

Folly 911

Chapter 911: Mu Danian, That Bastard

When Mu Dalang spoke to Mr. Mu, he had already made a decision in his heart.

If this matter really was Old Mrs. Mu's doing, he would completely separate from the Old Mu Family.

Then he and Bita would find another piece of land and live their own lives.

Mr. Mu knew there was more to Mu Dalang's words, but he dared not verify with Old Mrs. Mu, fearing that this matter was indeed as Mu Dalang suspected.

"Da Lang, it's late, and your grandmother is asleep. Why not wait until tomorrow?" Mr. Mu asked Mu Dalang in a negotiating tone.

"No, Grandpa, I must know the answer tonight. If you feel it's inconvenient, I'll go and ask myself," Mu Dalang replied.

Unable to resolve it with Mu Dalang, Mr. Mu turned to Mu Dashan for help.

"Old Third, help persuade Da Lang. Let's deal with this matter tomorrow, okay?"

Mu Dashan shook his head, "Dad, this matter should be resolved today. Bita is Da Lang's wife, and he's entitled to know what happened when his wife was bullied."

Mr. Mu directly bypassed the fourth branch and asked Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang was even more straightforward than Mu Dashan, "Grandpa, for this matter, please don't protect anyone. If it's my grandma, let her come out and resolve it.

If it's not my grandma, then let my cousin rest assured, or else it'll delay Uncle's travel the day after tomorrow, and Grandma will cry and make a fuss."

Under the pressure from several people, Mr. Mu felt as if he were sitting on pins and needles, but he had no choice but to verify.

Late at night, he woke up Old Mrs. Mu, who was full of anger, especially when Mr. Mu asked the question, she was even more furious.

"Tell that pesky boy to come ask me himself. I've never splashed Bitu with cold water; it has always been Lin Xiaozao who did such things."

Old Mrs. Mu's demeanor didn't seem deceitful.

Mr. Mu felt relieved.

He explained the situation to Mu Dalang, who was waiting outside, and returned to sleep.

As for Mu Dalang, he still didn't believe it wasn't Old Mrs. Mu's doing.

"No way, I still need to go ask again," Mu Dalang said and tried to rush to the room of Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu.

But Mu Shuangshuang grabbed his wrist.

"Cousin, it's late. Sister-in-law still needs care. Besides, I don't think Grandma is lying; Uncle is going to the Capital for exams, and you both should be seeing him off.

If she splashed sister-in-law with cold water, wouldn't she know it could make her sick?"

Earlier when Mu Shuangshuang had Mr. Mu question Old Mrs. Mu, it didn't mean she truly suspected her; she just wanted to make Mr. Mu anxious and disturb Old Mrs. Mu a bit.

Bitu had a tough time at the Old Mu Family, and Old Mrs. Mu couldn't shirk her responsibility.

With Mu Shuangshuang advising, Mu Dalang finally refrained from making a scene at Old Mrs. Mu's place.

That entire night, Mu Dalang cared for Bitu, wiped her sweat, brewed medicine, staying up till dawn.

When the sweating Bitu finally came to, Mu Dalang let out a sigh of relief.

"Bitu, what do you feel like eating? I'll go make it for you." Mu Dalang got up to prepare food for Bitu.

Bitu stopped him.

"I'm... not hungry. Did you stay up all night?"

Bitu remembered the events before her fever; her body felt hot, her consciousness grew blurry.

In bits and pieces, she heard Da Lang calling her name.

"I'm fine, just wait for me a bit, I'll go make porridge for you," Mu Dalang said and walked straight to the kitchen.

Mu Shuangshuang arrived almost on cue, she didn't stay up but woke earlier than the third branch.

She knocked on the door outside Mu Dalang's room. After getting permission, she walked in.

The illness made Bitu look so much frailer, her face sallow and her eyes sunken.

However, her clear eyes suggested the fever had subsided.

"Bita, last night, when you fell ill, the elder cousin went to the third branch, and Fengzi called Grandpa Zhang to come over and check, and that's why you're better now," Mu Shuangshuang said.

Hearing Mu Shuangshuang's words, Bita struggled to sit up.

She said, "Shuangshuang, thank you. I don't even know how to thank you."

"Sister-in-law, I haven't finished talking yet. Yesterday, Grandpa Zhang said your illness was because of soaking in cold water. The elder cousin said Grandma did it, but this matter..."

Mu Shuangshuang spoke while observing Bita's reaction.

Bita was startled, then promptly shook her head, "It wasn't Grandma, it was me... it was my own doing."

"I accidentally wet my clothes and caught a cold. I'll explain it to Da Lang later, can't let him misunderstand Grandma."

What Bita said gave Mu Shuangshuang the feeling that it was half-truths.

When she said it wasn't Old Mrs. Mu, her gaze was firm.

But when she assumed the blame herself, her eyes subconsciously evaded for a moment.

"Sister-in-law, are you going to keep this matter hidden forever? If you did accidentally wet your clothes, you should have changed right away; the chances of catching a cold would be slim," Mu Shuangshuang said.

"Shuangshuang, I'm telling the truth, I'm not lying to you, it really was me..." Bita refuted Mu Shuangshuang's words, refusing to admit she lied.

"Sister-in-law, do you think telling these lies will convince the elder cousin?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Sister-in-law, often, it's not that bad people are too strong, but we are too weak. When they bully us for the first time, we should clench our fists and beat them till they find their teeth on the ground. Do you think they would dare to bother you again?"

At this point, Bitu felt conflicted deep inside.

Speaking about Mu Danyan, letting Shuangshuang know what Mu Danyan did.

But... if Shuangshuang knew, would it mean Da Lang would know too?

If he knew his wife was bullied by her uncle, how would he react?

"Shuangshuang, I..."

"Sister-in-law, if it's anything else, I wouldn't force you. When you married the elder cousin, it was my idea; I should rightfully be responsible for you.

If someone bullies you and I don't know, it's one thing; if I do, even if it's Grandpa or Grandma, uncle or aunt, or even the higher-ranking uncle, I would step forward without backing down."

Mu Shuangshuang's words were like a tonic, stirring Bitu's mind to confess the truth.

"Shuangshuang, I can tell you, but please... don't tell Da Lang. I'm afraid if Da Lang knew, he'd be angry," Bitu said.

At this point, it was Mu Shuangshuang who hesitated.

This matter seemed quite serious, not telling Mu Dalang didn't seem right.

Mu Shuangshuang frowned and thought for a moment. Suddenly, she recalled last year when Bita told her about Fifth Uncle chasing away someone who spoke indecently to her, and offering to give Bita fabric.

"Sister-in-law, was it Fifth Uncle who splashed you with water yesterday?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

Bita paused for a long while without speaking.

But it indirectly confirmed Mu Shuangshuang's conjecture.

"Did he do anything else? Like... bully you?" Mu Shuangshuang continued.

This time, Bita directly broke down and cried.

"Damn, it really is that bast**d Mu Danyan!" Mu Shuangshuang exclaimed with agitation, bursting out with profanity.

Chapter 912: There's Still Hope

"Shuangshuang, you mustn't go to Uncle Wu about this. If things get out of hand, Grandpa, Grandma, and Mom will definitely force Dalang to divorce me. I don't want to be separated from Dalang."

Huang Bita tightly clutched Mu Shuangshuang's sleeve, afraid that Mu Shuangshuang might act impulsively and do something irreversible.

Huang Bita's parents died early, so her brothers took care of her, and the only warmth she felt came from them.

The villagers bullied them since they were orphans, often forcing her brothers to work for free.

After a hard day, they wouldn't even have a decent meal, let alone be paid.

She finally got married and had such a wonderful husband; if everyone found out about Mu Daniau bullying her, she'd lose all face to stay with the Old Mu Family.

Mu Shuangshuang fully understood Huang Bitu's concerns.

While enduring might bring temporary peace, who knew whether such a shameless rogue as Mu Daniau would act up again in the future?

Yesterday, he took advantage during the water-spilling incident, and who's to say he wouldn't use even more despicable means next time to get to Huang Bitu?

"Cousin-in-law, you and my big cousin are a match made in heaven. As long as Grandpa and Grandma wish well for Uncle's family, they won't make my big cousin divorce you."

"Besides, my big cousin is a man of integrity; he would never divorce you, trust me. But your matter can't just be resolved by enduring."

"The last time Uncle Wu acted inappropriately, I said we must guard ourselves, and it's only been..." Mu Shuangshuang said.

"Do you plan to wait until he gets bolder and does something even more shameless next time?"

