I've spoken with Fourth Aunt. She's chopping vegetables, and later I'll be wrapping the dumplings."

Although there were a few years' difference in age between Mu Shuangshuang and Huang Bitao, Huang Bitao felt particularly secure when around Mu Shuangshuang.

Especially after the incident with Qian the Fourth, Huang Bitao increasingly felt that places where Shuangshuang was, were safe places.

"Oh, by the way, your second aunt..." Mu Shuangshuang hadn't finished speaking when Huang Bitao jumped in, "In the past few days, Mom hasn't given me any trouble.

Since she and my eldest aunt came back disheveled that time, Mom has basically stopped coming to my room. She's been spending all day with little sister Qingqing.

The two of them are hiding in a room, discussing who knows what. My eldest aunt also left, upset because of that matter."

In fact, Mu Xianxian had chased all the way to the Liu Family, but couldn't stop Liu Zian from calling off the engagement. Instead, it gave Liu Zian a chance to have the Song Family stuff Mu Xianxian with a bunch of things.

Mu Xianxian refused to take them and fled in panic.

Mrs. Lin, emboldened as the sister-in-law, took the things Mu Xianxian didn't want, and personally agreed to Liu Zian's annulment of the engagement.

Mu Xianxian wasn't in a hurry and waited at the entrance of the Liu Family Village. Seeing Mrs. Lin with the things, Mu Xianxian got into a fight with her.

They fought all the way back to the Old Mu Family, and the things were long discarded along the way.

Never mind relying on those things to make a comeback for Mu Xianxian.

Mu Xianxian was hit hard by that incident. The third branch didn't deal with it, and even her daughter's fiancé was gone.

Thus, Old Cao's house and the second branch completely severed ties.

Mrs. Lin didn't care about any of that. She only knew that by breaking the engagement with the Cao Family, Liu Zian could marry Mu Qingqing.

That's what the two have been discussing in the room.

"Is that so! It seems... my eldest aunt's daughter's marriage is indeed busted." Mu Shuangshuang said while wiping her hands.

"Huh? I only vaguely heard Mom mention it, saying the Liu Family thinks Miao Miao looks too ugly."

Women are always gossipy, especially when two get together.

Huang Bitao couldn't hold back and shared with Mu Shuangshuang everything she recently learned.

"Miao Miao really is unlucky, being rejected at such a young age. I'm afraid it'll be hard to find a match in the future, just like our little aunt."

Other than Old Mrs. Mu, it was basically Huang Bitao who delivered meals to Mu Xiangxiang.

Sometimes when cleaning, Huang Bitao would see Mu Xiangxiang gnawing on wood in front of her, which pained anyone to watch.

"Cousin-in-law, you can't just look at the surface of things at the Old Mu Family. Cao Miaomiao's marriage was my eldest aunt trying to latch onto the Liu Family.

So she kept giving me trouble over that, saying I orchestrated Liu Zian. As for our little aunt, think about it yourself, does her behavior really seem like that of a crazy person?"

Mu Shuangshuang hadn't intended to talk about these things with Huang Bitao, but there was so much going on at the Old Mu Family.

She was worried that if she didn't warn her, Huang Bitao might end up being blamed, and life would become difficult for her.

"You mean, little aunt isn't crazy?" Huang Bitao gasped, covering her mouth, completely unable to believe what she'd heard.

"It's the same reasoning as why you and my cousin got married. Everyone's goals are clear.

No one plays crazy for no reason; there's always a purpose! That's why some people do things that seem completely self-destructive."

After hearing this, Huang Bitao finally understood.

Everyone has their own difficulties, and the things people do aren't just what they seem on the surface.

"Alright, let's wrap dumplings!"

The preparations Mu Shuangshuang had made were slower than those at the Old Mu Family. The flour was still un-kneaded, and the fillings un-segregated.

The vegetables also hadn't been thoroughly washed.

Thankfully, the two girls in the kitchen were diligent. In no time, finely chopped meat and vegetables were laid on the chopping board.

The only thing left was waiting for the dough to rest.

The two girls jested about everything under the sun while sitting inside, with Huang Bitao not the least bit shy. Even if she hadn't been to some places herself, she dared to chat with Mu Shuangshuang about them if she'd heard about them from others.

