

Folly 901

Chapter 901: Keep an Eye on the Old Man and Old Lady

Mu Shuangshuang's explanation made both Mu Dashan and Mu Dalang nod repeatedly, that was indeed the case.

That Gao Tiezhu, his business was lending money to others, then constantly expanding himself by relying on others' interest.

Once the money wasn't repaid, he would take the borrower's life.

To some extent, the contract spirit of the Da Ning Dynasty has always been praised. As long as a contract is established with both parties' consent and a witness is found, the contract is considered valid.

Even if there are many unreasonable points, it will not be declared invalid, and the court will not interfere either. Usually, contract parties agree on a solution themselves.

This was the experience Mu Shuangshuang had gained through analysis and practice over time.

"Did Grandpa and Grandma not know the consequences of not being able to repay that money in the future?" Mu Shuangshuang couldn't help but ask.

"Sigh, I asked my father too, but he said that elder brother would surely pass the scholar examination. Once he becomes the Champion Scholar, even if those fifty taels of silver double to a hundred taels, we would still be able to repay it." Mu Dalang said.

Hearing Mu Dalang's words, Mu Shuangshuang was at a loss.

Where on earth did the Old Mu Family get such confidence that someone like Mu Dade could definitely pass as the Champion Scholar?

If he doesn't pass, how would they repay it? With their lives?

Mu Shuangshuang's profession in her previous life had given her some understanding of usury.

And she had encountered similar cases.

Most didn't end well, either having their private information exposed or being pursued and harmed, even their families couldn't find peace.

In the modern age, such issues aren't necessarily resolved perfectly; let alone in the Da Ning Dynasty from thousands of years ago.

"Fools! Father and Mother are really fools!" Mu Dashan said, his face flushed, full of agitation.

The man felt particularly uneasy at this moment.

Does an elder brother have to ruin the family just to take the imperial exam?

"No! I must go find your Grandpa and Grandma." Mu Dashan suddenly said and was about to walk towards the Old Mu Family.

But Mu Shuangshuang grabbed his wrist.

"Dad, didn't you hear what cousin Dalang said? This money is to help uncle go to the Capital. Back then, when he went to the Qianzhou Prefecture for the exam, Grandpa and Grandma wanted to sell me to marry Wang San just to cover the travel expenses.

Do you think if you go now, Grandma and Grandpa will listen to you? A person pretending to sleep can never be woken up." Mu Shuangshuang said.

Mu Dalang also nodded along.

"Third Uncle, Shuangshuang is right. It's useless to go to Grandpa and Grandma. Once they decide something, no one can change it. Now only uncle can, but the money is for him, do you think he'll stop it?"

Mu Dashan's eyebrows furrowed together, and his face, due to agitation, was full of bulging veins.

"Look for Xiangxiang, Grandma listens to Xiangxiang; if she disagrees, maybe Grandma will change her mind." Mu Dashan said, unwilling to give up.

Mu Dalang still shook his head, "Old Aunt was okay before, but ever since the Qin Family incident and her madness, Grandpa treats her like a worm in the dung pit, just seeing her is irritating, how could he listen to her?"

This doesn't work, neither does that, Mu Dashan felt a bit desperate.

"What should we do? Are we just going to ignore it? Normally, Grandpa and Grandma are partial, but not to the point of risking lives!" Mu Dashan mumbled.

"Dad, don't blame yourself. This matter isn't your responsibility, Grandpa and Grandma won't listen to you, going there is pointless." Mu Shuangshuang said bluntly.

With the kind of wicked things Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu have done, she would never get involved in Old Mu Family's affairs.

If it were someone else you helped, even if they don't show gratitude, at least they wouldn't stab you in the back when you're not looking.

The people of the Old Mu Family, they would carve out the third branch's flesh if they could.

If you're not good to me, why should I risk my life to protect you?

"Shuangshuang, I understand what you mean, but it's still hard to get past it in my heart."

This time, Mu Dashan wasn't being a pushover.

Anyone else in his place would also try to persuade, especially when it involved his own parents and siblings with whom he grew up.

"Third Uncle, I think you should stay out of this. After all, it was Aunt who started it, and she did something else as well. When Uncle was leaving, she made him step on Grandma's back to get on the horse in front of the entire village, saying it was for... rising high so Uncle could pass the exam."

This time, Mu Dashan was even more furious.

He clenched his fists, the already bulging veins on his face becoming even more pronounced.

"That vicious woman again, what's she trying to do? She won't stop until our Old Mu Family is ruined?"

The way Mu Dashan called the vicious woman was through gritted teeth.

This was also the first time Mu Shuangshuang saw hatred in Mu Dashan's eyes, thinking about it, Mrs. Jin had left a very deep impression on Mu Dashan.

"Cousin, how could Grandpa and Grandma agree to such an absurd thing?" Mu Shuangshuang suddenly asked.

"Aunt told Grandpa and Grandma I and Bi Taowang's Mansion, this matter, Grandpa and Grandma didn't tell anyone, so they believed."

Mu Shuangshuang finally understood.

Mrs. Jin was specifically targeting Old Mrs. Mu, probably because something about Ruan Xiao Jiao struck a nerve with Mrs. Jin.

It was then that Mrs. Jin thought of such a method to make Old Mrs. Mu embarrassed.

"Dad, this matter was led by Aunt; Aunt wanted Grandma to suffer, you really shouldn't get involved."
Mu Shuangshuang said.

Seeing his daughter not budging, Mu Dashan turned to ask Mu Dalang for his opinion.

Mu Dalang also shook his head. "Third Uncle, you should do as Shuangshuang says, don't get involved. They've always treated uncle as their lifeline, willing to do anything.

Simply let Grandma and Grandpa learn a lesson this time, otherwise, who knows what more trouble they'll cause in the future."

Mu Dalang was speaking the truth, the entire family's lives were not as valuable as one Mu Dade.

If that's the case, then there's nothing more to say, let the facts prove everything.

"But what if something happens, what then?" Mu Dashan said.

"That's uncle's matter. I will go back and tell Grandpa and Grandma to write uncle's name, so when it's time to repay, they'll go to uncle for repayment."

Mu Dalang naturally believed that since the issue originated with Mu Dade, it should also be handled by him.

Unfortunately, Mu Dalang was too naive.

This time, when Old Mrs. Mu borrowed money, the name she wrote wasn't Mu Dade's.

"Cousin, although we're not getting involved, we still need to understand clearly how the money was borrowed. We must be cautious of Grandpa and Grandma borrowing money in the names of other branches of the family." Mu Shuangshuang reminded.

The Old Mu Family had a history, always tending to profit for themselves while pushing others out.

With Old Mrs. Mu's temperament, the chance of her writing Mu Dade's name to borrow money was zero.

That's why it was all the more important to be vigilant.

Chapter 902: Stopping Them

"Furthermore, you need to make things clear to Uncle and Aunt Four, reminding them not to sign anything, not even a blank piece of paper, to avoid taking the blame for the big house later."

Mu Shuangshuang knew, ever since the third branch separated, the fourth branch had always been the one taking the blame for the Old Mu Family.

Who knows, this time, whether Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu would push the fourth branch forward.

Mu Shuangshuang and Mu Dalang deliberated on a response strategy, generally, it was to avoid getting involved in this mess.

However, Mu Dashan still decided to talk to his parents about the risks of this matter; at least it shouldn't be as discussed by the two youngsters, not getting mixed up in it.

No matter what, he couldn't let his parents go astray and end up harming the entire Old Mu Family.

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After lunch, Mu Shuangshuang was chopping pig feed in the yard while Yu Si Niang hurriedly washed the dishes, searched around the house from top to bottom, inside and out, but couldn't find Mu Dashan.

She even went to the outhouse, but still didn't find him.

So, she asked Mu Shuangshuang whether she had seen him.

Mu Shuangshuang put down the kitchen knife, gathering the pig feed in the wooden basin into piles while saying: "Mom, stop looking, Dad just sneaked off to my grandpa and grandma's place, probably to prevent them from borrowing money from Gao Tiezhu."

Yu Si Niang was startled, wiping her wet hands on her apron.

"What is your dad doing? Didn't we agree not to get involved in this matter? If he goes, your grandparents won't be pleased with him again.

You know, last night before bed, he was telling me how your grandma treated him poorly on New Year's Day, almost like enemies."