Huang Bitu wiped away her tears, sobbing, "What should I do then? Shuangshuang, teach me, I'm clueless, but I really don't want to be separated from Dalang."

Huang Bitu had always trusted Mu Shuangshuang.

Whatever Mu Shuangshuang said, she believed.

And this time, she chose to trust Mu Shuangshuang again.

Mu Shuangshuang breathed a sigh of relief at Huang Bitā's words.

Being bullied isn't the end, being naive isn't the end, as long as there's a will to resist, there's still hope.

If even after this talk, Huang Bitā asked her not to confront Mu Danian, she would truly be helpless.

"Sister-in-law, don't be anxious about this for now. Let me find a chance to teach Mu Danian a lesson and catch him in a wrong act so that he won't dare bully you again."

Mu Shuangshuang's gaze was deep, fists tightly clenched, indicating her resolve to deal with Mu Danian.

To Mu Shuangshuang, this matter can't be simply settled with violence like before.

She was determined to send Mu Danian a huge message about the consequences of harassing his nephew's wife.

"Alright! Thank you, Shuangshuang. Without you, I really wouldn't know what to do." Huang Bitā said.

Mu Shuangshuang was about to offer comfort when Mu Dalang came in with the cooked porridge.

Seeing Mu Shuangshuang, his frowning face instantly relaxed.

"Shuangshuang, you came so early. Have you eaten? I've made porridge. Would you like a bowl?"

Mu Shuangshuang shook her head and forced a smile, "Big cousin, since you're here, I'll go now. I won't have the porridge; my parents haven't had breakfast yet, I must go back and prepare it."

Mu Dalang didn't insist on keeping her, "Alright, you head back first. I'll come to find you later."

It's only the fifth day of the new year, and there isn't much to do at the Old Mu Family, so Mu Dalang visiting Mu Shuangshuang wasn't difficult.

From his tone, he probably had something to discuss with Mu Shuangshuang.

After exchanging a few more words, Mu Shuangshuang returned to the Old Mu Family.

Upon arriving home, Yu Si Niang had already prepared breakfast.

She boiled rice cakes with cabbage and added some pork fat, creating a mix of the unique rice cake flavor and the freshness of cabbage.

After breakfast, Mu Shuangshuang pulled Lu Yuanfeng aside to discuss the matter.

Upon hearing what happened, Lu Yuanfeng's expression changed too.

He reacted similarly to Mu Shuangshuang; he had seen shamelessness, but Mu Dalian's level of it was beyond his experience.

"Shuangshuang, we need to teach your Uncle Wu a lesson." Lu Yuanfeng looked at Mu Shuangshuang with a serious expression.

Mu Shuangshuang licked her lips, nodding wholeheartedly.

"That's what I think too, but I haven't found a way yet. Don't be fooled by my Uncle Wu's appearance; he's quite crafty.

When uncles and aunts argue, he's always watching from afar, benefiting from the situation, and even my greedy Second Uncle can't match him."

Mu Shuangshuang spoke the truth.

Mu Danian and Mu Dazhong aren't the same type.

For laziness, Mu Dazhong's solution is always to hide in the latrine, while Mu Danian has a thousand excuses, each time implicating someone else.

At the Old Mu Family, besides Mrs. Jin, Mu Dade, and Old Mrs. Mu, only Mu Danian remained.

Mu Shuangshuang continued, "Since we aren't taking action yet, when we do, we'll make him feel the pain."

"Previous times, we'd beat him, my Uncle Wu would be sore for days, but when healed, he'd resume his behavior with no deterrent effect."

She spoke calmly, seeming indifferent to Mu Danian's actions, yet caring deeply.

"I think we should first find Hu Sheng and understand who the other thief was."

A hunch told Lu Yuanfeng that the theft in the third branch's kitchen might be related to Shuangshuang's Uncle Wu.

"Alright!"

Mu Shuangshuang entered her room and grabbed the deeply sleeping Little Black, heading to the mountains.

Their goal was simple: to find a snake in the mountains to intimidate the village bully Hu Sheng.

Despite the cold weather, Little Black was somewhat unwilling, scratching the ground with its paws, its dark little face showing a myriad of expressions.

Mu Shuangshuang held back laughter, seriously instructing Little Black, "Little Black, if you find me a snake, once you slim down, you'll manage the family's money."

So far, besides eating, money was Little Black's main concern.

Mu Shuangshuang watched its response closely. Upon mention of money, a gleam flashed in the little creature's eyes.

It quickly adopted a dismissive expression, hissing with pride in its voice.

Mu Shuangshuang gently caressed Little Black's smooth fur with her "magic paw."

"How about we add a house? Fengzi and I will build you a house? You live on top, Little Black Dog below?"

Little Black was among the most intelligent animals Mu Shuangshuang had seen.

As she finished, Little Black tilted its head, seemingly considering her words.

Before it made up its mind, Mu Shuangshuang added, "You might disagree, but with this cold, I might turn your fur into mink gloves!"

Chapter 913: Farewell Ceremony (Part 2)

Mu Shuangshuang's way of dealing with Little Black has always been coercion and persuasion, discussing properly first, and if Little Black cooperates, then there's no problem at all.

If it doesn't cooperate...

Just like now, Mu Shuangshuang watched the little fluffball shivering in front of her, a wave of wicked satisfaction rose in her heart.

Lu Yuanfeng watched the interaction between the person and sable, showing a helpless smile.

He stepped forward, lifted Little Black by its fur, and then placed it on the ground.

The little guy bolted, like a blob of meat, instantly disappearing in front of the two.

But after a while, Little Black came back, panting heavily.

Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Shuangshuang followed behind Little Black, who led the way, used a hoe to dig open a small mound, and sure enough, there was a black snake inside.

The hibernating snake was clumsier than the snake after spring, and Lu Yuanfeng easily caught the snake and placed it in the bamboo basket Mu Shuangshuang had prepared.

The two went down the mountain.

They didn't have to wait until the evening; Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng met Hu Sheng.

The man with a tigerish head and brain, holding his strong body, rampaged in the village, even during the New Year, uttering dirty words.

He had a blade of grass in his mouth and would make unusual gestures as people passed by.

If it was a widow from the village, he would go up and grope their buttocks.

If he encountered a woman with a basket, he would certainly lift the person's basket to see what's inside.

Mu Shuangshuang had the idea of teasing Hu Sheng, and she deliberately slung the basket on her right side, thinking that when Hu Sheng lifted her basket, he would just happen to touch the snake, and she could take the chance to interrogate Hu Sheng.

Mu Shuangshuang naturally walked towards Hu Sheng, and Hu Sheng, from afar, also spotted Mu Shuangshuang.

The girl, who used to be like a dirty, thin stick, had already become a graceful young woman.

Even though it wasn't the first time seeing a pretty girl for Hu Sheng, his eyes were glazed over.

His hand was ready, just waiting for Mu Shuangshuang to pass by so he could grope her behind.

As Mu Shuangshuang approached Hu Sheng, just as Hu Sheng was about to make a move, an icy gaze, like poisoned, immediately froze Hu Sheng in place.

His hand stopped far from Mu Shuangshuang's buttocks.

Then, with a cracking sound, Hu Sheng's hand was dislocated by Lu Yuanfeng's twist.

The sudden dull pain made Hu Sheng snap back, and he screamed, cursing Lu Yuanfeng, "You brat, how dare you hit me, you... you little bastard..."

The situation had not turned out as Mu Shuangshuang expected, and plus, Hu Sheng dared to curse Lu Yuanfeng, Mu Shuangshuang lifted her leg and kicked Hu Sheng, sending him flying.

The sturdy man, head to the ground, rolled several times on the muddy field, skinning his scalp before he could stabilize.

And Mu Shuangshuang, the main culprit, held her belly and laughed heartily.

"You filthy b..." Hu Sheng couldn't finish his curse as Lu Yuanfeng's glare shot over again, and Mu Shuangshuang lifted her foot...

Hu Sheng chickened out, not caring about the pain in his hand, turned tail, and ran.

Mu Shuangshuang was a bit surprised and exchanged looks with Lu Yuanfeng.

"Although it didn't go as I imagined, we can follow and see who Hu Sheng is close with; maybe that thief is the person."

Lu Yuanfeng thought it made sense too.

He helped Mu Shuangshuang pat off the dust on her clothes.

The two followed behind Hu Sheng.

The pain in his wrist made Hu Sheng think first to fix it. To get money from Zhang Huai Shu, Hu Sheng was willing to spend on daily pleasures, but to pay for a doctor, he refused.