In the blink of an eye, three incense sticks' time had passed.

Huang Bitao got up in a hurry and said to Mu Shuangshuang, "Shuangshuang, I have to go back to wrap dumplings now. If you're not in a rush here, wait for me a bit. I'll come over after I'm done."

"Okay!" Mu Shuangshuang nodded with a smile.

Huang Bitao rushed to the main house, but before even entering the kitchen, she was stopped by Old Mrs. Mu, who'd been waiting for her.

"Halt! Where have you been?" Old Mrs. Mu asked sternly.

"I...I..." Huang Bitao, timid and hesitant, dared not answer for quite some time.

Old Mrs. Mu didn't like the third branch, and even disallowed any mention of them unless necessary.

Being the granddaughter-in-law, these words were more of a death warrant for Huang Bitao, and she had to obey them.

"Alright, don't stutter around, struggling to speak. I'm here to tell you, when making dumplings later, make a separate batch, make them large, and make fifty of them!

Additionally, boil ten eggs and fry a bowl of rice with lard, and add plenty of lard, got it?"

Chapter 848: Uncle's Little Lover 1

Old Mrs. Mu has such a grand gesture, without even thinking, it's clear this is prepared for Mu Xiangxiang.

Huang Bitao agreed to everything, and casually asked about the size of the dumplings, roughly how big they should be.

Old Mrs. Mu replied impatiently and turned to leave.

In the kitchen, Mrs. Liu had already started making dumplings; the risen dough, in her hands, after a few rolls with the rolling pin, turned into very thin wrappers, and with various fillings, they became the dumplings for tonight.

Huang Bitao approached Mrs. Liu and said, "Fourth Aunt, Mother wants us to prepare a separate serving of fifty dumplings for Little Aunt. And also to boil ten eggs."

After hearing Huang Bitao's words, Mrs. Liu gasped.

The old hen of the Old Mu Family had long been killed, and the hens that weren't laying eggs, and the newly caught chickens, weren't laying yet either.

To boil eggs would require spending money to buy them.

Not to mention other things, Mu Family daughters-in-law don't even get to handle money at all.

Also, fifty dumplings, that would need quite a lot of meat filling!

In previous years, everyone got four dumplings, with many mouths to feed in the Old Mu Family, the first house got four, second house five, now it's six, the fourth house four, and then there's the Fifth, adding up to about fifty dumplings.

That's roughly about a pound of meat filling.

This morning, her mother had the Fifth buy just a pound of meat, and it might not even be a full pound.

Even though some vegetables were added, it's still somewhat challenging to make over a hundred dumplings.

"Sigh!" Mrs. Liu sighed, taking out more than half of the prepared filling.

For the remaining filling, she added a lot of cabbage, basically, for everybody except Mu Xiangxiang, their dumplings were mostly cabbage.

Huang Bitu noticed Mrs. Liu's difficulty and knew this wasn't an easy task.

Feeling a pang of distress, she didn't know where to get those ten eggs.

Even though Da Lang had given her household money, he specifically instructed: "Don't tell anyone, especially Grandma."

"Fourth Aunt, I'll go to ask Grandma for money to buy the eggs."

Mustering her courage, Huang Bitu went to Old Mrs. Mu with this issue, just as Mr. Mu was present.

Huang Bitā didn't evade Mr. Mu and said openly in his presence, "Grandma, about the ten eggs for Little Aunt, I don't have money on hand, what do you think?"

No sooner had Huang Bitā finished speaking than she was soundly scolded by Old Mrs. Mu.

"What did you just say? Eggs? I don't know anything about that! What, being a daughter-in-law in my Old Mu Family, and you're being mistreated, and now you want eggs?"

Old Mrs. Mu spoke these words, feeling a bit guilty inside.

Mr. Mu had long ordered not to allow Mu Xiangxiang to eat too much, and each time food was prepared, Old Mrs. Mu did it behind Mr. Mu's back.

This time, being confronted openly, Old Mrs. Mu felt guilty as expected.

But no matter how she refuted, Mr. Mu had already heard what Huang Bitā said.