"Mom, it's Da Lang and I who said not to bother, Dad didn't agree to it. If you really want him to ignore it, he'd feel uneasy inside; better let him follow his instincts," Mu Shuangshuang replied.

Yu Si Niang said: "But if your dad goes and gets bullied, what then?"

"You know what dad is like, right? Once he's decided on something, who can change that? Let him go, at least for peace of mind.

At least if anything really happens in the future, grandpa and grandma won't say we did absolutely nothing."

Mu Shuangshuang didn't want to interfere with Mu Dashan's personal freedom.

Mu Dashan is an adult and can decide anything for himself.

Besides, he is innately kind-hearted, loyal and honest. Even if the Old Mu Family treats him poorly, usually making him avoid them, he wouldn't care, but if it's related to safety, he would definitely step in.

Even if he runs into roadblocks and gets humiliated by Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu.

These shouldn't be obstacles for Mu Dashan to do what he believes is right.

"Mom, don't worry, I won't let dad get bullied, once I've finished chopping the pig feed, I'll cook it and go over there to take a look,"

Mu Shuangshuang said as she wiped the sweat from her forehead with the back of her hand, addressing Yu Si Niang.

Yu Si Niang felt slightly relieved after listening to her daughter.

She reassured herself in her heart: With her daughter Shuangshuang around, surely her dad would be fine.

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Mu Dashan went straight to the Old Mu Family's main house. On the second day of the New Year, many people had come to the Old Mu Family, all to join the festivities.

Incidentally, they wanted to inquire when Mu Dade would take the exams so that the village could send him off together and share in the good fortune of Mu Dade from the Old Mu Family.

The originally planned departure date of the third day of the lunar New Year for the Old Mu Family had been postponed to the sixth day. These days, all were busy preparing for Mu Dade's grand start to the Capital.

Old Mrs. Mu and Mr. Mu had shared the dates with the villagers, so those who came to pay New Year's compliments didn't stay long.

Of course, the main reason was that Mu Dade wasn't at the Old Mu Family house; if he were, no matter how busy everyone was, they would stay a bit longer.

When Mu Dashan entered the main room, only Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu were there, the others were either taking a midday nap.

Or went out to spread the news about Mu Dade, taking advantage of the villagers.

Seeing Mu Dashan enter the room.

Old Mrs. Mu snorted coldly and turned her head, proving with her actions that she didn't welcome Mu Dashan.

Fortunately, Mr. Mu wasn't as cold due to last year's New Year's incident.

Getting up, he grabbed some melon seeds from the snacks tray on the table for Mu Dashan, saying: "Have some, these are from your brother who brought them back from the county, bigger and tastier than the usual ones."

Mu Dashan glanced at the melon seeds in his hand, they were indeed large and plump.

They looked better than average melon seeds.

Must be good stuff.

"Dad, you and Mom should keep them for yourselves. We bought some at home, so I won't eat them," preparing to put the seeds back on the tray, Mu Dashan said.

Unexpectedly, Old Mrs. Mu was quicker.

She suddenly stood up, reached out, and grabbed all the melon seeds from Mu Dashan's palm into her own.

"Old man, why are you giving away stuff your eldest brought back, willy-nilly? Our Xiangxiang eats them less, don't you know?"

Questioning Mr. Mu's decision, he unhappily glared at Old Mrs. Mu.

"Shut up, the third son isn't an outsider, why can't he eat some melon seeds?"

With that, Mr. Mu snatched the tray from Old Mrs. Mu, pouring all the melon seeds into Mu Dashan's pocket.

Old Mrs. Mu was taken aback.

She stared blankly at Mr. Mu, wanting some justice from him.

But instead of comforting her, Mr. Mu said, "You can't make a scene in the Old Mu Family. The past few days were New Year, I didn't say anything. If you dare defy my words again, I'll divorce you and send you back to your Liu Family Village."

Fearing Old Mrs. Mu might start with her usual antics, Mr. Mu added, "If today you dare sit on the ground, hit your own thigh, or shout, I'll divorce you too."

These words left Old Mrs. Mu speechless.

Her aged hands waved repeatedly in front of Mr. Mu.

Mu Dashan felt the weight of the melon seeds in his pocket, momentarily not knowing what to say.

This should be the first time Mr. Mu proactively gave food to Mu Dashan.

"Dad, I actually came to persuade you about one thing: Neither you nor Mom should borrow money from Gao Tiezhu, he's not a good person. Have you forgotten about what happened a few years ago?"

Mu Dashan referred to the incident of the widow's suicide by drowning.

The body pulled out was bloated beyond recognition.

People from all nearby villages came to see, only then realizing how hateful Gao Tiezhu truly was.

Mr. Mu sighed deeply.

"How could I not know borrowing from Gao Tiezhu isn't wise, but your brother needs it!

This trip to the Capital is long and far, your mom and I come from peasant roots and have no savings.

Even if we did have savings, they were used up when your brother was taking the scholar exams."

Chapter 903: Fruitless Effort

"Dad, if Big Brother could just save a bit, the silver he received from the court would actually be enough."

Perhaps it was rare for Mr. Mu to speak so thoughtfully in front of him, so Mu Dashan expressed his true thoughts.

Over the years, to support Mu Dade's studies, they had spent several hundred taels of silver.

If those silvers were saved until now, the Old Mu Family could open a tavern in town, buy a house, and even purchase thirty mu of land, with some left over.

When other families' children went for exams, who spent as much as Mu Dade, over a hundred taels for just one imperial exam?

Now, heading to the Capital, it would probably require two hundred taels of silver.

"Enough? That's easy for you to say. Do you want your big brother to drink northwest wind on the road?"

Besides, no one asked you to contribute a penny, why are you so excited? What, do you want us not to gather money for the eldest, so he doesn't take the exam, and if he doesn't become a Champion Scholar, our Old Mu Family will be suppressed by the third branch?

This old woman tells you today, I'll borrow the money, if you still recognize me as your mother, sell that tavern of yours, and give the money to your big brother to take the exam." Old Mrs. Mu raised her voice and shouted at Mu Dashan.

Mu Dashan gasped at Old Mrs. Mu's words.

"Mom, you know very well, the tavern isn't mine. If you want me to sell the tavern, how will I explain to Shuangshuang and the others?"

"Explain? What's there to explain to a worthless woman and girl? You clearly don't regard me and your dad, or your big brother."

"Go look around, who else has become the head of the family like you? Led around by the nose by your wife and daughter."

These words from Old Mrs. Mu made her even angrier.

In her view, the third branch shouldn't prosper.

Everything from the third branch belongs to the Old Mu Family.

If she wants it, the third branch must hand it over.

"Mom, you're wrong, I'm not led around by the nose by Shuangshuang and Si Niang. In our third branch, whoever makes sense, we listen to.

Everything Shuangshuang does is for the good of the third branch. You can't speak ill of her and Si Niang."

In front of Old Mrs. Mu, Mu Dashan didn't hide his protective feelings for his daughter and wife, Yu Si Niang, at all.

As expected, Old Mrs. Mu's face turned green with anger from Mu Dashan's words.

"You're the only coward, the only one who knows how to care for your wife, care for your daughter!" Old Mrs. Mu said sarcastically.

Mr. Mu felt his wife's words had gone too far.

After lightly coughing, he said, "Old woman, why don't you go to the kitchen and pour a cup of tea for the third son. He's been here for quite a while, he must be thirsty."

Old Mrs. Mu exclaimed and then said, "Are you kidding? He's thirsty, why should I get water for him? I'm his mother, it's his job to get it for me."

"Just go, no more nonsense, or don't stay in our Old Mu Family!" Mr. Mu scolded sternly.

Old Mrs. Mu glared at Mu Dashan with her eyes, then reluctantly left the main hall.

In the courtyard, she shouted in the direction of the second branch, "Lin Xiaozao, get out here, it's noon, and you're lying around like a corpse, aren't you?"

A guest is at home, and you don't know to come pour water, Lin Xiaozao..."

Hearing there's a guest at home made Mu Dashan feel a bit uncomfortable.

But thinking of his mother's temperament, he tolerated it.

Mrs. Lin was resting inside, and upon hearing Old Mrs. Mu's wailing-like voice, she didn't want to move. She remembered Huang Bitao, who lived next door, got up, put on an outer garment, and went to Huang Bitao's door, knocking as she called out.

Inside, Huang Bitao, who was doing needlework, put down her work and went out to make tea.