But the one who injured him was that brat from the Old Lu Family and that brat girl from the third branch.

He decided to seek justice from Mu Danian.

"Fengzi, why's Hu Sheng heading towards our Old Mu Family's direction?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Could it be, it's really someone from our Old Mu Family?" Mu Shuangshuang added.

Halfway there, Hu Sheng remembered his agreement with Mu Danian, during the day when they met, to pretend not to know each other.

Hu Sheng and Mu Danian had stolen from villagers and sold the goods for the New Year, not just once or twice.

They weren't caught because they never interacted on ordinary days.

Even if they saw each other on the road, they'd pretend not to know each other.

Several times, almost caught, they avoided because they pretended not to know each other.

After realizing, Hu Sheng turned back home.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng didn't gain any insights, inevitably a bit disappointed.

But thinking long-term, as long as Hu Sheng contacts another gang, they'll find out who it is.

"Fengzi, I know the neighbor kid of Hu Sheng's family gets along well with Yuanbao; let's have Yuanbao tell him to keep an eye on Hu Sheng during the day.

As for the night, we'll stake it out ourselves. I guess, tonight Hu Sheng will go out, maybe it really is our Old Mu Family."

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng returned to the third branch, intending to go to the Old Wang Family to inquire about that night's situation but didn't find the chance.

Because tomorrow is the day Mu Dade goes to the Capital for exams, Mr. Mu personally came to the third branch to discuss the plans for early the next morning with them.

Mu Shuangshuang has always been indifferent to the big house.

Mu Dashan, after experiencing previous events, felt the same.

However, since Mr. Mu personally visited, Mu Dashan showed the minimum respect, even though when Mu Dade had spoken shameless words before, Mr. Mu turned a blind eye.

"Shuang, Grandpa wants you to lead the way for your uncle tomorrow. We'll have someone lay a red carpet on the road for him, and you walk ahead to bring him good fortune. What do you think?"

It would've been better not to say, but hearing this almost made Mu Shuangshuang choke.

Red carpet? Walk in front?

Why, is it like modern people walking the red carpet?

Mu Shuangshuang furrowed her brow and asked Mr. Mu, "Grandpa, what exactly are your plans?"

"It's nothing much; your aunt arranged it, saying tomorrow needs red for your uncle to prosper.

Coincidentally, the Ruan girl's connections in town helped borrow lots of red carpet, which can run from the Old Mu Family's entrance to the village's entrance.

At the village entrance, your uncle will ride a carriage, and we'll follow behind. We just need to escort him to town."

At this moment, Mu Shuangshuang felt her intelligence was being hijacked.

Who was the idiot that came up with such a plan to send Mu Dade for exams?

How could they be so sure Mu Dade would pass?

Mu Shuangshuang directly refused, "Grandpa, for leading the way, usually, it's someone elderly and respectable. Shuang is too insignificant, too young. Please find someone else!"

Expecting her to play the "eunuch" and "palace maid" leading the way? Dream on.

"Shuang, Grandpa thinks you're the best choice, you're clever..."

"Grandpa, no need to flatter, I said I'm not going, and that's final!"

Chapter 914: Overwhelming Nobility

"You..."

Mr. Mu never expected Mu Shuangshuang, a junior, to refuse so decisively.

Not giving him, this old man, any face at all.

Mr. Mu's mouth twisted in anger, just as he wanted to reprimand Mu Shuangshuang, Mu Dashan stepped in to protect his own daughter.

"Dad, Shuangshuang is still a child, she can't take on such a big responsibility, you'd better find someone else!"

Mr. Mu was shocked, knowing Mu Dashan was protective, but he didn't expect the third son would outright refuse him for Shuang.

"Third, you... you should think of it as doing it for me, an old man, let Shuangshuang reconsider, in the entire Old Mu Family, apart from your uncle, she's the most promising one in the future. She's the most suitable to lead." Mr. Mu said.

Mu Dashan's face changed.

"Dad, it's not that I don't want to, it's that Shuangshuang doesn't want to go. If she doesn't want to do something, no one can force her."

Seeing Mu Dashan's firm refusal, Mr. Mu was uncomfortable but couldn't say anything further.

"Then you all wait at the Old Mu Family courtyard gate tomorrow morning, bring the kids along too. Tomorrow morning, your mom will give Xiao Han and Little Zhi a bamboo basket each, with some food inside. Just distribute some candies when you see fellow villagers on the way."

Mr. Mu talked for a while about going to the Old Mu Family tomorrow.

In Mr. Mu's heart, everything concerning the Old Mu Family pales in comparison to Mu Dade participating in the imperial exam.

Mobilizing everyone from the Old Mu Family was only natural.

Mu Dashan didn't make any promises, just said they'd go early tomorrow morning.

The Old Mu Family was noisy, with music and festivities throughout the day.

At night, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng were staking out outside the Old Mu Family, and sure enough, they spotted Hu Sheng coming to look for someone.

Hu Sheng first mimicked a cat's meow outside the Old Mu Family courtyard, Mu Danian then came out with a vulgar grin.

"Shuangshuang, it's your fifth uncle..."

Lu Yuanfeng, having spent time in the military, knew how to use shadows to identify people.

Plus, his night vision and hearing were better than most, so recognizing Mu Danian wasn't difficult.

"It's actually him!" Mu Shuangshuang was very surprised. "I had a feeling my fifth uncle was a genius, usually, he and Hu Sheng hardly interacted, even if they stole something together, no one would suspect them."

The more she thought, the more Mu Shuangshuang felt Mu Dalian was not simple.

"Should we keep following them?" Lu Yuanfeng asked.

Mu Shuangshuang shook her head, "No need, now that we know the thieves who stole from my house, the Old Wang Family, and the Old Lu Family are my fifth uncle and Hu Sheng, after sending off my uncle tomorrow, we'll settle the score well with my fifth uncle."

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The next day, as dawn was breaking, Old Mrs. Mu started knocking on the third branch's door.

She asked Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan to come over to help, even woke up Xiao Han and Little Zhi, who sleepily got dressed to head towards the Old Mu Family.

Originally, Old Mrs. Mu wanted to call Mu Shuangshuang, but alas, her hand almost got worn out from knocking, and still couldn't open Mu Shuangshuang's room door.

Mu Shuangshuang knew the departure hour, and unless it arrived, she simply wouldn't leave.

"Lazy girl, get up quickly, your uncle is about to depart, the sun is almost burning your bottom!" Old Mrs. Mu, unwilling to give up, called out a few more times.

Yu Si Niang, already dressed, quietly discussed with Old Mrs. Mu: "Mom, Shuangshuang went to bed late yesterday, just let her sleep a bit longer, the child is too tired."

Old Mrs. Mu listened to Yu Si Niang, and rolled her eyes dramatically: "Am I the mother-in-law or are you? Do you have a say while I'm here?"

Yu Si Niang bit her lip, mustered the courage, and said: "Mom, I didn't mean it like that, it's just that Shuangshuang runs the entire household, it's not easy. Plus, it's still quite early, on regular days, everyone isn't up yet, you see..."

"You're talking about regular days, today's your eldest brother's day to head to the Capital for the exams, how can that be delayed?"

Old Mrs. Mu's mouth opened and closed continuously, spitting as she talked, hitting Yu Si Niang's face.

Inside the room, Mu Shuangshuang impatiently replied: "Grandma, if you're worried, just carry my uncle's carriage to town right now. You may not be sleeping, but others need their rest."

Old Mrs. Mu was infuriated, her wide sleeves swishing noisily in her hands.

After swishing her sleeves, Old Mrs. Mu laid down some harsh words and went to the Old Mu Family herself.

Yu Si Niang stood at the doorway, seeing Shuangshuang still not wanting to come out, she comforted Mu Shuangshuang: "Shuangshuang, if you don't want to go, then don't go. Mom will explain to your grandparents later."

"Mom, you should rest for a bit too. I asked Grandpa yesterday, we'll leave after the sun rises. It's still early, the roosters just started crowing."

After Mu Shuangshuang finished speaking, she didn't utter another word.

Outside the room, Yu Si Niang thought for a bit, then went back inside to tell the kids and Mu Dashan to sleep some more, while she herself started preparing breakfast.

Over at the Old Mu Family, the whole house, too, only got up when the sun rose.

Mu Dade was to show his face in front of everyone at the Old Mu Family today.

So he dressed in clothes bought from the county, gifted by Ruan Xiao Jiao, a burgundy robe with a wolf embroidered on the chest.