The dry tobacco in Mr. Mu's hand knocked heavily on the kang edge.

"Old woman, you still dare to let Xiangxiang eat so much, have you forgotten how her voice got hoarse in the first place?

Have you forgotten what Zhang Huai Shu said, that her food intake must be reduced to a normal level? You're dooming her, don't you know?" Mr. Mu reprimanded.

Old Mrs. Mu got angry as well.

"How am I dooming her? Who made Xiangxiang like this? Clearly, it's that Mrs. Lin, if not for her, would Xiangxiang's voice have become hoarse?"

At the beginning, it was you who let the second daughter-in-law take care of Xiangxiang; I haven't even blamed you yet. Do you know how it is when Xiangxiang is so hungry she gnaws on wood?

I can't bear to see her suffer. Anyway, I don't care, my daughter, if she wants to eat something, I'll let her, after all, she's already like this." Old Mrs. Mu stubbornly said.

"Your daughter?" Mr. Mu sneered, then said, "Your daughter, and you don't care about her life?

A matter of life and death, how can you, a woman, decide such a thing? As for Xiangxiang, I've already informed Matchmaker Sun to find a suitable match for marriage.

We, the Old Mu Family, can't support her forever!" Mr. Mu stated his opinion.

But in doing so, it was equivalent to taking Old Mrs. Mu's life; she stood up and charged toward Mr. Mu.

While muttering, "Good for you, Mu Dabiao, you don't even care about your daughter's life; I won't let this go with you."

Her pitch-black nails instantly scratched a bloody mark on Mr. Mu's face.

On the side, Huang Bitā was dumbfounded, feeling extremely anxious.

If the two of them got into a fight, who could intervene?

But today is the Little New Year, if something truly happened, it would surely end badly.

"Grandpa, Grandma, please stop fighting, I'll go get Uncle."

Huang Bitā's words made Old Mrs. Mu shudder, and she cast a poisonous glance at Huang Bitā's face.

"You little tramp, if you dare go call the First, I'll have Da Lang divorce you!"

"If you dare to divorce her, I'll divorce you too!" Mr. Mu said.

"Oh, so for the sake of a little vixen, you're willing to divorce me..."

"..."

The two argued relentlessly, with neither backing down.

Huang Bitā backed out of the Old Mu Family and headed to the first house to find Mu Dade.

Who would've thought she'd get shut out?

It was Mrs. Jin who personally stopped her, raising her voice, "Da Lang's wife, your uncle is talking with the concubine of the County Magistrate, don't go in."

"But... Grandpa and Grandma are fighting, and if Uncle doesn't come, I'm afraid something might happen." Huang Bitā said.

"They aren't children; do they need a granddaughter-in-law like you to call reinforcements?" Mrs. Jin mocked.

"Aunt, about this..."

"Don't talk about it anymore; I won't let you in. If you don't have any business, don't come around the first house anymore, either."

Mrs. Jin's words left Huang Bitā feeling alternately angry and embarrassed.

The feeling of being underestimated and wronged suddenly surged in her heart.

Huang Bitu nodded helplessly and left the first house.

After Huang Bitu left, Mu Dandan said, "Mother, why didn't you let Cousin-in-law find Father? Don't you not want Father to be alone with that Ruan Xiao Jiao? If she went in, Father would surely go to see Grandpa and Grandma."

"Hmph, I have my reasons. That Huang Bitu, her features bear some resemblance to that Ruan Xiao Jiao. Even if Ruan Xiao Jiao could pull some strings, she wouldn't dare have an affair with your father, given she's the concubine of the County Magistrate.

But this woman is different; she's right here in our Old Mu Family, constantly within sight.

If your father truly had intentions, it wouldn't be difficult either."

Mrs. Jin, using her logic, explained the reasoning behind her actions.

However, this was all her own thinking. She assumed Mu Dade and Ruan Xiao Jiao would at least exercise restraint because of the County Magistrate's influence.

Yet Mu Dade and Ruan Xiao Jiao were in Mu Dade's study, comfortable as if they were in their own home.

Especially Ruan Xiao Jiao, in the study, she sat on Mu Dade's lap, laughing and swaying with joy.

