

Folly 921

Chapter 921: A House Full of Rats

"Ah?" Ruan Xiao Jiao's face was full of astonishment.

"Just leave? Who will look after you along the way? Surely you can't rely on just a driver?" Ruan Xiao Jiao asked.

"You come with me, it's that woman from the Jin Family who gave up herself. This time, such a good opportunity, she didn't know how to grasp it. Instead, she went to pick up someone else's earring and ended up getting tricked. The Imperial Examination is imminent; I can't wait four or five days."

From start to finish, Mu Dade never believed Mrs. Jin had stolen someone else's earring.

He only thought those two women were decoys, trying to cheat Mrs. Jin out of some money.

If that's the case, it would be quite easy to handle. If he left, Mrs. Jin would soon be released since she had no money.

Ruan Xiao Jiao was secretly delighted; this scenario was exactly as she had imagined.

However, necessary hesitation still needed to be shown.

Ruan Xiao Jiao hoped the impression she left on Mu Dade was always that of simplicity and not causing trouble.

This time was no exception.

"Brother Dade, it's not possible. I'm the County Magistrate's concubine; once I hold my documents and leave the county, someone will report to the County Magistrate, and then it will be troublesome."

"It's okay, you use Mrs. Jin's pass, her document, meaning all the way, you are Jinyin'er; no one will suspect, and when we return, we'll handle things here."

"Then... alright! I'll go to the Capital with you."

Mu Dade was truly ruthless; ever since deciding to let Ruan Xiao Jiao go to the Capital, he didn't want to inquire about Mrs. Jin's situation.

Even if Ruan Xiao Jiao wanted to visit Chief Liu again for Mrs. Jin, Mu Dade showed no concern.

He just asked Ruan Xiao Jiao to prepare more of what she needed, conveniently making this enormous lie sound better.

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This trip to the Capital wouldn't be completed in three or five months, or even half a year.

Ruan Xiao Jiao had already thought of a reason for the County Magistrate; a relative in her family passed away, and she needed to observe mourning.

By chance, her fourth aunt died two months ago, so if someone really investigates, it would be plausible.

After spending half a day, Ruan Xiao Jiao arranged the matters in the county and sent someone back home to explain to her parents how to answer if someone inquires about her.

With everything handled, Ruan Xiao Jiao and Mu Dade left the city gates overnight to conceal their actions.

As for Mrs. Jin, due to Ruan Xiao Jiao's special instruction, she was locked in a separate cell.

The cell was dirty, with eating and defecating done in the same place.

It was dark and damp inside, with snakes, insects, and rats appearing in the corners; Mrs. Jin cried several times out of fear.

Standing for several hours, Mrs. Jin couldn't hold on any longer.

She shouted at the top of her lungs: "Wronged, I'm wronged... I really didn't steal anything."

No one responded, so Mrs. Jin shouted again: "I'm willing to compensate, I'll pay as long as you let me out, whatever the amount..."

Still, no one paid attention.

Instead, female prisoners in the nearby cells, upon hearing Mrs. Jin's desperate screams, all cursed Mrs. Jin furiously.

"You're already in prison, why are you yelling? I'm telling you, this prison is a hell for women; once you're in, don't think about getting out," said the prisoner nearest to Mrs. Jin.

"Mind your own business; I don't want to be like you, dirty and smelly. I want to get out; I'm a scholar's wife, I'm the future Champion Scholar's wife. Come, someone!"

Mrs. Jin kept shouting, and finally, someone couldn't bear it anymore. From the corner of the cell, they grabbed a large rat and threw it in Mrs. Jin's direction.

Though blocked by the iron bars, the squeaking sound of the rat still scared Mrs. Jin.

She backed away repeatedly and accidentally touched something soft, then realized it was a snake.

"Ah, there's a snake..."

Mrs. Jin was directly scared and fainted.

That night was the hardest night of Mrs. Jin's life.

She felt something gnawing at her fingernails and something crawling into her clothes, making her itch all over.

The cell was both cold and hungry, compounded by the fact that Mrs. Jin had only had a sip of soup for lunch and was already starving.

The next day, sunlight came in, and Mrs. Jin finally woke up.

She was almost lying in a nest of rats and cockroaches, with rats gnawing at her fingernails and cockroaches crawling by her feet.

