

Folly 871

Chapter 871: Old Mrs. Xue's Gifts

Xue Zheng withdrew from Mu Shuangshuang's embrace.

He nodded firmly.

"I want to go!" Xue Zheng answered.

"Old Lady, why don't you come along too? I'll cook for lunch today." Mu Shuangshuang invited Old Mrs. Xue.

Old Mrs. Xue didn't hesitate and agreed.

"Of course, that's great. I, this old woman, haven't eaten anything good in a long time. The cook in this house doesn't make tasty food at all, even those from the Capital aren't as good as what you whip up casually, little girl."

Old Mrs. Xue's words carried a hint of complaint.

"Mom, didn't you say last time that the cook was decent?" Xue Yi's voice came first, then Xue Yi himself appeared.

As usual, Xue Yi looked careless from the outside, not showing any signs of great ability.

But in reality, dealing with him once lets you know how treacherous he can be.

"Hmph, what are you doing here instead of staying in the study?" Old Mrs. Xue said irritably.

"Mom, I heard Miss Shuangshuang and Yuan Feng were here, so I came to take a look. You aren't unwelcoming me, are you?"

Old Mrs. Xue always held a certain disdain for Xue Yi, a fact known throughout the manor.

"Move aside, I'm going to talk to Shuang and Feng." Old Mrs. Xue urged.

Xue Yi shrugged and could only stand by the side, respecting Old Mrs. Xue's wishes.

Everyone chatted for an hour or more; Mu Shuangshuang looked at the sun in the courtyard, realizing it was about time to go back and prepare the meal.

She got up and said goodbye to Old Mrs. Xue.

Together with Lu Yuanfeng and Xue Zheng, they went to Fulin Restaurant.

Xue Zheng wasn't there just for the meal; he missed his little friends.

So he brought him early to play with the kids.

At the restaurant, Yu Si Niang was already busying herself.

She had bought a woman's chicken from the market, which was now slaughtered and just waiting to be plucked.

As soon as Lu Yuanfeng entered the courtyard, he took over the heavy tasks of slaughtering chicken and cutting fish.

"Aunt Si, you can rest inside. Shuangshuang and I can handle this." Lu Yuanfeng said.

"Mom, later Old Mrs. Xue and Second Master Xue will come to our home for a meal, but there's no need to prepare anything special; just treat it like usual!"

Mu Shuangshuang informed ahead about the Xue Family coming, fearing Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan would feel pressured.

Yu Si Niang smiled, waved her hand, and said, "Don't worry, I'll treat it like Yu Tou and the others coming over for a meal. We're all family; I won't be afraid."

With Yu Si Niang's reassurance, Mu Shuangshuang wasn't worried.

While Lu Yuanfeng handled the chicken, Mu Shuangshuang washed the rice and vegetables.

All the ingredients were newly bought from the town, so they were especially fresh.

Mu Shuangshuang was only preparing homemade dishes, so there was no pressure.

"Shuangshuang, let's also prepare New Year's Eve dinner together, letting the elders rest more!"

Lu Yuanfeng's mother wasn't present, so he had long considered Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang as his own parents.

"Sure! With you here, I'm not anxious at all," Mu Shuangshuang said.

Working with Lu Yuanfeng, she never felt tired.

Not sure if this silly boy did.

Lu Yuanfeng heard Mu Shuangshuang's indirect confession, his smile widened, bright and dazzling.

Mu Shuangshuang worked especially fast with Lu Yuanfeng helping with the materials.

Kung Pao Chicken, Boiled Fish Fillets—simple ingredients transformed into delicious dishes in her hands.

By lunchtime, the dishes were ready.

Xue Yi arrived with Old Mrs. Xue.

In the front courtyard.

In the front courtyard hall, two tables were joined together, and Mu Shuangshuang brought out a dish, calling everyone to eat.

Even Xue Yi stood up to help serve the meal.

The kids went to the well in the backyard to wash their hands with the water Lu Yuanfeng had drawn, each eagerly waiting for the adults to feed them.

Mu Dashan found an unopened jar of wine in the backyard's storeroom, asking Xue Yi and Lu Yuanfeng.

"Do you two drink?" Mu Dashan spoke as he brought out three large hai bowls.

Here, counting Lu Yuanfeng, there were only three who could drink.

Mu Dashan was happy today, and his urge to drink had arisen.

"Since Shuangshuang's father wants to drink, I, Xue Yi, naturally will join him!" Xue Yi picked up one empty bowl and moved it in front of Mu Dashan.

Lu Yuanfeng also nodded.

"I'll drink too!"

The three large hai bowls were filled with wine; Mu Shuangshuang and Yu Si Niang laid out the dishes and sat down.

A big table full of dishes, looking at it was appetizing.

"Let's just consider this an early New Year's Eve dinner, everyone happy and joyous." Old Mrs. Xue remarked.

Here, the eldest was Old Mrs. Xue.

Her words held significant weight.

Everyone nodded, no one argued with Old Mrs. Xue.

"Since it's New Year, I'll not keep secrets; I've prepared red envelopes as New Year gifts for everyone."

Old Mrs. Xue pulled out a stack of red paper-wrapped envelopes from her pocket, distributing them to those at the table.

The children were expected to receive some, but even Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang got some.

The couple felt somewhat embarrassed, thinking to refuse the red envelopes.

Old Mrs. Xue immediately said, "I'm the oldest. What I say, you all should listen.

Furthermore, I'm just trying to share in the joy; no refusing allowed."

Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang could only helplessly accept the New Year gifts.

"Thank you, Old Lady!"

Old Mrs. Xue laughed pleasantly, saying, "You can all open them and see what's inside."

Old Mrs. Xue urged everyone.

The children opened theirs, nothing special, twenty coins each.

Even Lu Yuanfeng's envelope contained twenty coins.

Only Mu Shuangshuang's shocked her when opened.

Inside was a paper with 'House Deed' written across it.

"Old Lady..." Mu Shuangshuang didn't understand Old Mrs. Xue's intentions.

"Oh, this is the deed to First-class Residence, a gift for you. I know now your restaurant isn't that big, but you'll surely move to a bigger place in the future.

So, I'm giving you the house deed to First-class Residence in advance, to save you from having to find another location later."

"Old Lady, this is too precious, I can't accept it!" Mu Shuangshuang tried returning the deed.

Old Mrs. Xue wouldn't take it.

"Why are you in such a hurry? I haven't finished speaking yet! The land deed isn't with me, and the house deed hasn't been registered with the government, which means you're holding onto something that's pretty much like waste paper.

But once you've saved enough to buy the land deed, I'll have someone register the house deed with the government, transfer everything, and only then will you have all rights to First-class Residence."

"Old Lady, why... me?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"I don't exactly know why; I just feel close to you and Feng. The first time I saw you, you felt different from the others.

If it weren't for your words, I would still be selling herbal tea at the shop, reminiscing about my old man.

You gave me hope, showed me that if I live well, my old man will be happy."

Chapter 872: Mu Qingqing's Good Days

Old Mrs. Xue's praise made Mu Shuangshuang feel a bit embarrassed.

Initially, outside the herbal tea shop, seeing Old Mrs. Xue's attire seemed unlike a regular tea-selling old woman, Mu Shuangshuang concluded that Old Mrs. Xue had status and might be useful later.

That's why she comforted Old Mrs. Xue with those words.

It wasn't genuine.

But Old Mrs. Xue, ever since then, has been fond of her.

And thereafter, always treated her well, never putting on airs in front of her.

In Old Mrs. Xue's eyes, she saw the words of equal treatment, Old Mrs. Xue always treated her and Fengzi as equals, just like friends.

Modest and unpretentious, but very attentive.

So later, she sincerely treated Old Mrs. Xue, without any pretense, never intending to gain anything from her, let alone now that Old Mrs. Xue wants to give her the house deed.

"Madam, I understand what you say, but I still can't accept this house deed. There's no such thing as a free lunch, you get what you're willing to give.

I consider my efforts insufficient to receive such a big reward from you! Moreover, although I, Mu Shuangshuang, love money, I prefer using the silver I've earned myself, it's more solid!"

Mu Shuangshuang's words didn't sound like a joke at all.

Old Mrs. Xue sighed and asked, "Little girl, the house deed of First-class Residence is worth quite a lot of Silver Tael, are you... willing to give it up?"

Mu Shuangshuang shook her head and said, "Reluctant, but I still have to give it up. To be honest, having a house deed right in front of me, saying I'm not tempted is a lie.