Chapter 849: A Man's Ruthlessness

"Dade, when do you think we can be together openly and honestly?"

Ruan Xiao Jiao looked at Mu Dade, her expression like the peach blossoms of March, shy yet tinged with tenderness.

Ruan Xiao Jiao always spoke softly, which felt very pleasant to Mu Dade, greatly fulfilling his vanity and sense of inflation deep in his heart.

"Soon, Jiaojiao, just wait a little longer! When I gain fame in the Capital and become an official, I'll bring you to the Capital to live, and we'll never have to deal with these people again for the rest of our lives."

Mu Dade was coaxing Ruan Xiao Jiao with a slight and hardly noticeable carelessness in his words!

Men are strange creatures; what they can't get is the best forever.

Yet once they've got it, they become a bit reckless, and even don't want to cherish it at all!

"Jiaojiao, I really can't bear you going back to serve that absurd County Magistrate. Being ugly is one thing, but not understanding you—only I understand you in this world! When I become a big official, I'll buy a piece of land in the Capital, plant all kinds of flowers and plants, and we'll live the simplest and humblest life."

Even though Ruan Xiao Jiao became a concubine for the County Magistrate, deep down, Ruan Xiao Jiao still preferred a plain and simple life.

When she was young, she had already shared her thoughts with Mu Dade, so Mu Dade knew exactly what to say to make Ruan Xiao Jiao happy.

Ruan Xiao Jiao's face reddened with shyness, her hand went back to holding Mu Dade, "Don't worry, since I've been with you, I haven't been with him. So Brother Dade, you must be good to me!"

Ruan Xiao Jiao's life changed completely when Mu Dade came to her.

From initial worry to addiction now, she and Mu Dade seemed to be gradually unable to extricate themselves in this heart-stealing game.

This life, the only man she has set her mind on, is Mu Dade.

"Rest assured, Jiaojiao, in this life, I, Mu Dade, will have only one rightful wife, and that's you!

When things settle down a bit, you can give me a son, achieving status through him.

Even if my mother finds out about us, she'll make Jinyin'er pack her bags and get out."

Ruan Xiao Jiao smiled even more brightly, the two of them stayed in the study all morning.

Mrs. Jin was getting impatient in the courtyard, buzzing around like a fly.

Her eyes were fixed on the position of the study in the backyard.

"Mother, if you're really worried, why not go take a look? Anyway, our yard isn't big, watching from outside, my father wouldn't know."

Mu Dandan, seeing Mrs. Jin's absent-minded appearance, suggested to her.

"Exactly, Mother, there's no fear of a million things but a single mishap. My father has been with that Ruan Xiao Jiao for so long, who can guarantee nothing will happen?"

Mu Yingying agreed with Mu Dandan, hoping Mrs. Jin would better go and take a look.

Initially hesitant, Mrs. Jin no longer hesitated.

She stood up and went straight towards the backyard study.

Mrs. Jin circled around outside the study but couldn't see anything unusual, the outside was quiet.

There wasn't even a sound.

Mrs. Jin mustered her courage, approached the study step by step, and finally pressed her ear against the door frame of the study.

In the end, she kicked open the study door and yelled, "What a pair of shameless people, dare to do such disgraceful things in broad daylight!"

As soon as she shouted, Mrs. Jin regretted it.

In the study, Mu Dade and Ruan Jiaojiao were sitting more than nine feet apart, not to mention being close together or exchanging glances.

Mu Dade frowned, his face darkened instantly with clouds.

He glared at Mrs. Jin with an extremely daunting look that almost bored a hole through her.

"What are you foul-mouthed saying? Don't you know the County Magistrate's concubine is here? Who did you learn those dirty words from?"

Mu Dade unabashedly reprimanded Mrs. Jin.

Mrs. Jin felt wronged, yet had no way to defend herself.

It was she who spoke wrongly and misunderstood.

She simply had no idea the situation inside the room was like this!

"I'm sorry, Master, Aunt Ruan, I..." Mrs. Jin lowered her head, her voice soft with a hint of flattery.

"Sorry doesn't cut it? Hurry up and pour tea to apologize to Aunt Ruan, or it'll be too late—even I can't save you then."