With another scream, Mrs. Jin jumped around like she was dancing in the cell.

The previous desire to leave surged back.

She kept shouting and yelling.

Finally, she called for the constables, and she realized they had come to open the door for her.

"Brother... Brother, I admit my mistake, I'll never dare again; the earring was stolen by me, I... I'm willing to compensate, please let me out."

Mrs. Jin was frightened beyond words, speaking incoherently.

The constables came forward and, just like yesterday, escorted Mrs. Jin out of prison.

Then they threw Mrs. Jin on the street, saying nothing, and left her there.

Mrs. Jin was freed but not as happy as she expected.

She hurried to the restaurant where she ate yesterday, but it was already empty.

The man was gone, and Ruan Xiao Jiao was also nowhere to be seen.

Upon inquiry, no one knew where her husband had gone, and nothing was left for her.

Mrs. Jin wanted to rent a carriage to chase after Mu Dade, but she didn't have a single coin; all the money was with Mu Dade.

Most importantly, without documents and proof of residence, as Jinyin'er, she couldn't go find her husband, nor could she return to Er Gui Village to confront Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu.

She couldn't even leave the city gate.

She couldn't go forward or backward, and only then did Mrs. Jin understand the meaning of being worse than death.

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Old Mu Family

One day after Mu Dade's family left, everyone accepted the fact that the main house was no longer there.

Mu Xiangxiang took over the entire main house's room alone, living a life of comfort beyond words.

Mrs. Lin also wanted to intervene, applying to Old Mrs. Mu to live in the main house's room but was driven out by Old Mrs. Mu.

Those few kicks from Mrs. Jin made Old Mrs. Mu twist her back; she couldn't get off the ground or move, truly supporting Mrs. Jin's words of not going out for months.

Old Mrs. Mu hated Mrs. Jin, but with Mrs. Jin gone, she couldn't get back at her, so she tormented the other daughters-in-law.

Mrs. Lin and Mrs. Liu lived lives worse than pigs and dogs, either being beaten or scolded every day.

Life was unbearable, to the point that later, neither daughter-in-law wanted to take care of Old Mrs. Mu, wash her, or help her.

If the older ones wouldn't go, the burden naturally fell to Huang Bitao.

That day, because Mu Dalang went to the neighboring village to buy three piglets on credit, Huang Bitao went to visit for a while and was a bit late in serving Old Mrs. Mu, causing her to be caught and scolded.

The scolding wasn't about anything else but having children.

"You married into the Old Mu Family for some time, why is there still no news from your belly? Could it be like that little wench Mrs. Jin, a hen that can't lay eggs?"

Chapter 922: Borrowing Hot Water

Old Mrs. Mu spoke directly, leaving Huang Bitao stunned in place, not knowing how to respond.

"What's the matter, turned mute? Can't even speak anymore?" Old Mrs. Mu rolled her eyes.

"Grandmother, regarding the child's issue, I... Da Lang and I will work hard."

Huang Bitao struggled for a long time before finally squeezing out this sentence.

Old Mrs. Mu was naturally displeased, feeling that Huang Bitao was fooling her and didn't respect her.

She kicked over the water Huang Bitao had drawn, and the muddy floor in the room instantly became wet.

Huang Bitao was startled and dared not lose her temper with Old Mrs. Mu, so she just kept apologizing: "I'm sorry... Grandmother, I said something wrong, I know I'm wrong."

Old Mrs. Mu, with a frosty expression, looked at Huang Bitao, who kept apologizing, and with irritation said: "Hmph, if you knew you were wrong, you wouldn't be brushing off this injured old lady!

It's said there's not a single good daughter-in-law, starting from that foul Mrs. Jin, to the remaining branches, including you, none of you are any good."

Old Mrs. Mu cursed loudly, with a unique insult in each curse.

Mr. Mu, finishing his meal outside the door, heard Old Mrs. Mu's voice.

He frowned and went inside, saw the chaos on the floor, and then looked at the teary-eyed Huang Bitao, and knew what was happening.

"Bitao, you'd better clean up the room and get to sleep early!"

"Sleep? Sleep what? I, as the grandmother, haven't slept, why should she? And you, you old coot, calling Bitao, Bitao so affectionately, have you taken a liking to her?"

Well, you shameless old thing, you even don't spare your granddaughter-in-law, you... you..., I spit on you!"