But if I accept it, it would go against my principles. I can earn money, give me some time, and I won't earn less than First-class Residence. I have confidence that at most in two years, I can buy the house deed and land deed of First-class Residence."

Mu Shuangshuang's attitude was neither humble nor arrogant, her words reflected grand goals, but the composure and calmness she showed made it easy for people to believe.

"And me, I will do my utmost to help Shuangshuang achieve what she wants to do!" Lu Yuanfeng stood up, looking completely earnest.

Mu Shuangshuang turned to Lu Yuanfeng and smiled, her heart filled with happiness.

The rarest thing in this world is that whenever you make a decision, there's someone by your side who supports you unequivocally.

Luckily, Mu Shuangshuang encountered this, which is her fortune.

Actually, Old Mrs. Xue was quite shocked, she set so many conditions for Mu Shuangshuang, asking her to save money to buy the land deed of First-class Residence, just to avoid her rejecting her goodwill.

In the end, round and round, this little girl still refused.

Not only refused, but also showed Old Mrs. Xue how different this girl was from others.

"Alright, alright! Since you don't want to accept my gift, I will keep the land deed and house deed for you. When you save enough money one day, I will sell you that piece of land at First-class Residence." Old Mrs. Xue stopped fretting about being rejected by Mu Shuangshuang.

She believes, as long as the little girl in front of her is capable, everything she wants to give will eventually be hers.

"Everyone, let's eat! If we don't, the food will get cold!" Mu Shuangshuang said, and everyone quickly picked up the bowls and chopsticks in front of them, eating the delicious food before them.

The few kids, unrestrained, said whatever came to mind.

As soon as the food entered their mouths, they kept exclaiming how delicious it was.

The adults behaved much more calmly; although they didn't shout out loud, their eyes occasionally fell on Mu Shuangshuang, full of praise.

"With this meal today, I made quite a fortune again, didn't I!" Old Mrs. Xue said with a chuckle.

*

The Old Mu Family came together to shop for New Year's goods today, excluding the third branch family: Mu Dade, Ruan Xiao Jiao, and also the second branch's family, Mrs. Lin and Mu Qingqing.

Mrs. Lin walked with Mu Qingqing for more than ten miles, stopping and going along the way, almost reaching noon when they arrived at the town.

As soon as they reached the town's entrance, Mrs. Lin plopped down on the landmark stone tablet of Qingshan Town, gasping for air.

While panting, she also scratched her butt.

No choice, at this moment Mrs. Lin felt her butt was unbearably itchy, as if bugs were crawling there.

"Oh my, I'm exhausted! I'm exhausted!" Mrs. Lin shouted loudly.

Some passersby looked at Mrs. Lin with disdain, turning their heads away.

Mu Qingqing also frowned.

She didn't want to go to town with her mother.

This time, Mu Qingqing came to meet the Liu Family, who helped her last time; she hadn't had the chance to come to town before, and this time, she wants to ensure that Mrs. Liu remembers her, Mu Qingqing.

"Qing, why are you still standing? Sit down and rest for a while. There's space beside me for you!" Mrs. Lin reached out and invited Mu Qingqing to sit down.

Mu Qingqing didn't want to.

Her attitude was bad, "Mom, I have things to do. If you want to buy something, do it yourself!"

Mrs. Lin didn't notice Mu Qingqing's disdain, instead continuing with her own business.

Once Mu Qingqing walked away, she withdrew her hand and grumbled, "Such an ungrateful child, does she know who I am doing all this for, taking on this New Year's shopping task?"

If I didn't come to town, who would get you the tiger and wolf medicine for Liu Zian, that stupid scholar?"

But unfortunately, Mu Qingqing didn't hear any of this.

Mu Qingqing wandered the market for a while, spent ten coins to buy a cabbage from a rural woman, along with the shabby bamboo basket.

Last time, Mu Qingqing had already asked the specific location of the Liu Family's mansion.

This time, she just needed to follow directions straight to the Liu Family.

The West Lane Liu Family is the largest household in the town's west side, aside from the Xue Family, there's this Liu Family.

However, the Xue Family will soon move to the Capital, and the town will soon be dominated by the Liu Family.

Of course, these aren't reasons for Mu Qingqing to exert all this effort to visit.

The Liu Family is not plentiful in number; Mrs. Liu has only given birth to two children in her lifetime, one son and one daughter.

The son is only nine years old, but the daughter was already sixteen, sadly, she drowned last year in her husband's courtyard well.

Mrs. Liu was grieved for a long time before she came out of it.

These tidbits were gathered by Mu Qingqing after considerable effort.

To Mu Qingqing, gaining Mrs. Liu's sympathy is the most important thing.

With the bamboo basket, she arrived at the entrance of the Liu Family.

Vermilion red doors, a vast mansion beyond sight...

Mu Qingqing was stunned by everything in front of her.

She never thought that in this world, there could be such a big house!

She thought the rooms her aunt and grandparents lived in were the largest.

But clearly, this Liu Family's home is far larger than hers in ways unknown.

If she could live inside, find ten or eight maids to serve her, wouldn't the whole Old Mu Family bow before her?

Mu Qingqing momentarily lost herself in awe.

Chapter 873: Swollen Like a Pig's Head (Part 2)

In broad daylight, a living person staring at someone else's front door with drool.

Naturally, this made the doorkeeper alert.

The servant walked up and asked Mu Qingqing, "What are you doing? Begging? Beggars, get away. Our lady's soup kitchen is not at the Liu Mansion!"

Although the servant was driving Mu Qingqing away, he didn't touch her, seemingly a bit disgusted.

Because today, Mu Qingqing came prepared.

She had a bit of mud on her face, intentionally applied before leaving home, just to show that she had been working.

And that mud didn't affect her beauty.

Moreover, she wore her oldest and shabbiest clothes, which she hadn't worn for a long time, aiming to elicit sympathy from Mrs. Liu.

"Brother, I'm not a beggar. I'm here to thank Mrs. Liu. She saved my life at the medical center last time and even bought me clothes. I..."

The servant glanced disdainfully at Mu Qingqing.

"I say, are you out of your mind? Our lady is famous for her charity. So what if she gave you a ragged dress?"

What, are you trying to use this pretext to climb up to my lady?"

"No, brother. I'm just here to thank Mrs. Liu, nothing more."

Mu Qingqing tried hard to make herself look as pitiable as possible.

Unfortunately, without a good outfit and with a dirty face, however pitiful Mu Qingqing made herself, the man in front of her was not willing to show her any sympathy.

He forcefully moved Mu Qingqing to the stall opposite the Liu family and warned her not to step into the mansion.

Mu Qingqing's stomach growled.

It was mealtime, but she had no money to eat. All the money she brought out went to that vegetable-selling woman.

Mu Qingqing stared eagerly at the Liu's front door, determined to wait for Mrs. Liu to appear.

Fortunately, Mu Qingqing got lucky; today was the day Mrs. Liu was giving out porridge in town, and she happened to return at noon.

Mrs. Liu usually went in and out on foot, and Mu Qingqing, with her sharp eyes, saw her.

She shouted, "Mrs. Liu, Mrs. Liu...it's Qingqing!"

Hearing someone calling her, Mrs. Liu turned her head and saw Mu Qingqing across the gate with a basket on her arm.

The servant who had previously driven Mu Qingqing away was afraid she would offend Mrs. Liu and quickly said, "Madam, I'll make her leave now. I don't know where this beggar came from!"

Mrs. Liu waved her hand and said, "It's okay, I know her!"

Mu Qingqing got the chance to meet Mrs. Liu.

Once in front of Mrs. Liu, Mu Qingqing's eyes reddened. She sniffed and said, "These are vegetables from my own garden."

I owe Madam so much from before. I thought with the New Year coming, I'd repay a bit of interest. Once Qingqing has money, I'll pay back the rest of the silver."

Mu Qingqing pretended to be strong.

Seeing Mu Qingqing in her plight, Mrs. Liu felt the same old heartache.

"Qingqing, what happened to you? I bought you new clothes, why aren't you wearing them?"

Mu Qingqing shook her head, deliberately looking troubled, refusing to speak.

Mrs. Liu sighed in resignation and asked, "Have you eaten?"

Mu Qingqing nodded, "I have eaten!"

Yet Mu Qingqing's stomach inconveniently grumbled, and Mrs. Liu understood everything.

She insisted that Mu Qingqing come into the mansion to eat with her, and Mu Qingqing seized the opportunity, finally entering the Liu family's gates.