In the main hall, Mr. Mu and Mu Dashan continued to discuss borrowing money from Gao Tiezhu.

Unlike Old Mrs. Mu, Mr. Mu spoke politely. He knew that borrowing money from Gao Tiezhu wasn't the best choice and it carried risks.

He said to Mu Dashan, "Third son, do you have any extra silver, not much, just lend me thirty taels first. With thirty taels of silver, if I sell a few more mu of land, maybe I can gather enough for fifty taels."

Mu Dashan shook his head, "Recently, Shuangshuang started the tavern and built a private school, using up all the family's money.

The last five taels of silver, used for buying this and that during the New Year, purchasing New Year goods, acquiring items for the private school, it's almost all used up.

But I do have two hundred copper coins. Dad, if you need them urgently, you can have mine; consider it as my New Year's money for you and Mom."

Those two hundred copper coins were New Year's money given by Mu Shuangshuang.

Both Yu Si Niang and he each received a hundred, and Yu Si Niang also put her money with Mu Dashan.

Saying this, Mu Dashan took out the two hundred copper coins tied with twine from his pocket and handed them to Mr. Mu.

Mr. Mu didn't refuse. Taking the copper coins, he said, "Third son, this money is a loan from me. Once your big brother passes the exam, I'll return it to you.

Father will remember what you've done today. When your big brother becomes a Champion Scholar, I won't forget you, the third branch."

Mu Dashan hurriedly waved his hand, he said, "Dad, even now, I still hope you don't go to borrow money from Gao Tiezhu, this compound interest thing.

Shuangshuang explained to me, we only suffer losses, you should think more about the future."

"Don't worry, your big brother is a scholar, a future official, he can definitely pay it back.

When I borrow money, I'll surely negotiate with Zhang Tiezhu. This compound interest you mentioned, I won't use.

We're borrowing fifty taels, at most it'll grow to one hundred taels, and once your brother becomes a Champion Scholar, we'll pay back the one hundred taels."

Seeing Mr. Mu so stubborn, Mu Dashan didn't say any more.

He took a deep breath and said to Mr. Mu, "Dad, I can't forget the past, nor do I want to.

But, if you and Mom ever need me and Si Niang in the future, just let us know, we'll help where we can."

This was a son's promise to his father.

The debt of raising a child, Mu Dashan felt, cannot be fully repaid by any child.

He could only do what he could for Mr. and Mrs. Mu to feel a little peaceful inside.

After leaving the Old Mu Family, Mu Dashan's mood was not as heavy as when he arrived.

He could only take things one step at a time for the future.

Back at the third branch, Mu Dashan hesitated whether to tell Yu Si Niang and Mu Shuangshuang about these events.

But as neither of them asked about his whereabouts during this time, Mu Dashan didn't say anything.

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At dusk, Mr. Mu, along with Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian, went to Gao Village to find Gao Tiezhu to discuss borrowing money.

Chapter 904: Seeking Mu Danian as a Son-in-law

Gao Tiezhu is one of the few wealthy people in Gao Village, indulging in lavish meals every day without restraint.

So he grew fat with a greasy face; you could probably scrape off two ounces of oil with a knife.

Upon meeting the Old Mu Family, Gao Tiezhu was still polite, and directly instructed his wife, Ms. Zhu, standing beside him, to pour tea.

As for himself, he reclined in the grand master's chair, half-listening to the Old Mu Family talk about borrowing money.

Mr. Mu had organized his thoughts before coming, so now his words were carefully considered.

After speaking, he stood beside waiting for Gao Tiezhu's response.

"So, you're saying your Old Mu Family wants to borrow money from me, Gao Tiezhu, and will pay me back once your family's scholar, Mu Dade, becomes Champion Scholar?" Gao Tiezhu asked unhurriedly.

It was Mr. Mu's first time borrowing money from an outsider, and when questioned by Gao Tiezhu, he felt somewhat embarrassed and instinctively considered withdrawing.

Seeing his father stay silent for a while, Mu Danian quickly spoke up: "Yes, Brother Tiezhu. My father heard that you're the richest man in these nearby villages.

Whenever anyone faces difficulties, they always come to you for money, and everyone regards you as the great benefactor of the area.

So, this time, we want to borrow some money from you for my elder brother's travel expenses for the exams. Once my brother becomes Champion Scholar, he won't forget your kindness."

Mu Danian shamelessly praised Gao Tiezhu in front of Mr. Mu.

Indeed, Mu Danian's sweet-talking ability was unmatched by anyone else in the Old Mu Family.

Gao Tiezhu felt pleased and grudgingly lifted his head, glancing at Mu Danian.

With that glance, he had an idea.

Suddenly, he stood up from the grand master's chair and said to Mu Dania, "This brother is the youngest of the Old Mu Family? You sure know how to speak well."

Mu Dania chuckled and said, "I go by Mu Dania, and I am the youngest son in the Old Mu Family."

Gao Tiezhu laughed aloud, his features densely packed, giving a rather frightening impression.

"Please sit for a while; I'll take care of some business in the back courtyard, and then we'll discuss the money!"

With that, Gao Tiezhu headed to the back courtyard.

The three members of the Old Mu Family exchanged confused glances, all at a loss.

"Dad, what does Gao Tiezhu mean? Weren't we discussing borrowing money? Why retreat to the backyard? Does it mean he won't lend us money?" Mu Dazhong asked.

As soon as he finished speaking, Mr. Mu smacked him on the head.

"Second son, stop talking so much!" Mr. Mu scolded.

Mu Dazhong rolled his eyes in dissatisfaction.

Mu Dania caught the eye roll and said, "Second brother, what are you doing? Dad said just two words. If you have opinions, say them instead of rolling your eyes behind our backs; what does that mean?"

Mu Dazhong nearly exploded with anger.

He glared at Mu Dania, ready to explain to Mr. Mu, but Mr. Mu gave him a slap.

Almost stunned, Mu Danian covered his mouth, secretly laughing on the side.

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In the Gao Family's back courtyard, Gao Tiezhu pulled Ms. Zhu aside and whispered, "What do you think of the young man who came with the Old Mu Family? I'm talking about the skinny one, not the fat one!"

Ms. Zhu nodded knowingly, "He looks nice, especially with that handsome face. What's up?"

"Nothing much; do you think he matches our eldest daughter, Cuihua?" Gao Tiezhu asked.

"What? Tiezhu, you must be mistaken, Cuihua? That young man?" Ms. Zhu exclaimed in shock.

It's no wonder Ms. Zhu was agitated; though mothers don't usually mind their children being unattractive, Gao Cuihua was one child out of four that she truly disliked.

She was simply too ugly.

Not only did the Gao family disdain her, but even when she went out playing with other kids and stole peas from the neighbor's field, only Cuihua got smacked.

When they relieved themselves in the courtyard corner as kids, even the rooster pecked her backside.

Now, at twenty-three, she still hasn't been courted, and any suitor seeing her face would turn away without wanting the betrothal gifts.

This matter was a sore spot for Gao Tiezhu and a pain Ms. Zhu was reluctant to mention.

"What's wrong? Is our Cuihua that bad?" Gao Tiezhu grumbled unhappily.

Ms. Zhu quickly shook her head. "She's not bad at all; our Cuihua isn't bad. That lad can't compare to her."

Gao Tiezhu snorted and instructed Ms. Zhu further.

"Get Cuihua to pour some tea; if she fancies Mu Danian, I'll lend money to the Old Mu Family.

Mu Dade is going to take the Champion Scholar exam; if he really passes, our Cuihua won't lead a miserable life with Mu Danian."

After all, she was his daughter; even if Gao Tiezhu was ruthless, he couldn't let her remain unmarried forever.

Besides, once his daughter became the in-law of a Champion Scholar, more people would come to borrow money.

"What if Mu Danian disagrees?" Ms. Zhu voiced her concern.

"Have you forgotten? They're borrowing money from me; if he doesn't agree, do you think I'll let it slide? When signing the contract later, follow the usual method and have the old man sign, then get Mu Danian and the other fatty to sign.

By year's end, I'll make Mu Danian marry my daughter, or else I'll take his life!"

These words from Gao Tiezhu gave an impression of extreme viciousness.

Ms. Zhu was no stranger to joining Gao Tiezhu in this sort of despicable scheme.

She was well accustomed.

"I'll call Cuihua; you go to the front courtyard and keep them occupied."