Mrs. Jin helped Mu Dade dress up, also applied some of her water powder, thus making Mu Dade look much better.

Mrs. Jin was in good spirits, because after today, they'd be heading to the Capital.

This whole trip, they wouldn't encounter that wench Ruan Xiao Jiao.

"Mr. Dan Dan, today you really exude nobility, one can tell you're not an ordinary person, surely destined for great wealth and fortune." Ruan Xiao Jiao added a piece of jade when tying Mu Dade's hair.

This is the common attire of wealthy young men during the Da Ning Dynasty.

Mu Dade was also in a good mood.

Today marks another pinnacle starting point in his life.

This time, heading to the Capital, he's aiming for fame and fortune.

Once he tops the exam as Champion Scholar, he'd be the most esteemed person not just in Qingshan Town, but in the whole county.

"Dan Dan's mother, these past days, you've worked hard! If it weren't for you, I, Mu Dade, would be nothing now."

It's Mu Dade's usual habit to praise Mrs. Jin after achieving something.

For ordinary women, hearing this might just be taken lightly.

Men's words, if believed, pigs could climb trees.

Yet, Mrs. Jin just believed it.

Not only believed it, as long as Mu Dade showed admiration for her, she felt all her efforts over the years were worthwhile.

"What are you talking about? We're a couple, what's there to thank?" Mrs. Jin turned her head aside, pretending to be shy.

If it had been ten years ago, this expression would have amazed Mu Dade.

Sadly, time flies, and at the age of thirty-something, being the mother of two, Mrs. Jin was no longer young, and Mu Dade no longer felt moved by her.

Mu Dade smiled perfunctorily, suddenly saying: "Yinyin, this time, Aunt Ruan will be riding in the same carriage with us to the county."

Chapter 915: Sister-in-law, Give Me a Kiss

"For what reason?" Mrs. Jin exclaimed directly upon hearing that this jinx Ruan Xiao Jiao was going to ride in the same carriage to the Capital with her and Mu Dade.

"Why are you so agitated? She's just going to the county, while we're headed to the Capital, hundreds of miles apart," Mu Dade said irritably, displeased with Mrs. Jin's reaction.

"Dan Dan's father, don't be angry, that's not what I meant. I just think... Since Ruan Xiao Jiao is the concubine of the County Magistrate, being too close to her, wouldn't the County Magistrate misunderstand something if he knew?"

Mrs. Jin could no longer say anything like nothing ever happened between her husband and Ruan Xiao Jiao.

She didn't want to investigate who's to blame now, just hoping her husband wouldn't be criticized over this matter.

"Dan Dan's father, maybe you find my words unpleasant, but where avoidance is needed, we still need to avoid it. If such things affect your career path, do you think it's worth it?"

Mrs. Jin advised earnestly.

If it were before, Mu Dade might have listened to a word or two, but now, he didn't want to hear it.

"Alright, you don't have to say any more. I understand all of this already; Ruan Xiao Jiao is already in our carriage. Later, when you get in the carriage, just don't shout."

Mu Dade considered it as informing Mrs. Jin, and he didn't care about her opinion.

Mrs. Jin was on the verge of going mad with anger.

She really wanted to go outside and tear open the sedan chair, ripping Ruan Xiao Jiao's face apart.

Her fingernails had sunk deeply into her flesh inside her sleeve, and half of Mrs. Jin's face was already twisted and deformed.

At this moment, Mu Dade stepped out of the room.

Mrs. Jin picked up a vase from the house and smashed it heavily on the ground. It was only after the vase shattered into pieces that she felt her mood calm down.

"Little bitch, I won't let you have it easy!" Mrs. Jin cursed.

After much contemplation, she still couldn't stand riding in the same sedan with Ruan Xiao Jiao.

She had to find someone to get rid of Ruan Xiao Jiao.

As long as they were outside the county, her husband and Ruan Xiao Jiao would have no further interaction.

After the Imperial and Palace Examinations had passed, that could be half a year or even a full year. Even if feelings had ignited, they'd be extinguished by time.

In her mind, Mrs. Jin listed a bunch of people who could help with this, and finally, she settled on Mu Danian.

Mu Danian was lustful and greedy; if he did something, he could be controlled.

If anything indeed happened, she'd simply say Mu Danian tried to act improperly with Ruan Xiao Jiao, letting them both pay for it.

As soon as Mu Dade left, Mrs. Jin lost her temper. After considering her backup plan, she too stepped out.

Today, many people from the Old Mu Family came, mostly to bask in Mu Dade's good fortune.

Searching for someone took considerable effort for Mrs. Jin.

When she finally found Mu Danian, the head courtyard of the Old Mu Family was already setting off fireworks.

It seemed they were making arrangements and preparing to set off to town.

Being straightforward, Mrs. Jin directly approached Mu Danian and said, "Fifth, I know you've always wanted to follow me and your elder brother to live a good life. There's something I need your help with. If it succeeds, when your brother becomes an official, I'll take you to live a good life, too."

Mu Danian picked his nose, a sly smile on his face.

"Sister-in-law, how strange this sounds to me? Is it that if I don't help you, you won't take me to live a good life?"

Mrs. Jin resisted her nausea, directly saying, "Fifth, I won't hide it from you. It's your elder brother's idea to take the most useful person.

Whoever is useful to us, we'll take them along, even if our parents speak well of them, it's useless."

Mu Danian's facial expression remained unchanged.

He had long known that his brother and sister-in-law wouldn't bring everyone along to enjoy the good life.

The third branch had already been divided out; the second and fourth branches were destined to be abandoned sooner or later.

But he was different. He knew how his brother ascended to his position.

Once he told his brother and sister-in-law that he knew about his brother buying the examination papers, they wouldn't dare move against him.

But this was Mu Danian's trump card.

He wouldn't reveal it easily.

Even Chen Hong, who knew the truth and was sent away by him, wouldn't tell.

The better Mu Dade fared, the more valuable the secret became.

If his brother lost everything, of what use was that secret? It wouldn't be as practical as a Copper Coin.

"Sister-in-law, when you say that, it's quite scary! But sister-in-law, I help you not for personal gain. Whether my brother takes me to enjoy a good life is irrelevant to me.

But I don't know if my brother knows that you're secretly asking me to mess with the County Magistrate's concubine?"

Mu Danian perfectly countered Mrs. Jin with her own ways.

When Mrs. Jin threatened him, he threatened her right back.

"You... are you threatening me? Aren't you afraid your brother will skin you alive?" Mrs. Jin asked.

"Of course not, how would I dare? I'm just doing what a younger brother should do. After all, sister-in-law, you're an outsider by surname, but I'm a Mu. When it comes to major issues, my brother should listen to me, his younger brother, right?"

As Mu Danian spoke, his eyes unscrupulously roamed over Mrs. Jin's chest.

Mrs. Jin was dressed elegantly today, allowing Mu Danian a feast for his eyes—something he wouldn't have had the chance to see before.

How could Mrs. Jin have delivered herself to him like this?

"Name your price for helping me deal with Ruan Xiao Jiao," Mrs. Jin asked.

"No money!" Mu Danian chuckled at Mrs. Jin's naiveté.

"Then what do you want?"

"Let me touch you—sister-in-law, you have no idea. To support my brother's education, I don't even have a wife; it's cold and lonely under the covers. That girl who was willing finally to be with me, you had her taken away."

Mu Danian was talking about Chen Hong.

Back then, Chen Hong planned to seduce Mu Dade and then stick around with Mu Danian to enjoy the benefits from the main branch.

Who knew Mrs. Jin would be so vigilant?

Old Mrs. Mu was fierce, and so Chen Hong didn't benefit at all.

The biggest loser in this was Mu Danian.

His usually warm-bed companion was no more, leaving him to sleep alone on a cold, solitary bed.

Otherwise, he'd be peeking outside Mu Dalang's room, checking when the couple would consummate their marriage.

Mu Danian had a tough life.

At his age, he still had no wife and spent all his time thinking about how to steal another's wife.

"You impudent fool!" Mrs. Jin was nearly driven mad with rage.

She wished she could slap Mu Danian across the face.

The more she thought about it, the angrier she became, indeed raising her hand, only for it to be intercepted by Mu Danian mid-air.

"Sister-in-law, your hand is so soft, smoother than a pig's pancreas," Mu Danian said as he held Mrs. Jin's hand, gently stroking it.

"Let go, let go..." Mrs. Jin struggled to pull her hand back, but she couldn't.

She felt nauseous enough to vomit...