At the dining table, under Mrs. Liu's persistent questioning, Mu Qingqing reluctantly told her about her life at the Old Mu Family.

"Madam, you are the nicest person Qingqing has ever met.

My grandparents favor my little aunt. Last time I was in town because she was sick, and if I didn't take care of her, they wouldn't give me food.

Every day I had endless work. Even the clothes you gave me were taken by my grandmother..."

Mu Qingqing seemed pitiful.

This reminded Mrs. Liu of her own deceased daughter.

Her daughter, married and living away, who maybe looked the same outside.

Is that why such a tragedy happened?

"Then what about your... parents?" Mrs. Liu asked.

"My dad... he listens to my grandparents, they are the only ones with a say in the house. My mother, being the daughter-in-law, has even less say. But she often says, girls will get married sooner or later.

Skipping a meal doesn't matter; her in-laws will take care of her anyway!"

Every word Mu Qingqing said had been planned and rehearsed in her mind countless times.

She had to make Mrs. Liu feel sympathetic enough to accept her as a goddaughter.

Only then could she escape the poverty of the Old Mu Family.

Sure enough, after hearing Mu Qingqing's words, Mrs. Liu was deeply angered and even more sympathetic to Mu Qingqing's plight.

She instructed the housekeeper to give some broken silver to Mu Qingqing, but she said nothing about the goddaughter issue.

Though Mu Qingqing really wanted the broken silver,

she only pretended to be disinterested and firmly refused to take it.

Feeling unsatisfied, she could only keep coaxing Mrs. Liu, hoping she would one day call her the Liu Family's eldest daughter.

*

By dusk, Mu Qingqing hadn't achieved her goal, but Mrs. Liu did at least say she could come by anytime and not to bring anything.

Mu Qingqing was naturally delighted as she headed to the village entrance to find Mrs. Lin.

Mrs. Lin was already boiling with anger.

She came up and slapped Mu Qingqing across the face.

Knocking Mu Qingqing to the ground.

"You little tramp, all day, a whole day I've been waiting for you here by this wretched stone tablet. Tell me, where the hell have you been?"

Mu Qingqing covered her face, her eyes full of hatred.

But she didn't lose her temper with Mrs. Lin.

When leaving the Liu Mansion, that servant who had stopped her earlier followed, though keeping a distance. Still, Mu Qingqing noticed.

Maybe that person was sent by Mrs. Liu.

So, without resisting, Mu Qingqing received slap after slap from Mrs. Lin until her face was swollen beyond recognition.

When Mrs. Lin was about to kick her,

Mu Dashan from the third branch, who also happened to be returning, intervened.

Mu Dashan jumped down from the ox cart and pulled Mrs. Lin's hand away.

"Second sister-in-law, are you crazy, hitting your own daughter in broad daylight on the street."

Mrs. Lin, already angry, got even angrier when she saw Mu Dashan.

"Disciplining my daughter is none of your business, is it?" Mrs. Lin puffed up her chest, hands on her hips, proudly facing Mu Dashan.

"Discipline your daughter at home, who does it in front of so many people?"

You don't care about faces, but Qingqing does!" Mu Dashan faced Mrs. Lin's disdainful gaze.

"I do as I please. My daughter. I'll hit her if I want to, or not if I don't. You, a piece of trash kicked out by the Old Mu Family, dare to meddle in my affairs!" Mrs. Lin said.

"Second aunt, did you eat garlic on your way out? Why does your breath stink so much?" Mu Shuangshuang jumped down from the ox cart and walked up to Mrs. Lin, rolling her eyes at her.

Chapter 874: Blushing with Shyness

Mu Shuangshuang approached full of momentum, and Mrs. Lin quickly retreated, seeming somewhat afraid of Mu Shuangshuang.

After a few interactions, Mrs. Lin somewhat understood Mu Shuangshuang's temper, knowing she couldn't confront Mu Shuangshuang head-on; if she accidentally angered her, she might end up getting beaten here.

Mrs. Lin squeezed out a particularly unpleasant smile and said to Mu Shuangshuang, "Shuang, please don't look at me like that. After all, I'm your second aunt.

Just... you... for the sake of us being family, please don't get involved in this matter."

Mrs. Lin tried to appear as someone easy to negotiate with, but those constantly twirling fox-like eyes betrayed her.

Mu Shuangshuang slightly pursed the corners of her mouth and said, "It seems I didn't hear the second aunt say that just now. The second aunt seemed to say we were kicked out by the Old Mu Family—worthless trash!"

Mrs. Lin jerked her body, chuckled awkwardly, "I was just joking around, besides, I was just disciplining my own daughter. Whose family matters would they be willing for others to interfere in?"

Her words carried a hint of resentment towards Mu Dashan meddling.

Receiving this message, Mu Dashan's face blushed slightly, feeling a bit embarrassed himself.

But upon reconsidering, Mu Qingqing is his niece; if he were to ignore seeing his niece get beaten, he couldn't justify himself as the third uncle.

"Second aunt, don't act like others enjoy intervening, would my dad have stepped in to stop you if you hadn't beaten someone on the street?"

If you're not concerned about your reputation, our unmarried girls in the Old Mu Family still need to maintain theirs.

If others find out you beat Qingqing sister publicly, those who don't know might think Qingqing sister has poor character. And as this spreads further, what would others think of the Old Mu Family's other members?"

Mu Shuangshuang's words seemed somewhat tenuous; Mrs. Lin could discipline anyone freely, as long as it wasn't someone from the third branch.

If it weren't for Mu Dashan stepping in today, she wouldn't have jumped off the ox cart to meddle in this matter.

Her actions were merely to prevent Mu Dashan from being bullied.

"If you don't want to see me discipline this little brat, then I won't!" Mrs. Lin mumbled a few words reluctantly.

But in her heart, she plans to make Mu Qingqing kneel and apologize when they return to the Old Mu Family.

Seeing that it's enough, Mu Shuangshuang helped Mu Dashan onto the ox cart.

Seeing this, Mrs. Lin quickly said, "Shuang, give me a ride, will you? My old back has been walking all day; it hurts a lot!"

"Second aunt, the cart is full, you should walk back." Mu Shuangshuang lifted her eyelids, directly refusing.

She was unwilling to give a ride to a backstabber who constantly plotted behind her.

"Come on, as a senior, with so many juniors on your ox cart, you could have someone walk back for me, it's not like it will hurt."

Mrs. Lin insisted, while her eyes fixed on the place where Xiao Han and Yuanbao sat, preparing to shove the two little kids onto the ground.

Mu Shuangshuang noticed Mrs. Lin's intention, waved her hand in disdain, just in time to hit Mrs. Lin's hand reaching towards Yuanbao and Xiao Han, and shouted to Lu Yuanfeng:

"Fengzi, let's go!"

Lu Yuanfeng waved the whip in his hand, and the ox moved again.

As the ox cart wheels moved, it kicked up dust from the ground.

The flying dust swept towards Mrs. Lin's face, causing her to cough until tears nearly fell out, and by the time she cleaned her eyes, the people from the third branch were nowhere to be seen.

"Well, Mu Shuangshuang, you little bitch! Don't let me see you again, or I'll beat you to death!"

Mrs. Lin cursed at the entrance of the town for the duration of a stick of incense.

Mu Qingqing found that those who were with her had left.

She walked out of the town with a cold face.

The injuries on her body and hands reminded Mu Qingqing that this issue between her and her mother was far from over!

Mrs. Lin caught up to Mu Qingqing, cursing incessantly, but unlike before, Mu Qingqing didn't stop at all.

She walked forward alone.

After a while, a carriage passed by from behind, and Mrs. Lin recognized it as Mu Dade's carriage; she waved her hand at the people inside the carriage, shouting, "Big brother, stop, it's Xiao Zao!"

Having waved for ages, all she encountered was dust, nothing else.

Inside the carriage, Ruan Xiao Jiao heard Mrs. Lin's voice and couldn't help but ask seeing Mu Dade not stopping the carriage, "Brother Dade, why didn't you give Gou Dan's mother a ride back? She's chasing our carriage, and I saw Qing too."

Mu Dade opened his eyes, lifted the curtain, and saw the people still chasing after his carriage, scoffing.

"Old second's wife likes to take advantage of others, and she's cunning. I don't want her polluting your eyes."

In the future, when you see her, pretend as if you didn't. Even if she comes to our home, don't acknowledge her."

Mu Dade was basically giving Ruan Xiao Jiao a heads up with these words.

Ruan Xiao Jiao listened and blushed.

She buried her head into Mu Dade's chest.