Old Mrs. Mu's unreasonable behavior wasn't a one or two day affair.

Usually, Mr. Mu wouldn't respond, but the affair with Huang Bitao, this comment darkened his face.

"You troublesome woman, spouting shameless words again? Bitao is your granddaughter-in-law, yet you can still say such things." said Mr. Mu.

"Hmph! If I'm troublesome, you shouldn't have married me in the first place. Now with so many children, you still say I'm troublesome.

Don't think I don't know what you really want, you just wait for the day I die so you can elevate some younger woman, I'm telling you, that's not going to happen, even as a ghost, I'd drag you, you old coot, down!"

The more Old Mrs. Mu spoke, the more outrageous and shameless she became.

Mr. Mu charged up and slapped her twice, making Old Mrs. Mu howl in pain.

"You... you dare hit me..."

"Hitting you is still light, if you dare to talk nonsense again, I'll tear your mouth..."

With the elders fighting, Huang Bitao dared not step in to mediate; she squatted on the ground, picked up the wooden basin, and dashed out.

Along the way, she didn't dare look back, fearing Old Mrs. Mu might catch up, or Mr. Mu might emerge to ask something of her.

She finally reached the kitchen doorway, only to encounter Mrs. Lin, who had sneaked some ginger from the salt jar.

Huang Bitao turned pale, her body trembling uncontrollably.

Usually, nothing good happens when she encounters her mother-in-law.

Upon seeing Huang Bitao, Mrs. Lin rolled her eyes, "Oh, I wondered who was holding a foot basin like it was a son, turns out it's you. What's wrong, can't have a son, so you want to replace him with a foot basin?"

Huang Bitao's face turned red.

Today, for some reason, everyone was talking about having children, but since marrying into the Old Mu Family, not to mention anything else, she hadn't even consummated her marriage with Mu Dalang.

If not consummated, how could she have a child?

But she couldn't discuss this with Mrs. Lin, nor with Old Mrs. Mu.

"Mother, I didn't. I'll first go give Grandmother the foot basin, then I need to prepare Da Lang's bed. Do you... do you have any more instructions?"

Mrs. Lin said, "What could I possibly instruct? I dare not offend you. Who are you, Huang Bitao, a fortunate person from Wang's Mansion.

This home's contributor, even if I don't care about the monk, I have to care about the Buddha, right? Otherwise, when your uncle and aunt come back, who knows how they'd discipline me."

"Mother, don't say that, I am your daughter-in-law, I belong to the second branch, if you want to beat or scold, it's up to you." Huang Bitao said timidly to Mrs. Lin.

"You understand then, in the future don't go wandering into other people's homes for no reason. I, Lin Xiaozao, don't want the daughter-in-law my son married turning her elbow outward."

Saying this, Mrs. Lin twisted her waist and returned to her room with a smug face.

Leaving Huang Bitao alone to clean up the mess.

In the kitchen, the pots weren't scrubbed, the bowls weren't washed, and the stove was covered in grease. The rags and leftover food were all thrown on the floor, the whole room was a mess.

Donning the apron from the kitchen, Huang Bitao prepared to wash the bowls and pots and wipe the tables with a bucket of cold water.

The rules of the Old Mu Family: No firewood in the earth stove could be used after finishing the three meals, Old Mrs. Mu would check the count daily.

Even now, as Old Mrs. Mu could not move due to her back injury, she instructed Mrs. Lin to check each day and report back.

Washing with cold water, wiping several times, yet the grease wouldn't come off.

Huang Bitao glanced at the firewood in the corner but dared not use it.

She looked outside at the sky; it wasn't too late yet, so the people from the third branch should not have slept.

Wiping her hands, she stepped into the cold wind heading towards the third branch.

At this moment, Mu Shuangshuang was in the kitchen with Lu Yuanfeng grinding beans, preparing to make tofu.

As the opening day of the restaurant approached, Mu Shuangshuang was busy raising funds for the renovation and simultaneously creating new dishes to attract new customers.

Tofu dishes were the first dish Mu Shuangshuang wanted to experiment with.

When Huang Bitao entered, Mu Shuangshuang had just finished grinding the beans and was ready to make tofu.

Seeing Huang Bitao, Mu Shuangshuang quickly went up to her.