Mrs. Jin completely lost out, failed to catch adultery, but instead was forced to pour tea and apologize to Ruan Xiao Jiao.

With others it may seem like nothing, but Ruan Xiao Jiao and Mu Dade once had an affair.

Doing this made Mrs. Jin feel like she was Mu Dade's little wife, the concubine, while Ruan Xiao Jiao was the main wife—the big wife.

"Why are you still standing there? Do I need to go myself?" Mu Dade urged.

Mrs. Jin remained silent, after a long time she hesitated and went to the front yard to boil water, preparing to pour tea for Ruan Xiao Jiao.

"Brother Dade, it's actually unnecessary, she... she's still your legal wife." Ruan Xiao Jiao said.

"Jiaojiao, do not sympathize with this woman, she's pretending. Back when I passed as a scholar, she used dirty tricks to become my rightful wife.

If she hadn't used tricks, the one standing openly beside me today as Scholar's wife would definitely be you, not Jinyin'er."

The last bit of sympathy in the woman's heart was completely erased by Mu Dade's words.

Indeed, the man was originally hers, Ruan Xiao Jiao's, and if it weren't for that woman's scheming, she should be the proper Scholar's wife today.

When Mrs. Jin brought tea into the study again, the last trace of sympathy in Ruan Xiao Jiao's eyes vanished, replaced by schadenfreude and anticipation for the future.

She watched Mrs. Jin walk towards her step by step, as if seeing herself back in the day being taken by Mrs. Jin over Mu Dade, and Mrs. Jin's cocky demeanor.

Hatred, came along without reason!

Chapter 850: A Bolt from the Blue

At the third branch, after the dough was ready, Mu Shuangshuang also started making dumplings.

Mu Shuangshuang calculated, the people coming to the third branch for dinner tonight include five from her family, plus Fengzi and Yuanbao, making a total of seven people.

Each person gets six dumplings, so Mu Shuangshuang needs to make a hundred, enough for tomorrow's breakfast, and some for families who helped out and are on friendly terms, all prepared at once.

Making dumplings, you can't say it's hard, yet you can't say it's easy either.

Rolling out the skins and wrapping dumplings are both technical skills. In the kitchen, it was only Mu Shuangshuang working alone, making it a bit slow.

However, Mu Shuangshuang wasn't in a hurry, since there was nothing much else to do.

After a while, she wrapped some dumplings, and the outside of the kitchen suddenly became lively.

Mu Shuangshuang glanced out the window and saw Lu Yuanfeng heading towards the third branch, holding what seemed to be firecrackers.

Beside him were several kids, not only Yuanbao but also Zhao Yun's Da Long, and several other village kids.

They surrounded Lu Yuanfeng, shouting for him to hand over the firecrackers, or they wouldn't let him leave.

Lu Yuanfeng had a cheerful grin, naturally not handing over the firecrackers in his hand.

Such flammable and explosive items must be handled together with adults to be played with.

"How about this, tonight I'll set off fireworks in your Sister Shuangshuang's yard, if you want to watch, come over tonight, I'll set them off myself!"

The kids were a bit disappointed, circling Lu Yuanfeng for a while, but still ended up agreeing to come watch the show later.

Mu Shuangshuang shook her head with a smile, and Lu Yuanfeng entered the room while she was in a daze.

Mu Shuangshuang quickly said, "Don't bring the firecrackers into the kitchen, it's not safe! Put them in my room instead, and please get Little Black and the Little Black Dog up for me.

Those lazy ones really think they're bears hibernating, it's been a long time already, if they don't get up soon, they'll turn into balls!"

Lu Yuanfeng chuckled, took the firecrackers to Mu Shuangshuang's room, and casually picked up the deeply sleeping Little Black.

Little Black was startled when suddenly lifted, first surprised, then glanced at Lu Yuanfeng disdainfully, letting him carry it into the kitchen.

In Mu Shuangshuang's impression, since winter began, Little Black rarely came out. Most of the time, it was focusing on maintaining itself, with its shiny black fur and robust body.