"Brother Dade, I knew you were good to me. It wasn't wasted that I told the County Magistrate there was a death in my family requiring me to come back to mourn!"

At this point, only Mu Dade and Ruan Xiao Jiao were in the carriage; in the village, they had to be discreet, but outside the village, they could do whatever they pleased.

Mu Dade's hand grew increasingly inappropriate, gently pressing on Ruan Xiao Jiao's chest, full of infatuation.

In Mu Dade's eyes, as long as he's with Ruan Xiao Jiao, he felt an inexplicable thrill.

Ruan Xiao Jiao's husband was the highest official in the county—the County Magistrate.

In front of outsiders, he had to be deferential to the County Magistrate, but secretly, he could treat the Magistrate's woman however he wanted.

Mu Dade was basking in pleasure, exceedingly delighted.

His actions grew even more unrestrained.

After a while, sounds distinct from any other could be heard from the carriage, making even bones tingle with weakness.

Listening to the sounds from inside, the carriage driver got goosebumps all over.

He was almost tempted to lift the curtain for a peek.

Afterwards, Ruan Xiao Jiao lay in Mu Dade's arms, with Mu Dade's face full of satisfaction.

He said, "Jiaojiao, during New Year's Eve dinner, just come and have it at our place! I don't want to be apart from you."

"No way, during such an important occasion, if I go, it would raise suspicions." Ruan Xiao Jiao shook her head.

"No worries, just have your parents go to your grandfather and grandmother's house, with no one at your home. Coming to my place for New Year's is totally reasonable, right?" Mu Dade explained.

Ruan Xiao Jiao agreed.

The two lingered for a while, finally arriving at Er Gui Village.

Mrs. Jin was joyfully waiting at the courtyard gate for Mu Dade, but instead saw the bashful Ruan Xiao Jiao stepping out of the carriage.

Following her womanly intuition, Mrs. Jin felt there was something unspeakable going on between her husband and Ruan Xiao Jiao!

Chapter 875: Give Me a Son This Year (Part 1)

"Why are you in my husband's carriage?"

Mrs. Jin, declaring her territory, used the village's most contemptuous term.

The purpose was to make the woman in front of her find her place.

Ruan Xiao Jiao looked at Mrs. Jin, somewhat displeased. She remembered Mu Dade's words: if not for Mrs. Jin drugging him, it would be her standing beside Mu Dade now.

"Mrs. Mu's words are quite vulgar. I always thought, although Mrs. Mu grew up in the countryside, her conduct should match that of a scholar's wife. In the end, I was wrong; Mrs. Mu is no different from other village women!"

"You..." Mrs. Jin knew Ruan Xiao Jiao was mocking her, and her expression wasn't good.

"What? Aren't you going to help Aunt Ruan?" Mu Dade popped his head out from the carriage and, hearing the argument between Mrs. Jin and Ruan Xiao Jiao, intervened directly.

Mrs. Jin's expression immediately returned to its previous delighted appearance.

"Mr. Dan Dan, you're finally back. Just now, Dan Dan and Yingying were asking me when you're coming back and if you brought them any treats."

Mrs. Jin stepped forward, reaching out to take Mu Dade's arm, intending to show Ruan Xiao Jiao who was in charge.

But Mu Dade flicked her away nonchalantly.

"As a mother, don't pamper the two daughters so much. They're no longer young; it's time for them to get married. Staying at home isn't an option."

Having eaten and drunk his fill, Mu Dade wasn't interested in Mrs. Jin.

Moreover, with Ruan Xiao Jiao present, Mu Dade naturally wasn't amiable to Mrs. Jin.

Mrs. Jin's attempt to use Mu Dade to suppress Ruan Xiao Jiao failed; she angrily went into the Old Mu Family's courtyard.

Mu Dade followed closely, with Ruan Xiao Jiao also entering the Old Mu Family's courtyard.

The combination of the three was indeed strange.

Mu Dade and Mrs. Jin were the couple, but it was Ruan Xiao Jiao who walked beside Mu Dade.

Mrs. Jin was forced to walk ahead, feeling sulky. She thought it over and decided to complain to Old Mrs. Mu.

*

Inside Old Mrs. Mu's room—

Mrs. Jin carried two oranges from her own room.

Though oranges were common in the countryside, at this cold winter month, they weren't cheap.

People used old methods to preserve oranges.

Stuffing a handful of hay in a cellar, placing the oranges on top, then covering them with more hay.

Layer upon layer, they could store quite a few oranges, but it wasn't foolproof.

With good luck, many oranges could be preserved whole, but often many others would rot and spoil the surrounding ones.

Old Mrs. Mu happened to be by the fire in her room. Seeing Mrs. Jin, her eyelids moved, but she said nothing.

After a while, she finally spoke.

"Oh, what wind brought the eldest daughter-in-law here?"

Old Mrs. Mu didn't like Mrs. Jin.

Not for anything else, just that Mrs. Jin had married into the Old Mu Family for over ten years, giving birth one after another, but only to two daughters who bring losses.

And after more than ten years, Mrs. Jin's belly had no news.

Old Mrs. Mu had long wanted Mu Dade to divorce Mrs. Jin, marry a village wife with wide hips, and give birth to a big, chubby son to carry on the eldest's legacy.

Mrs. Jin's gaze deepened slightly. She knew Old Mrs. Mu didn't like her, but the matter she wanted to discuss still required Old Mrs. Mu's help.

"Mother, I... I came to discuss something with you."

Saying this, Mrs. Jin placed the two oranges she held on the table in Old Mrs. Mu's room.

"Speak your mind, don't make a fuss! Also, is your belly just bloated, or is it useless? It's been so many years, and I'm still waiting to hold my eldest grandson!"

The saying 'love me, love my dog' rings true in Old Mrs. Mu's heart; Mu Dade's son would be her rightful grandson, while the rest weren't!

Mrs. Jin's face flushed slightly.

Being questioned like this made her feel uncomfortable, but in front of Old Mrs. Mu, she couldn't show it.

After all, this old woman was her mother-in-law.

"Mother, I wanted to ask you, don't you think Mr. Dan Dan and that Ruan Xiao Jiao are too close? Shouldn't they avoid suspicion?"

Mrs. Jin felt a little uneasy in her heart.

She had no evidence for this matter and couldn't say much.

But if she didn't say anything, her husband would be someone else's.

"Humph? You came to me for this nonsense?" Old Mrs. Mu was somewhat disdainful.

Mrs. Jin, feeling weary of Old Mrs. Mu's constant insults, grew impatient.

Under her sleeves, her fist was tightly clenched, never sure when it might explode.

"Mother, please... won't you help me? We can't let Da De go astray. That's the County Magistrate's concubine; even if Da De likes her, he can't, he can't have anything with that Ruan Xiao Jiao."

Mrs. Jin, with a pleading voice, originally wanted to soften in front of Old Mrs. Mu to ask for her help.

Unexpectedly, Old Mrs. Mu raised a hand and banged it heavily on the brick bed.

"Nonsense! Jinyin'er, don't you dare slander my son. What's between my son and that Ruan Xiao Jiao? Nothing at all.

You spread rumors again, I'll tear your mouth!" As Old Mrs. Mu spoke, she tried to get up from the bed.

Mrs. Jin kept retreating.

Her attitude became more submissive.

"Mother, I mean no harm, just want you to prepare early, so that Ruan Xiao Jiao won't have a chance to cause trouble with Mr. Dan Dan."

Old Mrs. Mu, growing angrier, sprang down from the bed in one move.

"I say, Mrs. Jin, are you out of your mind? Even if my son has something with Ruan Xiao Jiao, what concern is it of yours?"

Have you given our Old Mu Family a grandson, contributed to our Old Mu Family?

I'm telling you, if you don't bear a grandson by next year, I'll have Da De divorce you!"

After saying this, Old Mrs. Mu forcefully pushed Mrs. Jin out of her room by the abdomen.

She spat vehemently and cursed, "Mrs. Jin is such a troublesome woman, always making a fuss. No, I must tell Da De to prepare early. If no son is born, divorce is the way!"

Old Mrs. Mu put on her clothes and went straight to the main room.

At this moment, Mu Dade and Ruan Xiao Jiao were chatting eagerly.

Seeing Old Mrs. Mu arrive, Ruan Xiao Jiao approached, smiling brightly.

"Aunt, I just saw a bolt of cloth for you and Uncle in the county; I'll have Da De bring it to you later."

Upon hearing there was something to be received, Old Mrs. Mu was overjoyed.