"Sister-in-law, why are you here? Have you had dinner? I'm about to make tofu, would you like to stay and eat together?" Mu Shuangshuang said with a smile.

"No need... Shuangshuang, I'm here to borrow some hot water from you, the hot water in the kitchen has been used up for washing, and the pots are greasy, can't clean them with cold water."

"I see..." Mu Shuangshuang nodded, "I do have hot water, but it's inconvenient to carry it over! How about you wait a bit, I'll finish up here, and go with you." Mu Shuangshuang said.

After speaking, Mu Shuangshuang set up the tools previously prepared for making tofu.

There is a specific mold for making tofu, after filtering out the bean dregs, you need to pour the remaining soybean milk into a pot to cook.

As for the bean dregs, they can be set aside to feed the piglets Mu Dalang caught early in the morning tomorrow.

This time, Mu Dalang caught three piglets, not in his name, but in Mu Shuangshuang's name.

Not only this, from now on, any business he does in the village must be under Mu Shuangshuang's name.

The reason being, there are too many leeches in the Old Mu Family.

Chapter 923: He Never Touches Me

When Mu Dalang first started doing business, he told Mu Shuangshuang that he wasn't interested in the honors of the Old Mu Family.

All he wanted was to live a happy life with Huang Bitao.

Moreover, Mu Dalang and the three brothers from the Huang Family had sworn promises.

Within five years, he wanted to save enough silver to give Huang Bitao a respectable life at the Old Mu Family.

Mu Shuangshuang discussed with him and concluded that the best way was to quietly make a fortune.

All of Mu Dalang's money-making ventures would be done in Mu Shuangshuang's name, and to outsiders, Mu Shuangshuang would claim that she was paying Mu Dalang thirty coins a day to raise and slaughter pigs.

This way, it would be nine hundred coins a month.

Only half needed to be handed over to Old Mrs. Mu, and from the remaining four hundred and fifty coins, two hundred would be given to Mrs. Lin and Mu Dazhong.

"Shuangshuang, let me help you! I made tofu back at my parent's home too, and even carried it to the town to sell it. Unfortunately, at that time, I didn't know how to preserve it. By the time it reached town, the tofu had already gone bad."

When Huang Bitao spoke about tofu, the look in her eyes was filled with regret.

"It went bad? Bad tofu can be made into stinky tofu!" Mu Shuangshuang replied casually, not expecting to see Lu Yuanfeng and Huang Bitao's shocked expressions.

She realized the two gazes were fixed on her.

Mu Shuangshuang raised her head, looking innocently at the two, "Why are you staring at me? You can't possibly not have heard of stinky tofu, right?"

"No, Shuangshuang, is this something new?" Lu Yuanfeng grinned and asked.

"Hahaha, you really haven't heard of stinky tofu? Looks like heaven is good to me, Mu Shuangshuang is destined to make a fortune!"

What is stinky tofu? It's an indispensable snack in modern streets and alleys.

It smells bad but tastes delicious, and it's made from cheap tofu.

At the moment, Mu Shuangshuang was beside herself with excitement, while the two outsiders were still looking puzzled.

"Shuangshuang, the stinky tofu you're talking about, is it made from spoiled tofu?" Huang Bitao recalled Mu Shuangshuang's words and couldn't help asking.

"Yes! But there's no chance to make it for you today, wait a few days for the tofu to spoil, and then we can talk!"

After saying that, Mu Shuangshuang lit the fire and stuffed the firewood into the stove.

The bean water needed to be boiled at the right temperature, and after it's boiled, it needs brine.

With Huang Bitao's help, Mu Shuangshuang had plenty of time saved.

She only needed to light the fire and control the heat.

Because of Huang Bitao's presence, Lu Yuanfeng didn't have much to do.

He looked at Mu Shuangshuang with a contented smile: "Looks like I'm freeloading again today."

Mu Shuangshuang moved the fire tongs in her hand, rolling her eyes at Lu Yuanfeng: "You're dreaming, you'll have work to do later."

Seeing Mu Shuangshuang's expression, Lu Yuanfeng laughed heartily.

The bean water in the pot was almost done boiling, and Huang Bitao started adding the brine.

Seeing her adding the brine, Mu Shuangshuang was convinced she had truly been in the tofu business before.

Just as Huang Bitao had said, tofu really doesn't last long after being made.