After this exchange, Ms. Zhu headed to the most secluded northern corner of the Gao household where a solitary courtyard stood.

Once Zhu Cuihua heard that men had arrived, without a word, she carried the tea Ms. Zhu had brewed straight to the main house in the front courtyard.

Inside, Gao Tiezhu and Mr. Mu chatted up a storm, laughing as they went.

Unknowingly, plenty of information about the Old Mu Family had entered his mind.

Yet Mr. Mu naively thought that Gao Tiezhu was easygoing.

Just then, Zhu Cuihua came walking in, and Gao Tiezhu quickly called out, "Cuihua, pour tea for Mr. Mu and Brother Danian!"

Gao Tiezhu blatantly ignored Mu Dazhong, which irked Mu Dazhong.

"Brother Tiezhu, don't forget me, I'd like some tea too." Mu Dazhong said with a flattering tone.

Only to receive a side-eye from Mr. Mu.

Zhu Cuihua, in her twenties, had only met the unattractive men from Gao Village. With Mu Danian looking indeed nice, she immediately nodded towards Gao Tiezhu, signaling she had decided on Mu Danian as her man.

Only then did Gao Tiezhu relax, "Regarding the money, no problem, but you know my rules, right? Borrowing money is fine, but the interest can't be lacking."

Chapter 905: Got the Loan

Speaking of interest, Mr. Mu held his breath.

"So, how do you calculate the interest?" Mr. Mu asked.

"Usually, I start lending at fifty cents, and the daily interest is one cent. Over a year, it's more than three taels.

The more you borrow, the more the interest, which means if you borrow fifty taels of Silver for a year, the interest is three hundred and sixty-five taels." Gao Tiezhu said.

Upon hearing this, Mr. Mu almost fainted.

If he borrowed fifty taels of Silver, it would turn into three hundred and sixty-five taels in a year, and that's just the interest, not the principal.

Mr. Mu hesitated.

Not only him, but even Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian also hesitated.

They were there to enjoy the good life, not to bear debts. Borrowing fifty taels and paying back four hundred taels at the end of the year, where would the Old Mu Family get so much money?

"Dad, how about we go back and sell some land, or you could ask those Old Mu family relatives for loans. Even multiple loans won't exceed a hundred taels of Silver. We might not be able to repay these four hundred taels."

Mu Dazhong quietly reminded.

If Mu Dazhong hadn't mentioned the relatives, Mr. Mu might have still been hesitant because of the interest.

But after the mention, Mr. Mu didn't want to go back.

He had to borrow the money to make the Old Mu Family proud among their kin.

To avoid their clan members from saying that the Old Mu Family is just a sidelink and needs the approval of others to enter the family register.

"Tiezhu, it's not that Uncle Mu doesn't want to borrow, but your interest is just too high, exceeding my expectations.

My son is a scholar now and is about to take the Champion Scholar exam. If you're willing to lower the interest, our Old Mu Family will surely remember your kindness."

Gao Tiezhu remained silent.

Seeing this, Gao Cuihua quickly chimed in, "Dad, for your daughter's sake, just lend them the money, and charge them less interest!"

Previously, everyone's attention was on Gao Tiezhu. Only when Gao Cuihua spoke did they notice her.

Upon seeing her, Mu Danian almost couldn't help but throw up.

Too ugly, really too ugly.

Gao Cuihua's face was full of wrinkles, uneven, and those pus-filled bumps made it uncomfortable to watch.

And her features and eyebrows were exactly like Gao Tiezhu's, only Gao Tiezhu had a fat head and big ears, making his features unclear, while Gao Cuihua was just like a replica of Gao Tiezhu.

Mu Dazhong was more direct; he rushed out, and after a while, the sound of retching came from the front yard.

Gao Cuihua's face suddenly changed.

"Dad! Don't lend them the money, tell them to get lost!"

Mu Dazhong's reaction was actually normal; villagers often reacted this way.

But Gao Cuihua had set her eyes on Mu Danian.

In the future, Mu Dazhong would be a relative, and if even relatives dared make fun of her, how would she let Mu Dazhong off comfortably?

"Old man, my daughter says no money will be lent, you better leave!" Gao Tiezhu extended his chubby hand, starting to chase away the people from the Old Mu Family.

Mr. Mu was almost driven mad by Mu Dazhong.

The hard-negotiated matter was blown away once again.

Mu Danian suddenly stepped up, saying to Gao Cuihua, "Sister, my second brother has a problem with his mind, please don't take it to heart; talk to brother Tiezhu to lend us the money!"

Mu Danian usually mingled a lot with the young women and wives in the village, knowing what words would make them happy.

He forced himself to say some pleasant words to Gao Cuihua.

Gao Cuihua then spoke some good words to Gao Tiezhu.

The matter was resolved just like that.

Fifty taels of Silver, fifty taels of interest for a year, with the village head of Gao Village as a witness, on the spot, Gao Tiezhu handed over the fifty taels, and the three men from the Old Mu Family signed the paperwork.

At first, Mu Danian felt something was wrong. Only after the village head of Gao Village explained did he relax and press his thumbprint.

By nightfall, the people of the Old Mu Family arrived at Er Gui Village.

As for Gao Cuihua, once the people of Old Mu Family left, she started to primp herself.

Gao Tiezhu meant for her to marry into the Old Mu Family before the end of this year, to become a sister-in-law of a future Champion Scholar.

...

Mu Shuangshuang only learned on the morning of the third day of the New Year that the Old Mu Family had borrowed fifty taels of Silver.

And the interest wasn't particularly high, at least not in the eyes of the Old Mu Family.

Fifty taels of Silver, fifty taels of interest for a year—Mu Shuangshuang only thought the Old Mu Family was crazy to make such a foolish deal.

But no matter what, she said she wouldn't get involved and she wouldn't.

No matter how well the Old Mu Family lived, she wasn't interested.

The third of January was still part of the New Year's celebrations, and most people were at home eating and drinking.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng went to the mountains early in the morning.

Lu Yuanfeng said that at this time, the prey in the mountains was the easiest to hunt because, nearing spring, hibernating animals were generally weak.

The only thing was that the prey wouldn't be too plump at this time.

But it's better than nothing, just like Mu Dashan said: with the third branch of the family having little Silver Tael left, they must work more to put food on the table.

In one morning, they caught two rabbits and a roe deer, enough to earn several hundred cash reluctantly.

Mu Shuangshuang picked quite a few vegetables from the garden, bundled them with straw, and by the time they reached the town, it was already afternoon.

The marketplace was lively enough.

Because the townspeople didn't grow their own vegetables, they relied on vegetables sold by other households.

Generally, inns and storefronts open after the eighth day of the first lunar month, most after the Lantern Festival.

As for these small vendors, their lives depend on selling vegetables, and except for New Year's Day, they are generally at the vegetable market.

Even in the afternoon, the weather was still very cold.

Mu Shuangshuang wrapped herself in a newly made cotton-padded jacket but still felt cold. In her rush out, she forgot to bring gloves.

So from time to time, she would clench her fists and breathe warm air into her palms.

Lu Yuanfeng, who had been busy attending to customers, hadn't noticed; when he did, he immediately reached out to Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang raised an eyebrow, not quite understanding Lu Yuanfeng's intention.

"What's up? You..."

"Shuangshuang, my hands are a bit cold, lend me your hand!" Lu Yuanfeng suddenly said.

Mu Shuangshuang naively extended her hand, and Lu Yuanfeng smoothly grabbed it.

Lu Yuanfeng's hands weren't as cold as he said; instead, they were a bit hot.

Mu Shuangshuang couldn't help but reminisce about Lu Yuanfeng's earlier words, feeling a sweet sensation in her heart.

Sweeter than honey.

It's a pity this guy lived in ancient times; if it were the modern age, this sweet talk could have charmed countless girls.

After a while, holding Mu Shuangshuang's hand, Lu Yuanfeng made her feel no longer cold.

Just then, a few more customers came to buy vegetables, and Mu Shuangshuang got up to serve them.

Suddenly devoid of that small hand in his palm, Lu Yuanfeng felt somewhat lost.

In his daze, Mu Shuangshuang had already made a sale.

Shaking off other thoughts, Lu Yuanfeng joined Mu Shuangshuang to work together.

Chapter 906: Little Black Returns to the Jianghu

On the second day of the new year, there aren't too many people out buying vegetables, and it's already afternoon. Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng stood for a long time, only managing to sell a few bundles of greens.