She no longer spoke to Ruan Xiao Jiao as an outsider.

"Da De, I'm here to tell you, your wife is no easy commodity; she just said you and Jiaojiao have some unspeakable affair!"

Mu Dade and Ruan Xiao Jiao were both startled.

They were both a bit flustered.

However, Mu Dade steadied himself and signaled Ruan Xiao Jiao not to be afraid with his eyes.

"Mother, Mrs. Jin talks like that, likes to speak nonsense, I'll teach her a lesson when I get back." Mu Dade said.

"Son, I won't fault you. I just advise you to find a wife who can bear sons quickly. A woman who doesn't bear sons, what's she but a salted fish?"

Chapter 876: Complaining

"Mom, we'll handle this matter, Mrs. Jin and I. Please don't worry about it."

Mu Dade wasn't keen on Old Mrs. Mu discussing his affairs, especially regarding offspring.

All these years, Mrs. Jin hadn't given Mu Dade a son. It wasn't just Old Mrs. Mu and Mr. Mu who had opinions; even Mu Dade himself had issues with it.

But in front of others, he had always maintained a generous and nonchalant image. If he were to blame Mrs. Jin openly, wouldn't he be contradicting himself?

If people found out, what would they think of Mu Dade?

Old Mrs. Mu didn't understand Mu Dade's thoughts; she assumed he was still protecting Mrs. Jin.

So, she raised her voice and said, "How can I not care? You're my son; how could I not be involved? Unless you've truly taken that woman as a treasure?"

"Mom, I understand what you mean! But having a son is not something that can be done in a day or two. Could you give Mrs. Jin and me a little more time?"

"No way! Mrs. Jin hasn't given birth to a son in a decade, let alone a day or two. If she could, she would have by now."

Dade, I'm just saying, a man should find a wife who can give him sons. Like me, I gave birth to so many sons for your father. Who in Er Gui Village doesn't know that I'm the hero of the Old Mu Family?"

Old Mrs. Mu was full of pride talking about her sons.

She continued, "Dade, listen to your mom, quickly find a simple and honest woman who can give you sons. I don't care about anything else, just eager to have a grandson."

Mu Dade nodded, as if agreeing with Old Mrs. Mu's request.

Only then was Old Mrs. Mu satisfied, feeling that her son still listened to her, and that Mrs. Jin's influence was futile.

"Alright, don't take it to heart. I'm just venting. Once you have a son, and I become a proud grandmother, I'll take him out to play every day." Old Mrs. Mu said with a smile, sounding extremely considerate.

After speaking, Old Mrs. Mu left the main room.

As soon as Old Mrs. Mu left, Mu Dade turned to Ruan Xiao Jiao and said, "Jiaojiao, did you hear that? My mom said I need to find someone willing to give me sons. If you are, I'll marry you!"

Ruan Xiao Jiao, who was beside him, blushed as her handkerchief moved with a swipe in front of Mu Dade, making him stare intently.

"Jiaojiao, I really want to marry you as soon as possible!"

*

After dinner, Ruan Xiao Jiao returned home, and Mu Dade went back to his room to rest.

Mrs. Jin sneaked into Mu Dade's room like a thief, as usual, to complain about Old Mrs. Mu.

"Mr. Dan Dan, Mom talked about my having sons again today. What should we do? She even said that if I don't give birth to a son, you should divorce me!"

Mu Dade remained silent for a long time without responding to Mrs. Jin.

Mrs. Jin was a bit displeased; in the past, whenever she complained about the old lady, her husband would always agree. Why was he silent now?

Could it be that the old lady said something?

No way, her husband never paid attention to the old lady's words.

"Mr. Dan Dan, why aren't you saying anything? We agreed that only us in the main house would live a good life, while Dad and Mom would stay in the countryside to farm, and you..."

Mrs. Jin's words were interrupted by Mu Dade.

"Alright, just keep these thoughts to yourself. Don't mention them again. If people hear, what will they think of us in the main house?"

Also, my parents raising me wasn't easy; don't stir things up unnecessarily by talking about them, okay?"

For the first time, Mu Dade defended his parents.

Mrs. Jin was extremely surprised.

Her husband seemed completely unrecognizable.

Mrs. Jin said, "Mr. Dan Dan, didn't we used to gossip about Mom and Dad together? You yourself said..."

"Enough! Stop talking about it. How many years ago was that? From now on, don't bring up bad things about Mom and Dad in front of me, it's annoying to hear!

Furthermore, I want to sleep; tonight I wish to sleep alone. You go sleep with the two daughters!"

Mu Dade impatiently interrupted Mrs. Jin, who wanted to continue speaking.

Mrs. Jin was filled with grievance; she felt like a forlorn woman, staring at Mu Dade for a long time.

Since Mu Dade didn't respond, she could only discuss with Mu Dandan and Mu Yingying about how to resolve this matter.

She went into Mu Dandan's room and told her about Mu Dade's unusual behavior.

Mu Dandan frowned for a moment, then said, "Mom, wait for me, I'll get Yingying."

The Mu family's main house was the best within the Old Mu Family, like a small independent courtyard.

The courtyard wasn't small.

It housed the main family, and in the corner was Mu Xiangxiang. Moreover, Mu Dandan and Mu Yingying each had their own rooms.

Mu Xiangxiang had been kept obediently by Old Mrs. Mu lately. Except for coming out after everyone was asleep, she spent most of her time sleeping, so Mu Dandan wasn't worried about disturbing her while fetching Yingying.

After a while, Mu Yingying was brought over.

The two sisters weren't young; Mu Dandan was mature in thinking, while Mu Yingying was impulsive. However, both listened to Mrs. Jin and treated her very well.

Mu Dandan relayed what Mrs. Jin had told her to Mu Yingying.

Before Mu Dandan could speak as the elder sister, Mu Yingying exclaimed, "Mom, my dad must be having an affair with Ruan Xiao Jiao.

Mom, you can't delay this matter. You have to show Ruan Xiao Jiao your strength."

"But that woman is the County Magistrate's concubine; we cannot bring her down, and I don't have any evidence of what she has with your dad."

Mrs. Jin felt somewhat helpless.

Ruan Xiao Jiao's status was an insurmountable gap.

Even her husband was only a scholar; how could he compare with a County Magistrate?

"Evidence? Mom, didn't you say they both went to town together already? What more evidence do you need? Mom, don't be naïve. That Ruan Xiao Jiao looks just like a seductress.

What if she uses tricks to lure Dad away?" Mu Yingying anxiously grabbed Mrs. Jin's hand.

Mrs. Jin could feel the urgency and desire to help from her daughter's perspective.

But the external conditions still existed.

"Yes, Mom, under the present situation, Dad clearly has feelings for that woman. During dinner, he served her food, twice even.

Even you don't get that treatment anymore, so if Dad hasn't fallen for her, what is it?"

Mu Dandan also helped Mrs. Jin analyze their current predicament.

The more they analyzed, the more they felt this matter required immediate action.

Mrs. Jin thought for a while and said, "Your grandma is of no use; only your grandpa can help.

If your dad really has an affair with Ruan Xiao Jiao, it doesn't just affect them but the whole Old Mu Family.

Your grandpa still hopes to count on your dad for the family's honor."

Mrs. Jin's statement demonstrated a keen understanding of the Old Mu Family's personalities.

She didn't want to confront Ruan Xiao Jiao personally, so she had to rely on others.

But Mu Yingying didn't see it that way.

Chapter 877: Mu Dade's Affair Exposed

Mu Yingying felt that since Ruan Xiao Jiao dared to touch her father, everyone in the village should know that Ruan Xiao Jiao is a vixen, shamelessly seducing someone else's man.

A thought flashed through Mu Yingying's mind, and she decided to follow Mu Dade.

After coming out of Mu Dandan's room, Mu Yingying didn't rush back to her room but waited outside Mu Dade's door to see if there would be any movement.

Meanwhile, outside the room of Mu Dalang at the main house, Mu Danian, wearing a tattered cotton jacket, was similarly crouched below the windowsill, eavesdropping.

After days of staking out, Mu Danian had lost weight, and the dark circles under his eyes were somewhat alarming.

Every day, Mu Danian hoped something would happen in Mu Dalang's room, but day after day, nothing occurred.

His last bit of patience was gone, and of course, he also couldn't hold on any longer.

Since the day Mu Dalang got married, Mu Danian had been eavesdropping, waiting night after night, but in reality, he hadn't heard a single sound, let alone the ones he was hoping to hear.