"Sister-in-law, it's just a brief moment—and for that brief moment, I'll help solve the Ruan Xiao Jiao issue, so you and my brother can journey in peace, a scene so enviable..."

Chapter 916: They're Here, They're Here (Part 1)

"What are you doing?"

A woman's voice suddenly appeared, and Mu Danian and Mrs. Jin turned around to see Mu Xiaxia standing not far away, staring at them.

The two of them were so frightened they quickly separated.

Mrs. Jin's first reaction was to squat in the corner and vomit.

At the thought of her hand being touched by Mu Danian, that dead pig, Mrs. Jin felt terribly uncomfortable and nauseous.

Mu Danian was also angry, blaming Mu Xiaxia from the fourth branch for ruining his good moment.

The chance to touch Mrs. Jin's soft hands was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and it was disrupted by this stinky girl.

"Why do you care what we're doing? You stinky girl, what are you doing in this corner? Did you steal something from the Old Mu Family again to keep for yourself?"

"No, no... Uncle, I didn't steal anything." Mu Xi Xia shook her head like a rattle drum.

"No? Then what sneaky business are you up to here? What did you see?" Mu Danian asked.

Before Mu Xi Xia could answer, Mu Danian started threatening her: "Remember this, girl, whatever you saw or heard today, act as if you didn't see or hear anything.

If you dare to gossip outside, watch me rip your mouth apart and sew it shut with a needle!"

Mu Xi Xia was timid, and this threat turned her face ghostly pale.

Mu Danian advanced on her step by step, and before Mu Xi Xia could react, the new red headband on her head was snatched away by Mu Danian.

Tears welled up in Mu Xi Xia's eyes from the pain, yet Mu Danian still scolded her.

"Let me remind you again, if you dare to repeat what happened today, I'll give your headband to the ugliest, oldest man in the village and make you marry him as his wife!"

Mu Danian was always cautious, and after threatening her twice, Mu Xi Xia was too scared to speak, her legs trembling.

She kept repeating that she didn't know or see anything before Mu Danian finally let her go.

"Get lost!" Mu Danian shouted angrily, and only then did Mu Xiaxia, with her hair disheveled, run off.

Once Mrs. Jin finished vomiting, Mu Danian approached her.

"What do you want? Stay where you are, take another step, and I'll call for help." Mrs. Jin said.

Mu Danian sheepishly waved his hand and then smiled, "Since sister-in-law doesn't acknowledge our little moment earlier, I'll do this favor for you. When you become an official's wife, don't forget your fifth brother. After all, aside from my elder brother, I'm the only man who's touched your hand."

Mu Danian's words were the epitome of lewdness and shamelessness.

Fortunately, the second firecracker sound rang out from the Old Mu Family's side, and by the time the third firecracker sound rang, Mrs. Jin and Mu Dade were to head to the Capital.

At this point, Mrs. Jin could no longer delay; she had to go to the front yard immediately.

When Mrs. Jin arrived at the Old Mu Family's courtyard, it was already filled with people, men and women, old and young, all gathered to share in the good fortune and watch the spectacle.

"Sister-in-law Jin is here~"

Someone shouted, and several women surrounded Mrs. Jin, all seeking her advice.

"Oh, congratulations, congratulations, Mu Family's eldest sister-in-law, you truly have good fortune. Your husband is a scholar and soon to become the Champion Scholar; in the future, you'll be donned in gold and silver." Someone laughed.

Another chimed in, "Young sister-in-law, take this chance to tell us how Dade usually studies. We're all eager to use this method to help our children become scholars in the future."

Seeing the respectful and flattering looks directed at her by the crowd of women, Mrs. Jin felt a great sense of pride.

Mrs. Jin Yinyin didn't ask for much, just for the women before her to grovel at her feet and be beneath her, which made her very happy.

Jin Shi opened her mouth, intending to casually teach these women a few things.

Mrs. Lin suddenly emerged from somewhere, squeezing past the young wives surrounding Mrs. Jin.

"What are you all doing gathered here? Move aside, move aside, I still need to speak with my sister-in-law." Mrs. Lin said.

The women gave Mrs. Lin an angry look and moved away.

Mrs. Jin also looked displeased as she didn't want to deal with Mrs. Lin, so when Mrs. Lin moved closer, she turned her shoulder towards her.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Lin remained unaware and said, "Sister-in-law, we are family. Over these years, you know how I, Lin Xiaozao, have lived with the Old Mu Family.

Mother doesn't like us daughters-in-law, all her affection is reserved for Xiangxiang. Whatever we want to eat or use must be approved by her.

I've accepted all this because I, Lin Xiaozao, married into the Old Mu Family and became one of the daughters-in-law.

I only have one request now: once my elder brother attains high office and wealth, please don't forget our Gou Dan. Just take the child with you; I, Lin Xiaozao, will serve you as a maid and stay at your mansion..."

Mrs. Lin was both pitiful and sympathetic, willing to serve Mrs. Jin just to get a definite answer about their future from Mrs. Jin that the second branch would not be forgotten when the first branch prospers.

Regrettably, Mrs. Jin not only refused to promise but also said to Mrs. Lin, "Xiao Zao, Gou Dan is already at the age for schooling, and come spring, he must be sent to private school; you can't wait for his uncle to help.

Fortunately, Shuangshuang has just opened a private school. Gou Dan's dad and the third brother are siblings, sending Gou Dan there can save tuition, isn't this a win-win situation?"

Upon hearing this, Mrs. Lin knew Mrs. Jin was unwilling to take her son Gou Dan along.

But after all, Mrs. Jin provided her with a good idea.

Her son's schooling could indeed be left to the third branch, anyway the third branch would surely allow Old Lu Family's fat kid to study.

No matter what, that fat kid is still an outsider. She didn't believe that stinky girl would rather be criticized than ask her aunt for money.

"Alright, alright, since the eldest sister-in-law doesn't want to take Gou Dan, it doesn't matter. After all, every member of our Old Mu Family, including every grass and tree in this courtyard, will enjoy the good life, no matter where the elder brother or sister-in-law are."

Leaving those words, Mrs. Lin, imitating Mrs. Jin's manner, sashayed off to the backyard.

Lunch today will be prepared by her and Mrs. Liu, as they will stay at the Old Mu Family to take care of the old lady.

The third set of firecracker sounds finally went off, with Old Mrs. Mu under a burlap sack and wearing a tattered jacket, assisted by Mu Danian and Mu Dazhong into the carriage.

"Elder brother, elder sister-in-law, get ready, you're about to board the carriage!" Mu Dazhong shouted.

Mu Dade, now all packed, hurried towards the carriage.

All along the way, Mu Danian was walking on a red carpet, so there wasn't a speck of mud on his shoes.

Mu Shuangshuang blended into the crowd, looking at Mu Dade's ever-closer feet, she suddenly tugged at Lu Yuanfeng's sleeve.

"Fengzi, do you think my elder brother will step on it?"

Chapter 917: Overdoing the Show-Off (Second Update)

Lu Yuanfeng was also one of the insiders.

He knew that the one lying at the side of the carriage, acting as a step stool, was Old Mrs. Mu, and also knew that this was Mrs. Jin's idea.

However, he still tended to think that Mu Dade wouldn't step on her, after all, she's his own mother.

"I guess... he won't!"

As soon as Lu Yuanfeng finished speaking, Mu Shuangshuang chuckled and said, "Then Fengzi, you are surely going to lose. My eldest uncle isn't the kind of person you think he is. Let's wait and see."

While Mu Shuangshuang was discussing, other villagers were also talking, and then suddenly someone asked, "Eh, what's going on, at such an important moment, why hasn't Old Mrs. Mu come out?"

Everyone was puzzled as well.

Not seeing a trace of Old Mrs. Mu all morning was, by reasoning, an impossible occurrence.

This old lady always liked to make a fuss, even about small matters, ensuring the whole village knew.

Since Mu Dade passed the scholar's examination, the old lady walked with such a spring in her step, often seeking presence in front of the villagers, and for such an important occasion today, her silence was unusual.

"Old Mu, where did your wife go?" someone asked Mr. Mu.

Mr. Mu, full of embarrassment, stuttered for a long time, not knowing how to respond.

Lying on the ground, Old Mrs. Mu was also anxious and sweating, fearing that her identity might be discovered if it weren't for the bag covering her head.

"Eh, why is there a burlap bag under the carriage? Is it a person? The silhouette looks familiar," someone else asked.