No one was interested in the game caught from the mountains.

Mu Shuangshuang collected a few coins, feeling she couldn't just keep waiting like this.

"Fengzi, let's go check out the wealthy households nearby and see if they want fresh vegetables?" Mu Shuangshuang suggested.

Typically, the wealthy families in town either get their vegetables from nearby farmhouses or have their housekeepers buy in large quantities.

Normally, those wealthy families might not buy vegetables brought to the door, but these days are special — it's the new year and festive season, and generally, people don't deliver vegetables; they're stored before the festivities.

Even if they've stored greens, they might buy some just for freshness.

Experience proved Mu Shuangshuang's choice was right.

Those wealthy families in the town are not lacking in silver taels. On the contrary, a bit of fresh produce might prompt them to spend money.

Mu Shuangshuang knocked on several landlords' doors, explained her intention, and after a while, a man who looked like a housekeeper came out and bought some vegetables.

The deer and rabbits were sold in one go, at the west end of the town. Mu Shuangshuang heard it was some wealthy household to the west with the surname Liu, and even the officials were courteous when buying various things.

Mu Shuangshuang took the money and returned to the eastern market with Lu Yuanfeng.

On the night of the twenty-ninth of the twelfth lunar month, there was almost a theft at Old Wang's house, and all the chickens at Lu Yuanfeng's grandparent's house were stolen.

With the new year happening, Mu Shuangshuang couldn't inquire around then, but now that she's in town, it's convenient to investigate.

Mu Shuangshuang has been setting up a stall in town not just for a day or two. The market has only three chicken vendors; the rest are hawkers selling chickens themselves from farmhouses.

Mu Shuangshuang approached one of the vendors to ask.

The vendor's surname was Wang, and the stall owners in the market all called him Brother Wang, so Mu Shuangshuang followed suit.

Having become quite familiar, they were treated well by Brother Wang, especially after Mu Shuangshuang gave him the remaining two bundles of greens.

Brother Wang even considered Mu Shuangshuang as one of his own.

"You two have been setting up stalls in our market not just for a day or two, although not every day. Every time you come, I watch you."

No wonder the people paid attention to Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng.

Mu Shuangshuang is lively, and in the entire market, she's the only one who likes to loudly shout when selling. Coupled with her good looks and pleasant speech, people end up buying from her.

Typically, those setting up stalls stay for a whole day, passing time with what the market offers.

"Brother Wang, do you know if anyone came to sell chickens around the thirtieth of December? Around twenty to thirty chickens?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

According to Gu Jiulian, the Old Lu Family lost a total of twenty-eight chickens, even a plucked chicken was stolen.

If Gu Jiulian wasn't lying, it should be easy to find.

"I have an impression, but those chickens weren't sold to me. It was a young lad from the stall nearby. I remember there was a plucked chicken given away for free. At new year, buying a plucked chicken is unlucky."

Brother Wang's words told Mu Shuangshuang she had found the right person.

"Do you remember who sold the chickens? Their height, appearance, anything?" She asked.

Brother Wang furrowed his brows, thinking, "Two men, one very ugly, looking fierce and intimidating."

Mu Shuangshuang was stunned for a moment.

This information seemed useless.

Ugly men, looking fierce and intimidating, any random guy might fit that description.

"What about the other one? Any characteristics?" Lu Yuanfeng asked.

"The other had his face covered, claiming to have contracted typhoid, but his tone didn't sound like he had typhoid," Brother Wang explained.

Although not understanding why Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng were inquiring,

Brother Wang added, "That ugly one walked with a limp, seemed injured, and I heard the masked one call him Hu... Hu Sheng!"

Though it had only been two days, Brother Wang couldn't be sure about what he'd heard.

His speech held a touch of doubt.

Mu Shuangshuang took a deep breath, instantly picturing Hu Sheng's appearance and usual demeanor from the village.

"Shuangshuang..." Lu Yuanfeng also thought of it but didn't speak directly, seemingly waiting for Mu Shuangshuang's reaction.

"Brother Wang, any other distinguishing features about the masked one? Like clothing or behavior?"

Mu Shuangshuang knew Hu Sheng was from her village, but she was truly curious about the other person.

Moreover, she dared to assert that Hu Sheng wasn't the one who went to their kitchen that night.

To speak candidly, Mu Shuangshuang's suspects were four: Ma Houhou, to whom she once gave a horse nest for health maintenance.

Then there's Mu Danian and Mu Dazhong, who seemed like they enjoyed sneaky activities.

Lastly, Mu Dade, but she could mostly rule him out; while she believed he might set her house on fire, she couldn't believe he'd conspire with someone to steal.

"That's all, he covered up pretty well, couldn't even see half his face."

Mu Shuangshuang realized that pushing further might not yield much useful information.

To find the burglar from that night, she'd go directly to Hu Sheng.

After saying goodbye to Brother Wang, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng pushed the cart towards Er Gui Village.

On the way, Mu Shuangshuang wondered how to make Hu Sheng reveal the other person's identity, and Lu Yuanfeng, knowing her thoughts, suggested, "Hu Sheng is timid. We could scare him a bit."

"Scared and still dare to steal?" Mu Shuangshuang found it extremely amusing.

It was so late that night, and Hu Sheng with another small thief dared to venture out to steal, so what could they fear?

"That's where you're mistaken," Lu Yuanfeng said. "He's timid when it comes to snakes. I remember when we were little, seeing Hu Sheng play with the villagers, Hu Sheng fell into the river and got entangled by a water snake, he was pale with fear.

If it weren't for the villagers passing by, rescuing him, he would've been scared to death by that snake."

Lu Yuanfeng, being a boy, sometimes followed older kids to play in the village when young.

But eventually, as life became increasingly difficult, he took on family responsibilities.

"This time of year, snakes should be hibernating, finding one to scare is way harder than a direct beating and interrogation," she said.

Lu Yuanfeng nodded.

"True, but it's not particularly difficult. Don't forget, we still have a little creature at home that likes catching snakes and mice."

Lu Yuanfeng was naturally referring to Little Black.

That fearless Black Mink.

Chapter 907: The Whole Village Sees Mu Dade Off

Mu Shuangshuang burst into laughter after hearing Lu Yuanfeng's words.

She had almost forgotten there was someone at home freeloading off them.

It had been mooching for so long, it was time to show its face.

Although deep down, Mu Shuangshuang actually preferred solving problems with her fists. Clearly, in her past life, she wasn't a violent person—it's just that she didn't know why, after spending so much time with the Old Mu Family...

She always felt that fists were the most straightforward way.

By the time she returned to the Old Mu Family, it was already dusk, and Yu Si Niang was waiting at the courtyard gate. The Old Mu Family had been busy all day, engaged in activities that involved a lot of hammering and clanging.

She heard that on the sixth day of the first lunar month, the Old Mu Family even called people from the neighboring village who beat drums and gongs to send off Mu Dade for the Champion Scholar examination.

And the entire village would escort Mu Dade to the town.

After reaching the town, everyone would return to the village together.

This was arranged by the village head, and everyone in the village, regardless of gender or age, had to attend.

After hearing Yu Si Niang's words, Mu Shuangshuang really wanted to bury her head in the ground.

It was just too embarrassing, truly too embarrassing.

Did her uncle plan to let everyone from the neighboring ten miles know that he was going for the Imperial Examination?

What if he didn't pass?

Wouldn't that be utterly humiliating!

Her daughter didn't say a word. Yu Si Niang, standing at the courtyard gate, also looked thoroughly embarrassed.

"Shuangshuang, should we go or not? The village head arranged it, and I didn't have the heart to refuse," said Yu Si Niang.

"Sigh, let's go then, I'm just afraid that by then, the third branch will embarrass themselves along with us," Mu Shuangshuang said honestly.

Logically, this imperial exam is more terrifying than the modern college entrance exam. Where does Mu Dade get his confidence that he could pass?

But Mu Shuangshuang didn't dare to ask this.

Because she felt that Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan were quite hopeful that Mu Dade would become Champion Scholar.

"Mom, on that day, you can call me again!" Mu Shuangshuang said.

Only then did Yu Si Niang believe that her daughter agreed to go.

"By the way, where's Fengzi? Didn't you two go to the town together?" Yu Si Niang asked.

"Fengzi went back; he's not having dinner here tonight!" Mu Shuangshuang said.