Unable to eavesdrop successfully, Mu Danian could only go back to sleep, and in the meantime, he kept the matter in his heart, planning to ask Huang Bitu someday if things between her and Dalang were going well.

Similarly, Mu Yingying squatted outside Mu Dade's door, waiting until her hands and feet were freezing, and her legs were numb, but still, there was no sound from inside the room.

Just as Mu Yingying was about to go back to sleep, Mu Dade's door creaked open.

Mu Dade came out of the room fully dressed, and like a thief, he looked around to make sure no one was there before leaving Old Mu Family's courtyard and headed straight to Ruan Xiao Jiao's house.

Ruan Xiao Jiao's house was on the west side of the village, not too far from the school Mu Shuangshuang was building. To go to Ruan Xiao Jiao's place, he had to pass by the school.

Mu Dade looked at the school being built day by day and scoffed.

He thought disdainfully, with the conduct of the third branch, dreaming about running a school is just a daydream, like a toad wanting to eat swan meat.

He stood in front of Mu Shuangshuang's school for a while, with disdain on his face, before leaving.

Mu Yingying felt she had discovered something. Late at night, her father was definitely going to see that Ruan Xiao Jiao.

If they still claimed nothing was happening, Mu Yingying would never believe it.

At Ruan Xiao Jiao's house, outside the courtyard stood a banyan tree. Mu Dade arrived and stood under it for a while, then mimicked a few cat calls.

After a while, Ruan Xiao Jiao, also fully dressed, came out.

Initially, Mu Yingying thought she would catch them red-handed, but then she reconsidered, thinking the evidence was insufficient.

She had to let her father enter Ruan Xiao Jiao's house before she called anyone.

Ruan Xiao Jiao looked at Mu Dade, scarcely believing it.

During the day, they spent the whole day together, and logically, Mu Dade shouldn't come at night, yet here he was.

However, Ruan Xiao Jiao's heart was still sweet. A woman who likes a man would wish for him to be there every moment.

"Brother Dade, why did you come?" Ruan Xiao Jiao asked in a soft tone.

Mu Dade grabbed Ruan Xiao Jiao's hand and whispered, "I couldn't sleep thinking of you. You don't mind me coming, do you?" Mu Dade asked.

Ruan Xiao Jiao blushed and shook her head. "My parents are asleep, you... you should come to my room!"

With that, Ruan Xiao Jiao led Mu Dade by the hand to her room.

Mu Yingying watched the scene, her eyes nearly popped out of their sockets.

Her father was indeed meeting Ruan Xiao Jiao late at night, intending to enter her room. If that's not anything, then Mu Yingying might as well die.

After a while, a candle illuminated Ruan Xiao Jiao's room.

The candlelight faintly revealed the silhouettes of two people.

The room was initially quiet, with the occasional exchange between Mu Dade and Ruan Xiao Jiao.

But Mu Yingying could no longer remain calm.

She thought of her father, inside, messing around with another woman behind her mother's back, and Mu Yingying wished to rip Ruan Xiao Jiao's face apart.

Mu Dade and Ruan Xiao Jiao were adults, unlike the newly married and shy Mu Dalang and Huang Bitu, who dared not do anything; they were familiar with all the things they should and shouldn't do.

In the room, Ruan Xiao Jiao's soft moans and Mu Dade's low breathing gradually filled the space.

Mu Yingying felt it was time. She stepped forward and kicked open Ruan Xiao Jiao's door.

Ruan Xiao Jiao let out a shriek.

Before she could react, Mu Yingying shouted.

"Help! Ruan Xiao Jiao is having an affair..."

On the first call, villagers didn't respond much, but by the second call, someone heard it, and the gossip-hungry hurriedly dressed and woke their husbands.

"Get up, someone's been caught having an affair in the village!"

The men, drowsy from sleep, got up, albeit without the women's enthusiasm for gossip.

Yet they too got dressed and went to seek the origin of the commotion.

Mu Yingying wanted to yell more but was slapped hard by Mu Dade, leaving a bright red handprint and a burning pain on her face, causing her to clutch her face.

Mu Dade then grabbed her hand and covered her mouth.

"Dad... mmph mmph..." Mu Yingying couldn't speak and could only make muffled sounds.

Let me go!

Mu Yingying continued to yell indistinctly, while Ruan Xiao Jiao, frightened out of her wits, hadn't even had the chance to dress properly after Mu Dade messed up her clothes.

She stood there, dazed, watching the father and daughter scuffle, not knowing what to do.

Only after Mu Dade reminded Ruan Xiao Jiao to dress properly did she do so.

"You followed me here?" Mu Dade asked Mu Yingying affirmatively.

Mu Yingying glared at him without replying.

At that moment, Mu Dade's image had completely shattered in Mu Yingying's heart.

To think her mother believed her father wouldn't dare do anything improper with Ruan Xiao Jiao, but the truth was, not only did he, he did it in Ruan Xiao Jiao's house.

Mu Yingying gave no response, and Mu Dade, angry, slapped her again.

He slapped her mouth crooked.

"Ever since you were young, I didn't believe you would amount to anything, and now it seems I wasn't wrong. You truly can't keep anything to yourself."

At this point, Mu Dade didn't intend to coddle his daughter anymore.

He had to protect Ruan Xiao Jiao.

If she were gone, the benefits promised by the County Magistrate would also be gone.

And it would impact his promotion.

Mu Yingying mumbled a few words, and though Mu Dade didn't understand, he was unwilling to let go of her mouth.

He said, "If you call the villagers over today, not only will I be ruined, but your mother can forget about living a life of luxury.

And you, not only will you forget about becoming a rich lady, but even getting married will be a problem!"

Mu Dade truly wanted to crack open Mu Yingying's head to see what's inside.

Unfortunately, the only response he got was Mu Yingying's resentful glare.

Chapter 878: Threat

"You still dare to glare at me? Don't forget who gave you the good days you have now."

After Mu Dade finished speaking, he slapped Mu Yingying's face again in anger.

With just a few slaps, Mu Yingying's fair face swelled up like a bun.

The burning pain on her face made her cry out loud.

At that moment, Ruan Xiao Jiao's parents knocked on her door.

"Ah Jiao, did you hear any noises?"

It was Ruan Xiao Jiao's mother, Mrs. Zheng, speaking in a gentle voice, seemingly afraid to alarm Ruan Xiao Jiao, and didn't dare to clearly mention the sounds she had heard.

Mu Yingying had initially been shouting in Ruan Xiao Jiao's room, and it's normal for the Ruan family's elderly parents, who were light sleepers, to hear some noises.

Ruan Xiao Jiao's heart was almost leaping out of her throat. She looked at Mu Dade, signaling him to come up with an idea.

Mu Dade gave her a reassuring look, indicating that Ruan Xiao Jiao should go deal with the Ruan family's elderly first.

As for Mu Yingying, he would handle it.

Upon hearing Mu Dade's words, Ruan Xiao Jiao calmed down a little, and she said to the people outside the room, "Dad, Mom, I'm asleep. I didn't hear a thing. If you have something, come to me tomorrow. I'm tired!"

The Ruan parents were honest folks; whatever their daughter said, they believed, and wouldn't suspect her of lying.

Otherwise, they wouldn't have ignored addressing the Old Mu Family's trouble even after their daughter had been wronged so much back then.

Outside, Mr. Ruan comforted Mrs. Zheng, "It's okay, like I said, even if something happened, it wouldn't be in our home. Our daughter is part of the County Magistrate's household; who would dare touch her? Are they tired of living?"

Let's go! Don't disturb your daughter's sleep."

Mr. Ruan's last words made Ruan Xiao Jiao burst into tears instantly. She even considered rushing out and confessing to her parents.

But seeing Mu Dade, she backed down.

She couldn't ruin Mu Dade.

The Ruan parents left, leaving only the three people in the room.

Mu Dade loosened his grip on Mu Yingying's wrist slightly.

He threatened Mu Yingying, "Yingying, don't you want everyone to know what happened between me and your Aunt Ruan?"

Go ahead and shout. See if the villagers, seeing what's going on between me and Aunt Ruan, would still let you be a rich lady."

After speaking, Mu Dade let go of Mu Yingying's hand.

Gaining her freedom, the first thing Mu Yingying did was to spit at Ruan Xiao Jiao.

"Pah! Shameless slut, are you lacking men? Why did you seduce my dad? I'm going to let everyone in the village know about your disgraceful deeds, tear your face apart!"

Ruan Xiao Jiao couldn't dodge in time, and the spit landed on her face, making her feel utterly disgusted.