Previously a critter capable of digging into mouse holes and climbing trees, now it couldn't do anything, even its caretaker duties had been returned to Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang had a bold idea, she felt it was time for Little Black to go on a diet.

Because in her view, entrusting the Third Branch's assets to Little Black was the safest.

She pulled out a piece of broken silver from her pocket, waved it in front of Little Black, and said, "If you can slim down a bit, how about I give you this silver."

This was Mu Shuangshuang's tactic, knowing Little Black is particularly greedy.

Offering money to encourage Little Black to lose weight was the best plan, yet Shuangshuang was thinking too much; Little Black didn't care at all, only concerned whether its fur was shiny black.

Being despised by a Black Mink wasn't something Mu Shuangshuang found prideful.

She glared at Little Black, grabbed its shiny black mink fur, and swung it back and forth, causing Little Black to emit a "hiss hiss" of distress.

Shooting pitiful eyes towards Lu Yuanfeng, its paws clasped together clearly believing Lu Yuanfeng could help!

Witnessing this, Mu Shuangshuang huffed coldly, "You think acting like this means you don't need to diet? I'm telling you, if you don't slim down to your former self, I'll throw you out!

Or sell you, anyways given your current size and weight, your fur is worth quite a bit."

Little Black trembled fearfully, turning to beg Mu Shuangshuang.

Its rotund body swung back and forth in the air, looking delicious, making Mu Shuangshuang drool.

Unfortunately she hadn't heard of anyone eating minks, otherwise she'd want to try how it tasted.

Lu Yuanfeng looked helpless; he grabbed vegetables not yet washed from the nearby chopping board, rinsed them with water, and started washing.

After cleaning all the vegetables, he turned to Mu Shuangshuang and said, "I'll help you with the cooking tonight, let's make dinner together."

Mu Shuangshuang nodded, having someone assist meant the work would be done quickly.

Soon, everything that needed preparation was ready.

...

During dinner time, Mr. Mu had someone come over to invite the third branch people to have dinner, saying it's a family reunion.

But Mu Shuangshuang refused, not to mention the third branch splitting from the family.

Tonight's dishes at the third branch were relatively abundant, definitely not inferior to those at the Old Mu Family, with no need to go freeloading.

However, one matter surprised Mu Shuangshuang; the woman dining at the Old Mu Family, Ruan Xiao Jiao, Lu Yuanfeng knew.

Though he'd only seen her once, she left a very deep impression.

Lu Yuanfeng had once told Mu Shuangshuang, back when he went to find Luo Xiuer's in-laws in the county, he'd wandered around the county for a long time.

Then he saw a woman entering an inn with Mu Shuangshuang's uncle, Mu Dade, and they didn't come out for a long time.

That woman was Ruan Xiao Jiao.

Meaning, the relationship between Ruan Xiao Jiao and Mu Dade wasn't simple.

Recalling that Mu Dade, at one point, bragged around the third branch, that even without being a high official in the capital, he could certainly be one in the county.

And also Mu Dade climbed the social ladder, currying favor with the County Magistrate.

It seemed likely Ruan Xiao Jiao was the intermediary, and the connection was that the two were secretly mingling.

To Mu Shuangshuang, this matter was akin to a thunderbolt on a clear day.

The things Mu Dade did were indifferent to Mu Shuangshuang, but this matter made her feel anxious.

In this world, two things should never be done; one is wiping out a family, the other is stealing someone's partner!

Mu Dade was merely a scholar with no official position, yet dared to challenge a County Magistrate, and he was poaching the Magistrate's partner.

If this matter is discovered, it would inevitably implicate the Old Mu Family, and implicating them is not the concern, it's whether the County Magistrate will let the third branch go after they split.

Mu Shuangshuang dared not think further. This small year, she lived worriedly, until Lu Yuanfeng took out the firecrackers from her room, allowing the kids to gather around waiting for him to light them, slightly lifting her mood.

"I noticed you were distracted during dinner, was it because of your uncle's issue?"

I personally feel that this matter doesn't need to weigh on your heart, Shuangshuang. I once had the fortune to exchange some words with the County Magistrate.

From what I understand, the County Magistrate is not an unreasonable person; if we haven't participated, he won't blame us."