Early the next morning, Old Mrs. Mu woke up all the sleeping members of the Old Mu Family.

There was only a day left before Mu Dade went to the Capital, and many matters had not been clearly instructed. Naturally, Old Mrs. Mu had to explain things well.

"You all know that on that day, everyone in the village will accompany Dade to the town. Your father meant to set up a good meal at home and invite everyone in the village to eat together," Old Mrs. Mu said.

"That's women's business, what does it have to do with us men?" Mu Dazhong grumbled as he rubbed his sleepy eyes, speaking reluctantly.

Mu Danian also looked half asleep; he agreed with Mu Dazhong's words.

"Mom, just let the sisters-in-law do the work, why call us? It's so early, even the chickens haven't crowed yet."

Old Mrs. Mu thought about it and agreed, then waved her hand. "You two go back to sleep, and you too, Lao Si!"

Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian yawned and returned to the room.

Only Mu Dajiang didn't understand, he was still standing by Mrs. Liu's side.

"Mom, I'm not going to sleep. If there's anything, just tell me, I'll help Xiaxia's mom with it."

Old Mrs. Mu said, "Help with what? Are you going to do women's chores too? Get back in there and sleep!"

Reluctantly, Mu Dajiang turned to walk back to the room.

Mrs. Lin hadn't had the chance to rinse her mouth and wash her face, being woken up so early, she naturally didn't want to.

"Mom, let's have one person from each family doing the cooking. Our family will have Huang Bitu do it; she'll be in charge of the cooking. Xiaxia's mom from the fourth branch will assist her."

Old Mrs. Mu rolled her eyes. "Easy for you to say, why don't you go?"

Mrs. Lin shivered and instantly woke up. "Mom, it's what you said, it's only right for a daughter-in-law to show filial respect to her mother-in-law. Surely, you wouldn't have me, as a mother-in-law, working together in the kitchen?"

"Or what? Did you think you could slack off?" Old Mrs. Mu said.

Mrs. Lin was fuming, she looked at Huang Bitu, and the more she looked, the more uncomfortable she felt.

Other sons would marry daughters-in-law and the mothers-in-law would live well.

Her son married a wife, who had even more airs than her, the mother-in-law.

"Mom, I wanted to go to the town with everyone else. Why don't you treat me as if I were farting, just let me go, and let me go with my elder brother to catch some of the good luck..."

"You fart! Da Lang's wife is going to accompany and send your elder brother to the town; if you don't work, who will?"

Mrs. Lin then realized, should everything not be with Huang Bitu alongside her, it would be her alone.

My goodness, has the old woman had her brain squeezed by the door? Letting her, a mother-in-law, do the work. Mrs. Lin cursed in her heart.

"Mom, why don't you hire some people from the village to help? I'm part of the Old Mu Family, I must go with them to send my brother to the town, otherwise, the village people will talk about me behind my back if they don't see me."

Mrs. Lin hadn't gone out much for a long time, all because of that tuft of hair on the back of her head.

Now that her hair had grown out a bit, and she wore a hat, she just wanted to wander around with everyone.

"Enough, what I say goes, say another word of nonsense, and I'll tear your mouth apart!"

Mrs. Lin pursed her lips and dared not utter another word.

...

Huang Bitā returned to her room and told Mu Dalang about what she and Dalang had to do on the day Mu Dade went to the town.

Both needed to dress festively, then stand by Mu Dade's palanquin, one on each side.

All these arrangements were made by Mrs. Jin, as instructed by that fortune teller Wang Banxian.

Mu Dalang knew very well that Wang Banxian was just a facade, but he couldn't say.

"Bitā, I'm so sorry, ever since coming to the Old Mu Family, you've either been asked to do this or that," Mu Dalang said, full of guilt.

While speaking, he pulled Huang Bitā into his arms.

Other people pamper their daughters-in-law after marrying them.

But when it came to him, none of the promises he made were fulfilled, and Mu Dalang always felt uneasy.

"What are you talking about, it's not about being sorry, we... we are husband and wife, we should share both joy and sorrow."

Huang Bitā actually had something weighing on her mind.

Ever since marrying Mu Dalang, they hadn't consummated the marriage yet.

Every night, although they lay under the same quilt, they never... never crossed that line.

Huang Bitā hadn't been married before, so she didn't know what went wrong.

But Matchmaker Sun clearly said that after getting married, a man and a woman should have children to continue the family line.

Otherwise, this woman would be looked down upon by the man's family and by the man himself.

"Da Lang, we..." Huang Bitu still felt that such things couldn't be said out loud, it was terribly embarrassing.

Mu Dalang, deep down, also had a knot in his heart.

He didn't know if it was his imagination, but as soon as night fell, he always felt there was a pair of eyes watching him and Bitu from outside the door, night after night.

Several times, when Mu Dalang wanted to make a move on Huang Bitu, that feeling emerged.

Mu Dalang didn't dare to tell Huang Bitu, matters between a husband and wife, he could only delay again and again!

Chapter 908: I'll Call for Help

Huang Bitu and Mu Dalang kept silent, neither willing to bring up the thorn in their hearts.

Especially Huang Bitu, several times, the words were on the tip of her tongue, but she swallowed them back, hoping Mu Dalang would figure it out himself.

"I'm going to wash clothes, you... you should sleep some more." Huang Bitu got up and said to Mu Dalang.

"I won't sleep anymore, I'll go wash clothes with you."

Old Mu Family had many members, naturally, there were lots of clothes, making Huang Bitu wash them all made Mu Dalang feel miserable inside.

Huang Bitā said, "It's okay, there aren't many clothes today, you just rest."

Seeing Huang Bitā insisting like this, Mu Dalang had no choice but to stay silent, but he still followed behind Huang Bitā in actions.

As soon as Huang Bitā reached the yard, he stepped forward and picked up the bucket.

"I'll go fetch two buckets of water."

Mu Dalang finished speaking and left the yard, not giving Huang Bitā a chance to refute.

Knowing her man cared about her, a warmth slowly enveloped Huang Bitā's chest, warming her whole body.

She sorted the family's clothes, separating women's clothes, men's clothes, and some people's undergarments.

When Huang Bitā was at her own home, even her brothers' underclothes were washed by themselves. She had never handled them.

But since coming to Old Mu Family, everything changed.

Not only did she have to help wash men's shirts, even when women were in their monthly cycle, she'd clean the soiled clothes and pants.

However, Huang Bitā dared not complain because it would certainly invite mockery and curses.

She put some soap into the clothes and was about to go to the kitchen to fetch water to soak the clothes, when Mu Danyan appeared.

First, he sneakily looked around seeing no one else, Mu Danyan slyly rubbed his hands, loosened his joints, and cleared his throat.

After softly coughing, Mu Danyan approached Huang Bitu.

"Bitu, oh, this little girl has grown more and more lovely. Dalang must be treating you well, right?" Mu Danyan said.

"Fifth... Fifth Uncle!" Mu Danyan's sudden appearance startled Huang Bitu, she didn't even hear what Mu Danyan said at first.

"Fifth Uncle, why are you here?" Huang Bitu stood up, retreated two steps, and asked Mu Danyan uneasily.

"I came to see you... you and Dalang, what's the matter with that kid, with such a delicate wife, he doesn't keep you at home to spoil you, instead he drags you out to work.

Don't wash clothes anymore, it's harmful for your hands, both icy and cold, I'll talk to Mom later, let second sister-in-law wash them."

While speaking, Mu Danyan kept his eyes fixed on Huang Bitu's face.

This face was still as pretty as when she first came.

Mu Danyan was certain that the girl before him was still a virgin.

Plus, he kept a nightly watch outside Dalang's door; if they had done anything, Mu Danyan would surely know.

Huang Bitu shook her head, "No... no need, Fifth Uncle, if you have nothing else, I'll go fetch water, you..."

Her intention was to get Mu Danyan to leave quickly, but she feared being too direct wasn't good.

"Fetching water, huh, I'll do it!" Mu Danyan snatched the wooden basin from Huang Bitā's hand, wiggling his way toward the kitchen.

For some reason, when Mu Dalang did the same thing, Huang Bitā felt genuinely delighted, but when Mu Danyan did it, she only felt disgusted and scared.

Moreover, she wasn't sure if it was her imagination, but Huang Bitā felt Mu Danyan deliberately touched her hand when taking the wooden basin...