Seeing Mu Yingying's aggressive stance, she didn't know where the courage came from to slap Mu Yingying on the face.

"I seduced your dad? You better think about who was shameless enough to drug Brother Dade, forcing him to marry your mother. If we're talking about seduction, your mother is the one who seduced him," said Ruan Xiao Jiao.

"Nonsense! You're the shameless one!" Mu Yingying retorted.

Ruan Xiao Jiao said, "Little girl, no matter what, I'm still the County Magistrate's concubine! If I want the Old Mu Family to rise, then the Old Mu Family can prosper.

If I want you to fall, the Old Mu Family wouldn't even qualify to stand in Er Gui Village.

Your father's position as a county clerk, I asked the County Magistrate for it. The court subsidies your father receives, I fought for those for him. I can take all these benefits back anytime.

Making sure your father doesn't become a scholar is just a matter of words!"

At this moment, Ruan Xiao Jiao was a far cry from her usual agreeable self.

Her gaze was sharp, her words fierce.

Mu Yingying, who had been thinking of confronting Ruan Xiao Jiao, deflated. It was only now she realized her mother was right—she shouldn't have been so confrontational with Ruan Xiao Jiao, but it was too late.

She had already done the thing she regretted most, putting herself in such a predicament.

Mu Yingying now thought, how good it would have been if she had rushed in earlier to tell her mother?

Her mother, if present, would definitely know what to do.

But sadly, there's no medicine for regret in this world.

Mu Dade seemed to notice Mu Yingying losing her nerve, so he said,

"If you tell anyone else about today, including Dandan and your mother, I'll divorce your mother and elevate Aunt Ruan's status.

And then, have your grandmother marry you off to Wang San from the village; weren't you always thinking of marrying the third branch's Shuang to him? Since she refused, you can take her place!"

Mu Dade's words were extremely vicious. Even for his own daughter, he wouldn't spare her if she ruined his plans.

Mu Yingying's eyes widened, her gaze towards Mu Dade full of confusion, doubt, anger, and unwillingness...

Various emotions intertwined; she wanted to shout out, but her throat felt clogged, dry, numb, unable to utter a word.

"Dad, can you do this to my mom?" After hesitating for a long time, Mu Yingying finally squeezed out this sentence.

"Enough, don't use your mother to pressure me. I have what I have today not because of your mother. It was me who went to take the exams, and it was still me who passed. If you're uncomfortable with it, you can choose to marry Wang San!"

After saying that, Mu Dade left Ruan's house by himself.

He didn't even stop to check if Mu Yingying followed him back.

Mu Yingying moved sluggishly out of Ruan Xiao Jiao's room and slowly walked towards the Old Mu Family's direction under the moonlight.

At the not-yet-completed academy at Mu Shuangshuang's house, she thought of the third branch family enjoying better days and even a more harmonious family life than hers.

The more Mu Yingying thought about it, the angrier she got. She even considered setting the academy on fire so the third branch would lose everything!

But Mu Yingying didn't have any fire-starting tools.

Unwillingly cursing a few times, Mu Yingying hurriedly returned home.

By this time, the night had deepened, and there was not a soul in sight on the village paths.

The leaves rustled as she almost stumbled her way to the Old Mu Family's main house.

She stood in front of Mu Dandan's room for a long time, wanting to rush in and tell Mu Dandan about what she saw that night.

But she kept thinking of her father's fierceness in threatening to marry her off to Wang San.

Mu Yingying was afraid and slunk back to her room, deciding to let the matter stay buried inside her.

*

Early the next morning, the whole Er Gui Village was bustling.

Everyone got up earlier than usual because they needed to clean their homes for the new year, removing all the filth that couldn't be left for the new year.

Then, they prepared various things for the new year's celebration.

Mu Shuangshuang got up early to make breakfast for everyone and then helped with the cleaning.

Lu Yuanfeng eagerly took on the chore of carrying manure. Just after breakfast, he started working with the manure buckets.

Chapter 879: One of Us

The dirtiest work is done by Lu Yuanfeng.

Mu Shuangshuang can only do some cleaning and washing tasks, as well as prepare food for tomorrow.

Outside the kitchen, Mu Dashan holds a broom tied with a bamboo stick, ready to sweep away the dust coming into the house, but fortunately, Mu Dashan wears a mask made by Mu Shuangshuang.

He wasn't choked.

He's almost fully equipped by Mu Shuangshuang, with a mask, felt hat, gloves, apron; wearing these, Mu Dashan looks perfectly comfortable.

While working, Mu Dashan is quite pleased because these things were made by his daughter.

"Our Shuangshuang is smart, knowing to use old sheets to cover the furniture, so even if we spread dust on the sheets, we only have to pull it off and it's clean."

Early in the morning, Mu Shuangshuang explained to Mu Dashan a different cleaning method than before, placing old cloth on the bed, chairs, and tables, letting dust fall on the old cloth.

When tidying, one only has to gather the old cloth, take it outside, and shake off the dust.

Yu Si Niang hears the commotion, echoing Mu Dashan from outside the house.

"Indeed, our daughter is clever, coming up with ideas we've never seen before. In past years, every time you cleaned the dust, you would cough for days.

Now with this mask thing, the dust doesn't get in at all."

Without mentioning, Yu Si Niang feels increasingly her daughter is sensible and capable.

"But today, the hardest worker is still Fengzi; look at all the manure, he's handling it alone."

While speaking, Yu Si Niang's eyes fall on Lu Yuanfeng, who is busy and sweating in the corner.

Handling manure is the most important task before the New Year; the manure buckets for villagers are much larger than water buckets, and all the manure needs to be carried to the fields planted with red flower seeds, quite a long distance.

Carrying manure is very unpleasant, and if there's a bit of wind, the smell spreads further.

Most people choose not to care.

After all, every household has times for carrying and spreading manure.

But some in the Old Mu Family just don't think this way.

Over at Shuangshuang's house, breakfast was earlier than at the Old Mu Family's; they had started working when the Old Mu Family was having breakfast, so the smell drifted into the Old Mu Family's dining room.

"Mother, it's so stinky, how can I eat!"

Mrs. Lin picks up then puts down her bowl, faces full of complaints to Old Mrs. Mu.

Old Mrs. Mu glances at Mrs. Lin, snaps: "Nobody's asking you to eat dung, why can't you eat?"

This was better left unsaid, as Mrs. Jin and Mu Dade feel like they want to vomit.

The two of them exchange a look and stand up.

"Dad, Mom, I have to review my studies, so I won't be eating!" Mu Dade says.

"Mom, I need to take care of Mr. Dan Dan, won't be participating in today's cleaning." Mrs. Jin says.

The eldest ones are not easy to deal with, the stink they can endure, but cleaning the whole house, they don't want to do it.

Not only that, Mu Dade adds: "Dad, Mom, assign someone to clean up our east chamber, dust needs sweeping, furniture needs wiping, and the quilt on the kang should be taken out and aired.

Also, have someone with skill wash my clothes, each piece is not cheap."

Mu Dade's words clearly treating family members like servants or helpers.

Yet, the Mu elders feel it's perfectly normal.

Old Mrs. Mu glances at the people at the table, thinking: the second daughter-in-law likes to evade work, the third daughter-in-law has been separated, that stubborn girl's temper won't let her go.

As for the fourth daughter-in-law, she's clumsy, if she ruins the clothes, can't compensate with half a life; the only one left is Huang Bitu.

Huang Bitu is decent-looking and usually careful with tasks, cooking and washing clothes are done better than the second daughter-in-law, who often does a poor job.

"So, Da Lang's wife, after eating, you go clean the eldest's room and wash clothes.

Second one, go dust the eldest's room, don't damage his stuff, or you'll skin yourself!"

Old Mrs. Mu assigning tasks, her words just ended and immediately scolded by Mr. Mu.

"It's New Year's, shouting and threatening, can't we eat properly?"

Old Mrs. Mu's arrogance instantly halved, she picks up her bowl and chopsticks, starts eating.

But it's clear she's still extremely unwilling.

Mu Dazhong pouts, unwillingly says: "Mom, it was the third one who always swept the dust, he knows how, won't damage the furniture.

If I do it, I'm afraid I won't do it well."

"Mom, there's also wiping furniture and cooking New Year's Eve dinner which are Yu Si Niang's job, if I cook, ancestors certainly won't like my food." Mrs. Lin adds.

Seeing this, Mu Dajiang knows brother and sister-in-law are shirking, before he speaks, Mu Danian suddenly cuts in.