Upon hearing this, most of the Old Mu Family became slightly panicked, afraid Old Mrs. Mu might be recognized.

Only Mrs. Jin was secretly laughing in her heart.

Her intent was to let Old Mrs. Mu suffer humiliation; if discovered, it would be perfect.

"Thank you everyone for your concern, my mother told us yesterday she'll stay home, eat vegetarian, and chant Buddha's name for three months to pray for Dade. During these three months, my mother won't see anyone, so..."

Mrs. Jin deliberately said loudly, ensuring almost the entire village heard her explanation.

This way, Old Mrs. Mu had to stay at home, unable to step out for three months.

By now Old Mrs. Mu realized something was amiss, but she could no longer get up to reprimand Mrs. Jin.

By this time, no matter how much bitterness she felt inside, she could only swallow it all down.

The villagers all accepted this as a fact, each saying that Old Mrs. Mu was willing to endure all sufferings for her son, hinting she would surely enjoy life's blessings in the future.

Old Mrs. Mu felt bittersweet at this moment, unable to express her distress.

Finally, Mu Dade walked to the front of the carriage, stepping on Old Mrs. Mu's back, almost flattening her.

Old Mrs. Mu felt her waist was about to break, yet she was in a good mood.

Her son had finally severed the ill omen brought by the third branch's troublesome girl, and soon she could become the old lady of a top scorer's family.

Picturing a good life, Old Mrs. Mu unexpectedly had both feet of Mrs. Jin step onto her back.

"Ouch..." Old Mrs. Mu exclaimed.

"Oh, what sound was that?" Mrs. Jin deliberately shouted, stirring interest in everyone about the person wrapped in the sack.

Someone deduced it was indeed a person, and even a woman's voice.

Just not sure which family had an old lady willing to be a stepping stool for others.

"Eldest sister-in-law, you better hurry up, it's almost time." On the side, Mu Dashan couldn't bear to see Mrs. Jin stepping further, urging them.

"Yeah, eldest sister-in-law, we really need to go." Mu Dajiang also chimed in.

Meanwhile, Mu Dalang nudged Mu Danian and Mu Dazhong, "Dad, Fifth Uncle, please help move... move the person to the side to rest."

Most of the Old Mu Family thought today's matter was a farce, but everyone was happy to watch it unfold.

Those who wanted to stop it couldn't find a way to do so.

After Mu Dade and Mrs. Jin mounted the carriage, the music and drums started playing ahead.

The whole village began to see Mu Dade off.

Mu Shuangshuang felt goosebumps all over.

She felt that today's situation didn't seem like celebrating for Mu Dade, but rather like a funeral procession for him.

"Fengzi, how about we not go, I sense something odd." Mu Shuangshuang said.

Mu Dade was on the carriage, while others walked, forming a long queue with drummers and gong beaters, if this wasn't a funeral procession, then what was it?

Lu Yuanfeng, here just for the fun, naturally didn't oppose when seeing Mu Shuangshuang didn't want to go forward.

"Alright!" Lu Yuanfeng replied.

"Then, since that's so, Fengzi, we'll seize the chance later and sneak into the hills to have some fun, coming back by noon anyways, no one will notice we're gone."

Mu Shuangshuang had her plan, dashing off once the procession started moving.

Anyway, with so many villagers attending, one or two missing wouldn't be noticed.

But Mu Shuangshuang didn't expect that as soon as she left, three little kids followed, coincidentally trailing right behind them.

Unable to shake them off, Mu Shuangshuang had no choice but to bring the little ones along.

Early spring and besides enjoying the scenery, there really wasn't much to do.

Fortunately, time passed quite quickly, and it was nearing noon when Mu Shuangshuang returned to the third branch.

She saw Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang also came back.

Naturally, Mu Shuangshuang asked about Mu Dade's situation along the way, and hadn't noticed it herself.

Mu Dashan looked somewhat displeased.

"Ay, Shuang, don't mention it, today was really unlucky.

"Our village's procession, after leaving the village and moving forward, encountered some people on the road who said we were a funeral procession; your grandpa got into a quarrel with them, followed by a fight.

Then those few called people from their village, and it turned into an all-out brawl, with many from our village getting injured as well."

"Ah, Dad, are you and Mom alright?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"We're fine, earlier your dad wanted to join in the fight, but I saw your uncle had the driver move the carriage away, so I had your dad hide.

This isn't something our third branch should bear, with your uncle gone, why should we risk our lives?"

Yu Si Niang, when talking reason, was quite logical.

Mu Shuangshuang gave her a thumbs up, speaking with admiration:

"My mom is truly our family's hero, saving my dad's life, she deserves a reward, let's make something tasty at lunch."

Yu Si Niang was quite fond of the compliments from Mu Shuangshuang.

Though still slightly bashful.

Mu Dashan gulped down some tea and started explaining the whole incident to Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang was dumbfounded listening, able to picture the scene of both villages rolling up their sleeves and getting into it.

But perhaps it was for the best, saving Mu Dade from always showing off, having the whole village escort him to the town to take exams; one could guess they'd become notorious once reaching town.

Mu Dade losing face was fine, but she still wished to keep some face for herself for future business dealings.

Chapter 918: After the Scare

"So, how did the whole thing end up being handled?" Mu Shuangshuang asked with a curious look.

Logically speaking, when people from two villages get into a fight, especially on such a large scale and even the village head gets involved, it shouldn't be an easy matter to resolve.

Plus, those who were injured, accidentally hurt, all need to be treated and managed, things could easily escalate.

"We haven't really figured out a solution. Everyone's thinking it's still the New Year, causing trouble now is probably not auspicious. We'll wait until after the New Year to discuss with the people from Xiong Family Village."

"I think the village head is quite upset this time too. It's possible that we won't have any dealings with the Xiong Family Village folks in the future."

Mu Dashan sighed, feeling uneasy inside.

Originally, this wasn't a big deal at all. The people of Xiong Family Village had no idea Er Gui Village was sending his big brother to take the imperial exams today, with the entire village turning out in force, creating such a big scene.

Maybe if we had explained everything calmly, there wouldn't have been any problem. But his second brother's words were too provoking and ended up insulting the people of Xiong Family Village, which led everyone to find them and confront them.

In the heat of the moment, hands started flying.

"Not dealing with Xiong Family Village? I remember among the nearby villages, we are closest with two, one being Tie Dao Village, and the other Xiong Family Village.

Xiong Family Village is upstream among these villages, controlling our village's water supply. If they get angry and cut off the water from upstream, what are we going to do?"

Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"This..." Mu Dashan was at a loss, these were things he had never considered, nor had the villagers.

"Even if they don't cut off the water supply, I remember a lot of people's fields in the village are rented from the wealthy landowner of Xiong Family Village, mostly short-term leases. Will they raise the rent?"

After a few questions, Mu Dashan was getting anxious.

He looked at his daughter in front of him, regretting the situation deeply now.

"Ah, if I had known earlier, I would have stopped this from happening. If Xiong Family Village uses these two issues against us, we'll be doomed."

"Dad, don't worry too much, I'm just saying, there's no certainty they'll do that.

But today's matter, my uncle and aunt are greatly responsible, such a big incident happened, and they just ran off.

My uncle is a scholar, if he had stayed and spoken a few soothing words, maybe things wouldn't have blown up like this."

Mu Shuangshuang gently supported Mu Dashan's body, comforting him.

Mu Dashan's demeanor slightly improved.

However, deep down, he still harbors concerns about this matter, thinking to find some time to discuss with the village head, resolving things peacefully would be better.

"Ah, your uncle indeed overdid it, but the village folks didn't blame him, everyone put the blame on the Xiong Family Village people!"

In short, today was definitely not the auspicious day for travel as Old Mu Family had hoped.

"Naturally, my uncle is a scholar, how could everyone speak ill of him." Mu Shuangshuang's big, round eyes sparkled as they rolled in their sockets.

Whenever Mu Dade was mentioned, she was basically disdainful.

"Alright, let's not talk about this. We haven't had lunch yet; I'll go prepare some lunch first."

Yu Si Niang didn't want her man and daughter to have ideological differences because of other people's issues, so she came out to mediate.

Though, in truth, Yu Si Niang was overthinking it, Mu Shuangshuang always respects Mu Dashan's opinion and wouldn't argue with him.

"Mom, I'll help you out, let's reward ourselves at lunch according to the New Year standards and celebrate that our third branch is getting better."

Mu Shuangshuang actually wanted to say that the curse of Old Mu Family's main branch had finally left, but Mu Dashan was present, so she had to restrain herself, learning to hold back to avoid making Mu Dashan uncomfortable.