The tofu made today has to be sold by tomorrow, otherwise, it will likely go bad.

If it's a hot day, a piece of tofu wouldn't last half a day.

"Shuangshuang, it's been so long since I did this. I really miss it. Thank you for letting me feel that way again." Huang Bitao said to Mu Shuangshuang as she busied herself at the stove.

"Haha, speaking of which, it's me who should thank Sister-in-law, you're helping me work."

The two girls chatted away, and the conversation ended up on the secrets of a daughter's home.

Lu Yuanfeng was discerning; he picked up a wooden bucket in the corner and said to the two, "I'll go to the village to fetch some water. You two keep chatting."

Mu Shuangshuang smiled and said to Lu Yuanfeng: "Fengzi, hurry back, later we'll have tofu pudding!"

After Lu Yuanfeng left, Huang Bitao's face suddenly turned gloomy, as if she hadn't been chatting with Mu Shuangshuang at all.

Mu Shuangshuang immediately sensed something was wrong, "Sister-in-law, if there's something you want to say, let me know. I'll help however I can.

Don't tell me... he's been troubling you again?"

By 'he,' Mu Shuangshuang meant Mu Dalian. It had only been a day since their big house left, yet Mu Shuangshuang hadn't found a chance to teach Mu Dalian and Hu Sheng a lesson.

Even the hibernating snake seemed stirred by her bedtime ramblings, ready to scare Hu Sheng, that little thief.

"No... it's not him. Uncle hasn't been home since the farewell party yesterday, he didn't even eat dinner last night."

Huang Bitao hesitated to admit that she thought it was quite nice right now, as long as Mu Dalian didn't return.

She didn't know that Mu Dalian had gone to town yesterday. He spent the money made from selling Old Lu Family's chickens and Wang Fugui's clothes during New Year, feasting and drinking, even finding a mistress in a brothel, planning to indulge in pleasure for a few days.

Once he runs out of money, he'll return to the Old Mu Family.

"Well, if it's not him, then let's not talk about him. Too much of a mood killer." Mu Shuangshuang said.

"Yes! Shuangshuang, there's something I need to tell you, but you mustn't share it with anyone, absolutely no one!" Huang Bitao said.

Normally, Huang Bitao rarely added "anyone" when speaking with Mu Shuangshuang.

Since marrying into the Old Mu Family, she had only done so twice, and with this incident, it was the third time.

The first time was when she suspected something between Mu Dade and Ruan Xiao Jiao, but feared wrongly accusing them.

The second time was about Mu Danian's affairs, and as for the third time, it still awaited her words.

"Go ahead, I'll keep your secret."

"Shuangshuang, I... I haven't consummated the marriage with Dalang yet." Huang Bitao said, blushing.

"Ah...!" In her excitement, Mu Shuangshuang broke the wooden stick she was holding into two pieces.

"Shuangshuang, do you find it embarrassing? Never mind, I won't say more."

Feeling annoyed, Huang Bitao regretted telling Mu Shuangshuang, who was still unmarried and a sheltered girl.

Telling her this tainted her ears.

"No... I don't feel embarrassed, just surprised! My cousin... shouldn't have a problem, right?"

Mu Shuangshuang, a modern woman, wasn't particularly taboo about this kind of thing.

Back in school, her roommates had shared anecdotes bound to blush.

Humans are inherently driven by desires and emotions, not reserved like nuns where this and that can't be spoken of.

But this was peculiar; newlyweds usually can't resist.

Could it be that Mu Dalang feels that Huang Bitao is too young, and waits a few years to approach her?

But that can't be right. Besides her own belief that women shouldn't get too involved before eighteen, most women here marry around the age of fourteen or fifteen.

They have no such mindset.

"I... I don't know." Huang Bitao shook her head.

"Since the wedding night, it's been like this. I can't figure it out, but several times, I felt Dalang was tempted, yet he always ended up backing away."

Chapter 924: Will He Be Willing to Move Out? (Part 1)

Women are naturally more sensitive than men.

They have a stronger perception of the things around them compared to men.

Because of this matter, Huang Bita has a knot in her heart, and she doesn't know who to discuss it with.

Her maiden family only has three brothers; she would never tell them something like this, even if she were forced.