"Dad, Matchmaker Sun told me yesterday she found a good girl for me, wants me to meet her in Li Family Village, today's tasks I'm afraid I can't do."

"Dad, Xiaxia's mother and I..."

Mu Dajiang isn't finished before being interrupted by Old Mrs. Mu.

"Enough, every one of you making excuses, is this year not going to be passed? Or do you want your father and me, with old bones, to sweep the dust and cook dinner, while you sit back and enjoy?"

Old Mrs. Mu talking in a somewhat sarcastic manner, those who understand her know she's about to lose her temper.

At this time, best not provoke her.

"Hehe, Mom, that's not what we mean, we just think the person who always does something should keep doing it, this way, the job is done right, and everyone's relaxed!" Mrs. Lin chuckles.

"Nonsense! The third branch has split, do you still want them to work and then eat New Year's dinner at our place?"

"Do you want the third branch to clean up after you? Mind you, I won't agree, nor will that stubborn girl in the third branch."

"The chores in the house, you either do them or get out of the Old Mu Family. We don't need such lazy good-for-nothings!"

Old Mrs. Mu almost shouting these words.

Those who were planning to shirk responsibilities look at each other.

It's clear today's duties won't be escaped.

"Mom, tell us what we should do, but I want to say! Since you said everyone should work, then everyone works together."

Although the eldest is a scholar, he's from a farming family; to remember his roots, he should join us in working, experience how hard you and Dad raised him."

Mu Dajiang's sudden words drag the escaping Mu Dade back in.

And surprisingly, it does make some sense.

Chapter 880: Writing Spring Festival Couplets

"Old Fourth, that's not how you should talk. You're a farmer and it's relaxed when it's not a busy season."

But Dan Dan's dad needs to study all the time. What if his performance gets affected, then what?"

Mrs. Jin hurried to prevent her husband from working, and her words carried a hint of threat.

Unfortunately, she touched Old Mrs. Mu's sore spot.

Old Mrs. Mu slammed her chopsticks heavily on the table.

She scolded Mrs. Jin, "What nonsense are you spouting? How come the eldest's performance isn't good? If you talk nonsense again, I'll tear your mouth apart!"

Mrs. Jin looked aggrieved, "Mother, that's not what I meant, I was just giving an example."

Old Mrs. Mu's face turned even uglier, "Mrs. Jin, just because you accompanied the eldest to Qianzhou Prefecture, you think you're somebody?"

As for Dade's matters, are you, a daughter-in-law, allowed to speak? If I hear you speak ill of Dade again, you know what the consequences will be."

In front of the whole family, Old Mrs. Mu started scolding Mrs. Jin, which showed just how little status Mrs. Jin held in Old Mrs. Mu's heart.

Mrs. Jin cursed the old woman countless times in her heart, but on the surface, she had to politely say to Old Mrs. Mu, "Mother, you're right in your teaching. I won't dare again in the future, but Dan Dan's dad doesn't have to work anymore, right?"

"Grandma, I don't think so. Eldest brother sits in the study reading books all year round, and he doesn't move around. We all know that the more a man does farm work, the healthier he becomes.

If the eldest brother works, it's not a bad thing, it's a good thing! Perhaps with this workout, he'll get stronger, have no illnesses or calamities, and when he takes the exam, it'll save him time and go smoothly."

Mu Dalang, who seldom got involved in Old Mu Family matters, also gave his opinion.

His thoughts were similar to Mu Dajiang's, but his starting point was for the good of Mu Dade, which pleased Old Mrs. Mu even more.

"Old man, what do you think?" Old Mrs. Mu looked at Mr. Mu, waiting for the head of the household to make a decision.

"The idea's not bad, since everyone thinks the eldest should exercise, then let's arrange some work for him too. Eldest daughter-in-law, you follow the second daughter-in-law to the kitchen, and prepare tomorrow's New Year's Eve dinner together.

Tidy up all the nooks and crannies in the house! Also, if there are any places you can't get clean, go see how other families do it. Our Old Mu Family, united as one, will clean the house thoroughly."

Mr. Mu said a long string of words that made everyone feel energized, inspired.

Mu Dade's face had already changed. He shook his sleeves, ready to ignore this bunch of people.

Mrs. Jin noticed this sharply and quickly said, "Dan Dan's dad, how about you write couplets? This task is festive, and maybe you'll catch some of the joyful spirit. Besides, now in the entire village, you're the only one who can do this!"

In Er Gui Village, not many have studied, and even fewer stayed in the village.

Before, Wang Fugui's family had a long-term worker who knew how to write, and in past years, that worker helped the whole village write couplets, with Old Master Wang paying him.

But after Wang Fugui fell ill, Old Master Wang dismissed quite a few workers, among them, that long-term worker.

Now, there's only Fu Wu left, who deals with land transactions all year round, but long ago he said he wouldn't write couplets for anyone.

With things as they are, the village people could only turn to her husband for help.

In fact, Mrs. Jin's plan was that writing a couplet in town costs five coins, and the villagers surely wouldn't want to spend that. If her husband helped write, everyone would surely remember her husband's kindness.

When they have conflicts with the third branch, those people would surely side with their branch.

Some words, people in their branch can't say, but the coarse villagers will speak.

Moreover, they can help anyone write couplets, except they won't help the third branch.

Let the third branch be without spring couplets during the New Year.

As soon as Mrs. Jin spoke, Mu Dade understood what she meant.

After all, after being married for so many years, if they didn't have this little bit of tacit understanding, they wouldn't really be a family.

"Alright! Then I'll go get the brush and ink. Every household should have red paper! Parents, tell the villagers that I can help write spring couplets, and the time is today!"

What Mu Dade said made the old couple of the Old Mu Family smile broadly.

Writing spring couplets is indeed a festive task.

In the future, no matter whose house they visit, upon seeing those bright red, festive couplets, everyone would definitely point out that they were written by their son.

"Alright then, I'll go call the villagers to come to our house to write spring couplets!" Mr. Mu stood up happily.

Old Mrs. Mu also quickly gobbled a few mouthfuls of food.

"Old man, I'll go with you!"

At the dining table, soon only a few younger members who hadn't eaten yet were left.

Mu Dalang placed some greens into Huang Bitang's bowl, urging her to eat quickly.

"Bitao, let's go to Huang Family Village after dinner to see how the three brothers are spending New Year's tomorrow." Mu Dalang said.

"Okay!" Huang Bitao grinned at Mu Dalang.

The two were showing off their love early in the morning.

For a moment, the expressions of a few people at the dining table were somewhat unusual.

Mrs. Lin silently cursed Huang Bitao as a little tramp, shameless.

Mu Dazhong appeared indifferent, as if it had nothing to do with him.

As for Mu Danian, he wished he could take Mu Dalang's place, personally picking vegetables for Huang Bitao, and at the same time, holding her in his arms to comfort her well...

Only Old Fourth's family reacted normally.

Mu Dajiang said, "Dalang, before you head to Huang Family Village, stop by my room, I have something to give you."

Although Mu Dajiang hasn't divided the family yet, he can now save many things for himself.

And the old man had implicitly allowed this behavior from the fourth branch.

Or it might be said that after Mu Dade passed the exam, aside from the income being handed over, each branch more or less had some things.

As for Old Mrs. Mu, as long as no one mentions it, she wouldn't know.

*

As soon as news spread that Mu Dade would write spring couplets for everyone, the threshold of the Old Mu Family was almost worn out by visitors.

Villagers, one by one, hurriedly came to the Old Mu Family carrying large sheets of red paper, and almost half the village showed up in no time.

The courtyard of the Old Mu Family was packed so tightly, there wasn't even room to squeeze through.

Everyone clamored for Mu Dade to write spring couplets.

Mu Dade had never seen such a scene before, and even felt a bit scared.

But seeing the adoring and expectant eyes of the crowd, Mu Dade felt light-hearted, willing to write as many spring couplets as needed.

However, where there are many people, disputes arise.

Just after Mu Dade finished writing the first couplet, an argument broke out.

It was between two women who had arrived last.

They were arguing about who got to go first.

One of the women was none other than the village's troublemaker, Aunt Zhang!

Aunt Zhang, used to her domineering ways, wanted to jump the queue for couplets even though she had arrived late, which naturally displeased everyone.

"Aunt Zhang, first come, first served, queue up!" said the woman who got cut off.

"Queue up for what? My niece is Ruan Xiao Jiao, the concubine of the County Magistrate, are you really up for provoking that?"