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On the other end, after the scuffle between the two groups, Mu Dade, along with Mrs. Jin and Ruan Xiao Jiao in the same carriage, all let out a sigh of relief.

Mrs. Jin sat limp in the carriage, drenched in sweat.

The order to urge the coachman to hurry away was given by Mrs. Jin.

Generally, Mrs. Jin's ability to react on the spot is quite good.

In her eyes, no matter how big the dispute might grow, it has nothing to do with her and Mu Dade, since they are soon heading to the Capital.

When they return, it'll be half a year or even a year later, by then, everyone will only come to curry favor with her and her husband; no one will remember their embarrassing departure today.

Sitting upright, Mrs. Jin swept her eyes toward Ruan Xiao Jiao.

Inside the same carriage, originally there was nothing to compare between the two women, but gradually, Mrs. Jin began to compare herself to Ruan Xiao Jiao.

Mrs. Jin wore a rose-red satin gown today to match Mu Dade, with fur at the collar, her outfit appearing extravagant, paired with rather heavy makeup, she looked somewhat aged.

Ruan Xiao Jiao and Mrs. Jin were completely different; wearing a green cape with a white long jacket underneath, gave her a particularly fresh appearance.

This contrast left Mrs. Jin feeling slightly uncomfortable.

She asked directly, "Are we having lunch in town later or speeding up to eat in the county?"

Riding in the carriage to town wouldn't take much time.

But going to the county, we're likely to miss lunchtime.

Mu Dade's gaze shifted towards Mrs. Jin, just as Mrs. Jin thought her husband was seeking her opinion, he suddenly asked Ruan Xiao Jiao.

"Aunt Ruan, what do you think? Heading to the county early or staying in town and eating lunch before we go?"

Ruan Xiao Jiao's face lit up with joy as she promptly replied, "Let's head to the county early; I know a good restaurant there, we can eat there."

"I'll treat you today as thanks for staying at Old Mu Family and eating their food all this time."

Ruan Xiao Jiao spoke playfully, coupled with her inherently younger appearance and fresher looks compared to Mrs. Jin.

For a moment, Mu Dade stared absently.

"Mr. Dan Dan! Mr. Dan Dan!" Mrs. Jin shouted several times before Mu Dade snapped back to reality.

"What's wrong? What's wrong?" Mu Dade asked.

"Nothing's wrong, I just wanted to ask your opinion." Mrs. Jin's smile was somewhat stiff, and her inner grievance towards Ruan Xiao Jiao increased a bit more.

"Let's listen to Aunt Ruan. After all, she has to get off the carriage in the county. Tonight, we won't stop in the county; ten miles outside, there's a small town where we'll stay and lodge."

Mu Dade said.

Mrs. Jin's tense expression finally eased.

"That's right, Aunt Ruan is soon going to separate from us."

Speaking of which, Aunt Ruan, you practically spent this New Year with us at Old Mu Family, suddenly separating makes me quite reluctant. If Aunt Ruan could go to the Capital with us, that would be wonderful." Mrs. Jin said deliberately with a wistful expression.

Chapter 919: Mrs. Jin Thrown Into Prison

"What are you babbling about? Aunt Ruan belongs to the County Magistrate, naturally she should return to the County Magistrate's house, why follow us to the Capital?" Mu Dade scolded Mrs. Jin in displeasure.

Mrs. Jin was scolded, but instead of feeling upset, she was in a great mood.

From her husband's words, she understood that Ruan Xiao Jiao would not have any entanglement with her husband.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Jin did not know that Ruan Xiao Jiao was no longer the Ruan Xiao Jiao of the past, ever since Mu Dade told her that he was drugged by Mrs. Jin and had to marry her.

Otherwise, the current scholar's wife, the mother of the child, these roles would have belonged to Ruan Xiao Jiao.

Women's jealousy and hatred are terrifying things, especially when they are transformed by a man.

Ruan Xiao Jiao paid no attention to Mrs. Jin's incessant provocation and anger during the journey, always keeping a smile on her face until the carriage stopped in the county.

The three of them got off the carriage together, and only then did Ruan Xiao Jiao retract her smile.

In the Old Mu Family, Ruan Xiao Jiao always played the role of a delicate woman, but upon arriving at the county, she appeared more mature.

Throughout the journey, Ruan Xiao Jiao frequently introduced the county to Mrs. Jin.

She acted as if she was very familiar with the county.

Mrs. Jin reluctantly followed Ruan Xiao Jiao to the inn she introduced.

From the external scale of the inn alone, it was clear that the inn Ruan Xiao Jiao invited them to dine at was no ordinary inn.

With the luxurious interior decor, Mrs. Jin increasingly felt that Ruan Xiao Jiao was showing off in front of her.

It was past meal time, and there were few people in the inn.

As soon as Ruan Xiao Jiao appeared, the staff welcomed them warmly.

A staff member who recognized Ruan Xiao Jiao immediately offered to introduce a private room.

"Mrs. Ruan, the private room is always reserved per your preference, let me take you there." The staff member said ingratiatingly.

The young staff member seemed to deliberately speak only to Ruan Xiao Jiao, making Mrs. Jin feel particularly humiliated. She interrupted the staff's words: "We still have a journey to continue, let's not go to a private room, just eat here outside, and leave immediately after finishing."

The staff looked troubled and turned to Ruan Xiao Jiao.

Ruan Xiao Jiao shook her head, signaling that it was fine, they would eat outside.

Only then did the three of them find a random spot to eat outside.

It was only the sixth day of the new year, the weather hadn't warmed up yet, eating in the hall would surely be cold, and the doors of the hall were kept open for the convenience of guests.

Before long, Mrs. Jin was shivering all over.

She regretted deeply, wishing she had opted for the private room sooner.

At least in the private room, this time it was possible to burn silver charcoal, which was quite warm.

"I come to this inn often; the chef's dishes are particularly delicious. You must try more later, otherwise, you won't have such good dishes in the evening."

While speaking, Ruan Xiao Jiao looked at Mrs. Jin with a meaningful glance.

It was this look that made Mrs. Jin's eyelids twitch.

A premonition of bad things crept into her heart.

Mrs. Jin's hand shook holding the chopsticks, and when she tightened her grip, the food and dishes were served.

As Ruan Xiao Jiao had said, the food from this inn was indeed delicious; even Mu Dade had two bowls of rice.

Mrs. Jin was angry, only sipping half a mouthful of soup.

No matter what tasty dishes Ruan Xiao Jiao introduced later, she couldn't eat any more; seeing Ruan Xiao Jiao instead made her nauseous.

After the meal, Ruan Xiao Jiao got up to settle the bill, and Mu Dade followed. The innkeeper mentioned the counter had no change, inviting the two to go into the backyard.

When they came back, Mrs. Jin was pressed to the ground by two women, her hair disheveled and clothes messy.

Whether she was beaten or not, Mrs. Jin moaned in pain.

"I'm innocent! I didn't steal anything; I didn't steal..." Mrs. Jin cried while pleading with everyone in the inn.

But the people in the inn seemed to have conspired, each pointing a finger at Mrs. Jin.

"Look at you, dressed so elegantly, why stoop to such disgraceful actions?" One of the two women said.

"Exactly, my pearl earrings are worth at least ten taels of silver."

"This thief, everyone take a look, see what she looks like!"

"..."

Everyone chimed in, so much that Mu Dade and Ruan Xiao Jiao didn't understand what had happened.

The two were bewildered.

But Ruan Xiao Jiao was the first to rush forward, pushing away the two women bullying Mrs. Jin.

"What are you doing? My sister is the scholar's wife; how could she want your pearl earrings?" Ruan Xiao Jiao defended Mrs. Jin.

But as soon as Mrs. Jin saw Ruan Xiao Jiao, she became agitated.

"It was you! You framed me, didn't you? You deliberately looked at me like that earlier and then deliberately found these people to trap me. You're so malicious."

Mrs. Jin was not stupid; from the moment they were eating, she felt something was off; she just didn't expect Ruan Xiao Jiao to truly slander her.

Using such disgraceful tactics to taint her reputation.

She would not let Ruan Xiao Jiao, this little vixen, off the hook.

"Sister Jin, what are you saying? Brother Dade and I went to the back hall together; it was the shopkeeper who asked us. I truly don't know what transpired."

Ruan Xiao Jiao strongly denied.

Mrs. Jin became more agitated; she raised her hand to slap Ruan Xiao Jiao.