The more she thought about it, the more frightened Huang Bitā became. She wanted to go back to her room and wait for Mu Dalang to return before coming out to wash clothes. But she feared Old Mrs. Mu or Mrs. Lin would come out, see she wasn't there, and come for her in the room.

While hesitating, Mu Danyan returned carrying the basin of water.

Looking at Huang Bitā standing there, pleasing to his sight, Mu Danyan suddenly had an idea.

Approaching Huang Bitā, Mu Danyan deliberately staggered, and the basin in his hand splashed towards her...

A basin of cold water poured over her head, leaving Huang Bitā completely dazed.

"Oh dear, Bitā, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, Fifth Uncle didn't mean to, I was tripped over something just now, I... I wasn't deliberate, you'd better change your clothes quickly, you'll be freezing." He shamelessly moved forward to help Huang Bitā.

But before his hand could touch her, Huang Bitā smacked it away.

"Fifth Uncle, what are you doing?"

Huang Bitā wasn't naive, such an obvious inappropriate move, Mu Danyan clearly had bad intentions.

"Bitā, don't be angry, Fifth Uncle is sorry, I'll help you into the house to change clothes, quickly..."

While speaking with concern, Mu Danyan's gaze was fixed on Huang Bitā's overly pretty face, refusing to blink.

"Fifth... Fifth Uncle, I can do it myself, you go... you go away!"

Huang Bitā's teeth chattered from the cold, but she continued to confront Mu Danyan, hoping he would retreat.

Unexpectedly, Mu Danyan stepped forward, reaching out to grab her!

"Bitā, weather is so cold, come into Fifth Uncle's arms, I'll warm you up..."

Disgusting words made Huang Bitā struggle fiercely.

She didn't know where her strength came from, but she stomped on Mu Danyan's foot, causing him to yelp in pain, and she quickly escaped from his embrace, running towards her room.

Inside the room, Huang Bitā closed the door swiftly.

The subsequent Mu Danyan furiously knocked on the door.

"Open up... open up!"

Mu Danyan used to be cautious to avoid discovery, but now he was furious, wanting Huang Bitā to pay the price.

"Go away, get out of here, you beast!" Huang Bitā shouted.

"A beast? Filthy woman, don't forget, you were supposed to be the one who proposed to me, I should have married you, you should be my wife. You think you're proud for choosing Dalang who's younger than yourself?"

"I'll tell you, filthy woman, when you grow old, Dalang will still be young, sooner or later you'll be abandoned, like a rag, thrown away!"

Huang Bitā was slightly older, another thorn in her heart.

Women in Da Ning Dynasty usually found older men, several years older, but she and Dalang were the opposite.

Her age was greater than Dalang's.

Huang Bitā felt waves of discomfort, but thinking of the person outside, her heart was furious still.

"Get out, or I'll cry for Mom and Grandma," Huang Bitā said.

"Go ahead, cry out, I'll just tell them it's you who seduced me, causing discord between me and Dalang.

Then let my mom sell you, confined forever in the brothel, with no hope of a way out!"

With venomous words, Mu Danyan's every sentence was like a knife stabbing into Huang Bitā's heart.

Rendering her heart bleeding profusely.

Chapter 909: Learned from Fengzi

Outside the house, the sound of knocking on the door was mixed with Mu Danyan's curses.

The more he cursed, the uglier it got, and the more emotional Mu Dania became.

With such a commotion, no one from the Old Mu Family came out to check.

Neither Mrs. Lin, who was usually sharp-eared, nor Old Mrs. Mu, who surveilled the whole family like criminals.

At this moment, how much Huang Bitu wished for these two people to appear, it didn't matter if they beat or scolded her, as long as they took Mu Dania away...

"Get lost, I won't open the door..." Huang Bitu shouted at Mu Dania outside the house, covering her ears.

Mu Dania's hands were hurting from pounding, yet Huang Bitu still didn't open the door.

He left a harsh word: "Bitch, sooner or later you'll come begging daddy."

When it became quiet outside the door, Huang Bitu was already numb from the cold.

She got up from the ground, changed into clean clothes, and hugged her legs, crying for a long time.

By the time Huang Bitu stopped crying, who knows how much time had passed.

She opened the door, took her drenched clothes, and shivered as she headed to the courtyard.

She initially wanted to do the laundry, but in the courtyard stood a young man, holding a freshly washed garment, ready to hang it out to dry.

"You... why are you... holding the clothes?" Huang Bitu stammered, and Mu Dalang spoke up.

"I ran into Fengzi on the way to fetch water and asked him. During such times, I should help you wash the clothes. He said it's cold in winter, and girls should avoid touching water; it's bad for health. From now on, I'll wash the winter clothes."

"I asked third aunt about the dirty spots and how to wash them. After washing, third aunt inspected it, and she said it's fine; our grandma and mom won't find fault with you."

Mu Dalang explained to Huang Bitā why he was holding the clothes and that he learned this from Lu Yuanfeng.

As he spoke, a small smile revealed his little canine teeth.

He was still young; taking on the burden of a family might still be challenging, but sharing small tasks with Huang Bitā was merely a trivial matter.

"Why are you crying? Don't worry, I won't tell grandma and mom that I washed these clothes." Mu Dalang put down the clothes and ran over to Huang Bitā.

Step by step, he slowly walked into Huang Bitā's heart.

Mu Dalang took the clothes from Huang Bitā's hands and placed them in a wooden basin nearby, then grabbed her hands.

A piercing chill surged through, almost making him let go of Huang Bitā's hands.

"So cold, Fengzi wasn't lying; hands this cold shouldn't be doing laundry!" Mu Dalang said.

After speaking, he gently rubbed Huang Bitā's hands.

Friction generates heat, and after a few rubs, the temperature of Huang Bitā's hands gradually rose.

Mu Dalang reached out his hand to wipe Huang Bitā's tears.

"So grown up, yet still crying, aren't you embarrassed?" Mu Dalang said.

Everything before her seemed like a dream, thoroughly warming Huang Bitā's cold body.

Huang Bitā greedily savored everything before her, momentarily leaving all her previous unhappiness behind.

"Dalang, let me hang the clothes; you go inside. It's cold outside." Huang Bitā said.

"You go in; I'm a man, I can handle it. From now on, if mom and grandma ask you to do the laundry, just leave the clothes aside, I'll wash, and you check whether they're clean."

Mu Dalang spoke as he hung the clothes.

Huang Bitā didn't remain idle, and helped out. Soon, the clothes were all washed clean.

The last piece of clothing was Huang Bitā's. Mu Dalang glanced at it and casually said, "Bitā, why do I feel like you wore this in the morning?"

Huang Bitā froze, suddenly afraid to tell Dalang what Mu Danian had done.

After all, that man was Dalang's fifth uncle.

Of course, what scared Huang Bitā more was what Mu Danian had said.

No matter how good things are now, one day, she'll be the one abandoned...

"No... no, you remembered wrong." Huang Bitu hurriedly denied.

Mu Dalang didn't think much of it, as he never paid attention to such details.

But he realized he needed to learn, just like Yuan Feng, handling both big matters and small tasks.

"You go inside; there's only one piece left. I'll go to the third branch and wash it with their clothes, Aunt was doing laundry earlier."

Huang Bitu nodded, watching Mu Dalang go to the third branch.

After a while, Mu Dalang came back not only with the clothes but also with two sweet potatoes.

The rosy sweet potatoes were cradled in his arms, the clothes casually thrown over a bamboo pole for drying. Mu Dalang took Huang Bitu's hand and led her into the room.

In between, he went out again, and when he returned, he carried a bundle of straw.

"Bitu, let's make a fire and roast some sweet potatoes."

The sweet potatoes were given by Yu Si Niang, while the straw was found in Old Mu Family's storeroom.

The two of them started a fire in the room.

As the fire blazed, the cold around Huang Bitu quickly diminished.

The sweet potatoes were still uncooked even after the bundle of straw burned out slowly, but Huang Bitu and Mu Danian insisted on finishing them.

By lunchtime, Old Mrs. Mu's yelling could be heard from the courtyard.

"That damn thief! Who stole my bundle of straw? Damn it, it's going to die!"

This shout startled many people in the Old Mu Family.

Including Mrs. Lin, who previously slept like a dead pig in her room.

"Mom, why are you yelling, what was stolen?" Mrs. Lin asked.