Only before she could hit her, she was stopped by a woman nearby.

"You old hag, to steal something and then falsely accuse the innocent. Who's gonna go report this to the government? I'll pay them twenty coins."

A great reward will surely bring forth brave men, especially for such a simple errand.

A man raised his hand, shouting: "I'll go call the arrest officer, let him catch this little thief!"

With that said, the man dashed off.

Mu Dade finally came to his senses; he wanted to stop the man calling the government arrest officer, but the man's legs were swift, vanishing quickly.

"What happened? Explain it clearly to me."

Mu Dade valued his face highly.

His wife was accused of being a thief, and the stolen goods were not just a worthless pair of pearl earrings.

He felt humiliated, deeply humiliated.

"Mr. Dan Dan, listen to me... It wasn't me, truly it wasn't me.

You and that little vixen Ruan Xiao Jiao went to the back hall; this stupid woman accused me of stealing her earrings, I didn't even touch her."

"Shut up, don't call her a vixen. Mrs. Jin, do you know your own status? How could you commit such disgraceful acts?"

Mu Dade had always hoped that his wife would be sensible and understanding. He used to think Mrs. Jin was, but now, he felt Mrs. Jin was merely an unreasonable village woman.

"I'm humiliating? How am I humiliating? I didn't get involved ambiguously with others; I know what things should be done and what shouldn't."

Mrs. Jin retorted.

This time, Mrs. Jin was enraged; having trouble, her husband didn't support her, but rebuked her.

All of this was Ruan Xiao Jiao's fault!

Mrs. Jin and Mu Dade were in a stalemate, and it was at this moment that someone shouted, "The arrest officer... the arrest officer is here!"

Chapter 920: Leave Directly, Ignore Mrs. Jin

"What? The arrest officer is here..." Mrs. Jin panicked.

It was only now that she realized the seriousness of the situation. Putting aside the fact that she hadn't stolen anything, with no one to vouch for her innocence, given Ruan Xiao Jiao's status, imprisoning her would be a piece of cake.

"Mr. Dan Dan, let's not argue anymore. Let's... let's deal with this matter first, okay?" Mrs. Jin glanced around before speaking.

"Deal with it? How am I supposed to handle this? I'm not part of the government."

Mu Dade replied impatiently.

As they were talking, the arrest officer had already entered the tavern and immediately asked about the situation.

"Who stole the item? And who reported the case?"

One of the women who had been holding Mrs. Jin stepped forward and pointed at Mrs. Jin, saying, "It's her, this woman, claiming to be a scholar's wife. But in reality, she does all sorts of debased things. She stole my pearl earrings. If I hadn't noticed in time, they'd be gone."

"Nonsense! Your earring fell to the ground by yourself, conveniently next to my feet. I merely picked it up out of curiosity, not intending to take your belongings!" Mrs. Jin retorted loudly.

"Rubbish! You're talking nonsense. My earring was securely on my ear; how did it end up by your feet? We were sitting at separate tables for our meal, clearly your claim of theft is a mere excuse!"

The two women, because of the theft accusation, argued incessantly.

They even ignored the arrest officer who had come to solve the problem.

It's often said that three women make a drama, but these two women alone were enough to heat up the situation.

The arrest officer couldn't stand it any longer.

"Alright, both of them will be taken back to the prison for detention. Any matters will be settled by the County Magistrate for questioning and verdict tomorrow morning." The chief arrest officer concluded decisively.

Two constables alongside him stepped forward, one in front of and one behind, and began to escort Mrs. Jin and the other woman towards the county government.

Mrs. Jin, once restrained, grew increasingly frightened, fearing she would indeed end up imprisoned, so she turned her head and shouted:

"Da De, save me, save me, I don't want to go to the county government, this matter has nothing to do with me..."

Mu Dade's expression turned sour, not only because Mrs. Jin's issue implicated him, but also because Mrs. Jin was foolish beyond measure.

In such situations, she thought to plead with him instead of Ruan Xiao Jiao.

Ruan Xiao Jiao is the County Magistrate's concubine; wouldn't her words carry more weight than his?

Mu Dade turned his head, gently and softly speaking to Ruan Xiao Jiao: "Jiao... Aunt Ruan, please save her. I believe there must be some misunderstanding in this matter!"

At this critical moment, Mu Dade couldn't even voice that Mrs. Jin was his wife, fearing Mrs. Jin's trouble would bring disgrace upon himself.

But it was precisely because of the mention of Aunt Ruan that the arrest officer noticed Ruan Xiao Jiao, who had been standing silently by the side.

"Aunt Ruan, why are you here? Weren't you... in the countryside?" The officer asked politely.

The County Magistrate didn't have many concubines, counting Ruan Xiao Jiao, there were merely two.

They were especially gentle women, and in the County Magistrate's backyard, there had never been incidents of women quarreling.

Everyone lived peacefully; you don't bother me, I don't bother you.

"Chief Liu, this here is... my friend. May I ask if you can release her? She would never steal anything." Ruan Xiao Jiao said.

"This..." Chief Liu looked awkward.

According to protocol, government affairs shouldn't be dictated by a concubine.

However, the person before him was the County Magistrate's favorite, given leave whenever for New Year's celebrations, able to set her return date at her will, as long as the concubine was happy.

Even the senior wife in the backyard didn't receive such freedom and privileges.

If he opposed this concubine, and if she ever sought revenge, his days ahead would be tough.

But the County Magistrate always took his public duties seriously and responsibly, where the people's affairs were of utmost importance.

As the arrest officer for the county government, he couldn't easily indulge in favoritism, at least not in front of everyone.

Ruan Xiao Jiao recognized Chief Liu's difficulties.

Today's situation was a trap she had set up.

It was all planned before heading to the county.

All to let Mrs. Jin experience the prowess of Ruan Xiao Jiao.

"Chief Liu, is this matter truly so difficult? Help me release this lady as if nothing happened, alright?"

Ruan Xiao Jiao's words sounded genuine, as if she really wanted to help Mrs. Jin.

Unfortunately, in this matter, it wasn't only Mrs. Jin involved.

The woman whose earring was "stolen" by Mrs. Jin complained about Chief Liu's handling, deliberately shouting loudly: "No way, you either take us both or take this woman, she's a thief!"

"Right! We can't let the thief go, or we'll seek justice from the County Magistrate..."

Among the onlookers, some started to chant, and the crowd surged forward, all claiming to go find the County Magistrate.

Chief Liu found himself helpless and had to raise his voice: "Alright, let's take everyone to the government office! Anything to discuss can wait until tomorrow morning!"

Taking Ruan Xiao Jiao aside, Chief Liu apologized with a face full of guilt: "Aunt Ruan, I truly don't have the authority to release this person. If the townsfolk cause trouble with the County Magistrate, I... I can't continue as arrest officer."

"If you have any grievances, please direct them at me. I only wish to keep my job, to provide for my family of five."

Ruan Xiao Jiao smiled faintly, "Chief Liu, I'm just joking with you, I didn't truly want you to release her, I understand your plight."

"Aunt Ruan, let me be honest with you, this person can be released, just not right now, not in front of the townsfolk."

"I'll release her later when no one is watching." Chief Liu said.

His intentions were clear, he was willing to offer a backdoor to Ruan Xiao Jiao.

"Release? Who said anything about releasing?" Ruan Xiao Jiao's lips curved into a subtle smile.

That smile, like the spring breeze in March, left Chief Liu stunned, unsure of what to say next.

"Aunt Ruan, weren't you... weren't you just asking me to release her? Why... why change your mind now? Or do you have any instructions? Please let me know, I'll certainly do what's needed, as long as Aunt Ruan provides a livelihood."

"I already said, I was joking earlier, whether to release her or not, matters like these, someone like me, a mere woman, where do I have the standing?"

However, there is indeed a matter where I need your help. Later go and inform that man, his wife might be detained for around four or five days.

"If proven innocent after four or five days, she can then be released, understand?"

Chief Liu nodded frantically.

"I understand!"

Following Ruan Xiao Jiao's words, Chief Liu relayed them to Mu Dade, then proceeded to escort Mrs. Jin in front of everyone.

Ruan Xiao Jiao asked with concern: "What should we do now, Sister Jin will be detained, who will accompany you to the Capital for the exam?"

Mu Dade was pondering over this issue.

Four or five days, he couldn't afford to wait.

If Mrs. Jin couldn't be released, not only would his journey be delayed, but it would also fail to rescue her.

"Jiaojiao, I think I'll just go, not concerned with Mrs. Jin anymore!"