"Straw, a bundle of dry straw. Yesterday, Ma Family's wife asked to borrow a bundle, said they couldn't start a fire at home. I thought it was a borrow-never-return thing, so I didn't lend it. Didn't expect that stinking woman to steal it."

Old Mrs. Mu spat profusely as she spoke.

Mrs. Lin retorted with irritation: "Then go find that stinking woman Ma, what are you shouting about in the courtyard?"

"You think I want to? With Ma being this bold, if I don't curse a few times, how am I supposed to go looking for trouble later?"

This was Old Mrs. Mu's usual style.

Whenever planning to squabble with someone, she must first curse them thoroughly before going and causing trouble.

"That's true, then hurry up!" Mrs. Lin urged.

In the house, the conversation wasn't too loud nor too quiet, reaching Mu Dalang and Huang Bitu's ears.

Huang Bitā was a bit anxious as she said, "What do we do now? Mom's going to trouble Ma Family's Sister-in-law, but we took the straw."

Mu Dalang shushed Huang Bitā softly, "Don't speak; even Ma Family's Daughter-in-law can handle my grandma."

And as for the straw, don't tell anyone about it, just pretend you don't know."

Mu Dalang pointed at the leftover straw ashes on the ground.

Huang Bitā hesitated, "Is this really okay? What if grandma finds out..."

"It's fine; after all, we were the ones bringing bale after bale. Using one bundle isn't much."

Besides, you don't know grandma's temper. If she knows it's the two of us, we won't be in for anything good."

Chapter 910: Your Good Deed

During the day, Huang Bitā was drenched in cold water. Although she warmed herself by the fire later, the cold had entered her body, and she delayed too long before changing into dry clothes.

So by night, she developed a high fever and began to speak gibberish.

When Mu Dalang discovered it, Huang Bitā had already become a burning furnace, her whole body scorching hot.

"Bitā, Bitā..." he called twice, but Huang Bitā did not respond to him.

Mu Dalang almost went crazy with anxiety.

In a state of panic, he was about to carry Huang Bitu to find Zhang Huai Shu.

As soon as he moved Huang Bitu's body, she cried out, "Get away, no..."

Mu Dalang listened for a long time before he clearly heard the words "get away."

In such a situation, taking her to see a doctor was not feasible, so he had to call Zhang Huai Shu to the Old Mu Family.

Mu Dalang had to care for Huang Bitu and couldn't leave.

He went to his parents' room and asked his father Mu Dazhong to call Zhang Huai Shu to come over to see her.

Unexpectedly, not only did Mu Dazhong refuse to call Zhang Huai Shu, but he also blamed Mu Dalang.

"If she's sick, she's sick, she's not dead, it's already dark, can you just let me rest properly?"

Mrs. Lin was even more direct in her criticism: "A worthless wretch, why waste money on this? Besides, whose wife gets sick and then calls Zhang Huai Shu?"

Everyone just bears with it, and after one night it's fine. She's no more valuable than anyone else, so why waste money unnecessarily?"

Their words boiled down to two points.

First, not spending money on Huang Bitu, and second, not calling the doctor for her.

Helpless, Mu Dalang could only call Mu Shuangshuang.

But before he left, Mu Dalang still dropped some harsh words.

"Father and Mother, your actions have left me cold-hearted. I will definitely learn and imitate from now on," said Mu Dalang.

This statement almost made Mrs. Lin faint with anger.

She kicked Mu Dazhong in the back, and even Gou Dan, who had just climbed into bed and hadn't washed his feet, was awakened by the noise.

He rubbed his sleepy eyes and asked Mrs. Lin in a daze, "Father and Mother, why are you hitting me?"

"Shut up!" Mrs. Lin shouted.

Terrified, Gou Dan burrowed into Mu Dazhong's arms, while Mu Dazhong, having been kicked unexpectedly, didn't react immediately. When he did, he kicked Mrs. Lin, sending her off the bed.

...

When Mu Dalang arrived at the third branch, Mu Shuangshuang was playing cards with Mu Dashan and Lu Yuanfeng, playing "Fight the Landlord."

As the game was becoming intense, Mu Dalang rushed in.

The young man's forehead was beaded with sweat, and upon seeing Mu Dashan, he said, "Third Uncle... Third Uncle... Bitu, Bitu has a fever. Can you help me call Zhang Huai Shu, Grandpa Zhang!"

The three of them simultaneously put down their cards and gathered around.

"What's going on? Take your time and tell us," Mu Dashan asked.

Without waiting for Mu Dalang to explain, Lu Yuanfeng said, "I'll go call Grandpa Zhang over."

"Thanks, Fengzi!" Mu Dalang expressed his gratitude to Lu Yuanfeng and then explained the situation with Huang Bitu to Mu Dashan and Mu Shuangshuang.

"I'll go and take care of Sister-in-law," Mu Shuangshuang said.

"Then I'll go make some ginger soup; it's good for driving out colds," Yu Si Niang said.

"I'll follow and wait for Uncle Zhang."

Everyone in the third branch made a move, even the already asleep children got up upon hearing that Huang Bitu was sick.

With such a big commotion, even the resting Mr. Mu got up, followed by the fourth branch.

Old Mrs. Mu insisted on not getting up and wanted Mr. Mu to reprimand Huang Bitu.

But Old Mrs. Mu couldn't influence Mr. Mu's actions.

Mr. Mu scolded Old Mrs. Mu a bit, got dressed, and headed to Mu Dalang's place.

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The Old Mu Family lit the lamps anew, led by Mu Dashan, and waited for a long time before Zhang Huai Shu arrived.

After winter arrived, Zhang Huai Shu rarely went out to see patients. If people needed consultation, they would go to his place.

Zhang Huai Shu was getting old and was fearful of any injuries from falls, which could lead to serious complications.

This time, it was Lu Yuanfeng who called him, coupled with it being Mu Dalang's wife, so he agreed to come.

Upon seeing Mr. Mu, Zhang Huai Shu complained.

"Your Old Mu Family calls me for consultations more in a month than other families do in several years. The family doesn't seem to take care of itself; someone's either overworked or malnourished.

If this continues, how many people will your Old Mu Family even have left? We're all from the same village, and I've never given you trouble, so don't burden me, this old man, with your problems, okay?"

Zhang Huai Shu held grudges against Mr. Mu, not only recently.

Whenever he got the chance, he would give a good telling-off.

Each time, he would make Mr. Mu blush, and this time was no exception.

After examining, Zhang Huai Shu announced in front of the Old Mu Family, "The cold has penetrated the body. As for the cause, in such freezing weather, don't let girls soak in cold water. Even for a grown man, it's unbearable, let alone a girl, I don't know what's in your heart..."

Zhang Huai Shu's words stunned the Old Mu Family.

"Old Zhang, you're not misdiagnosing, are you? Soaked in cold water?" Mr. Mu couldn't believe it.

But deep down, he feared that this was the result of his wife's or daughter-in-law's actions.

The two of them had bullied Huang Bitu together more than once.

"Old Mu, you can doubt my character, but not my medical skills. If you don't trust me, you'll have to seek someone more capable."

Zhang Huai Shu had a proud demeanor in everything he did.

If you truly offended him, even if Lu Yuanfeng intervened, it wouldn't necessarily resolve things.

Mr. Mu fell silent.

But his silence didn't mean Mu Dalang was silent.

He recalled that wet clothes he had washed for Huang Bitu and her odd behavior that morning.

"Grandpa, Bitu... I'm afraid Grandma splashed cold water on her. In the morning, I went to the village well, fetched two buckets of water and then..."

Mu Dalang dared not say he had helped Huang Bitu wash her clothes. Pausing, he continued:

"When I returned, Bitu's clothes were soaked, and she had changed clothes, her hands were ice-cold, like needles pricking her..."

Mu Dalang had no suspicions about his mother, Mrs. Lin, because around noon, his grandmother and mother were discussing the grass being stolen in the yard.

His mother looked like she hadn't fully woken up, indicating she had been sleeping all morning.

"What?" Mr. Mu couldn't sit still.

His legs trembled, nearly causing him to kneel.

"Dalang, don't rush to conclusions on this matter. Let me ask your mother."

Mu Dade was about to head to the Capital for exams, and Mr. Mu didn't want another commotion in the Old Mu Family.

Mr. Mu didn't want to upset Mu Dalang and Huang Bitu, as the two juniors were crucial for his eldest son's future.

"Grandpa, I'll wait here for your answer. Please tell me later whether it was Grandma who did this."