At her husband's family, her mother-in-law and grandmother are not kind to her, so apart from Mu Shuangshuang, she really couldn't find anyone better suited to share her thoughts.

"Cousin-in-law, I think this issue could be big or small, perhaps cousin is considering your health and wants to wait until the weather is warmer to consummate the marriage."

Mu Shuangshuang herself felt that her words were nonsense.

But she had to say it that way.

Because anything is possible.

Huang Bitu was also hesitant, but the knot in her heart was already there, and it was really hard to smooth it over; if she didn't resolve it, she wouldn't know how to live.

"How about... you directly ask my cousin? You are husband and wife; you can discuss anything."

"Shuangshuang, today my grandmother and mother both asked about my belly, and I didn't dare say that Dalang hadn't touched me."

"Of course, you can't say that! This is between the two of you. If grandma and the second aunt find out, who knows what kind of spiteful things they might do."

Mu Shuangshuang could swear that if Huang Bitu let Mrs. Lin know about it today, Mrs. Lin would tell the whole village tomorrow, then criticize Huang Bitu.

"Or, you can ask my cousin if there's something wrong with him physically."

Mu Shuangshuang remembered that there was a time when her Sixth Uncle, Yu Liulang and Sixth Aunt Feng Xiaohua had some issues.

However, her Sixth Uncle was given impotence medicine by Li Juhua.

Mu Dalang shouldn't have anyone harming him because the worst two in the Old Mu Family are their second household.

A fierce tiger doesn't eat its own cubs, and even as bad as Second Uncle and Second Aunt are, they wouldn't harm their own son.

Huang Bitu is still pondering over what Mu Shuangshuang said. If Mu Dalang is really sick, she would take him for treatment, but she is most afraid that Mu Dalang regrets marrying her, a woman older than him.

If that's the case, Huang Bitu truly does not know what she could do.

"Cousin-in-law, the tofu jelly is ready, let's quickly scoop it up and make tofu!"

Mu Shuangshuang used a large wooden spoon to scoop the tofu jelly into the wooden basin on the stove, and then slowly poured it into the tofu mold.

When pouring tofu jelly, the motion must be gentle and consistent; otherwise, even if the tofu is made, its thickness will be uneven, and such tofu won't sell for a good price.

As Mu Shuangshuang busied herself, Huang Bitu couldn't dwell on the problem any longer.

She only remembered what Mu Shuangshuang said, to communicate with Dalang.

Perhaps it's just a small misunderstanding, and as husband and wife, nothing is unspeakable.

The tofu was ready, and Lu Yuanfeng fetched the water and returned.

In the pot, there's still some tofu jelly left, intentionally reserved by Mu Shuangshuang.

The three of them each had a bowl, and with what remained, Huang Bitā took a bowl for Mu Dalang. As for Mu Dashan and the others, because they went to bed early and tofu jelly has to be eaten fresh, they'll have to wait until tomorrow morning to eat tofu.

For Mu Dalang's tofu jelly, after Huang Bitā filled it with a large sea bowl, she covered it with another large sea bowl, and above that, placed a layer of cloth scalded in hot water, just in case the tofu jelly got cold when she walked out.

Lu Yuanfeng carried two buckets of hot water and followed Huang Bitā.

The two of them escorted Huang Bitā back to the Old Mu Family.

While Huang Bitā was delivering the tofu jelly, Mu Shuangshuang entered the Old Mu Family's kitchen. The mess in the kitchen was no different from a pigsty.

And all of this needs to be cleaned up by Huang Bitā alone.

"My mother used to have to clean these things up before she could go to bed," Mu Shuangshuang couldn't help but sigh.

Back then, Yu Si Niang would work as a cook during the day and come back at night to make meals for the whole family.

After everyone ate, they just wiped their mouths and didn't care about anything else.

Leaving Yu Si Niang, who had worked hard all day, to still do all the cleaning work.

Lu Yuanfeng knew that Shuangshuang was feeling sorry for Huang Bitā, so he bent down and offered, "Let's wash these. Later, we'll talk to Dalang about finding a solution."

Lu Yuanfeng was somewhat aware of the situation with the Old Mu Family.

Basically, the strong bully the weak and the elders oppress the juniors.

The fourth household may not bully others, but none of their words carry weight.

"I think it's difficult. Right now, my eldest cousin doesn't want to tear themselves away from the Old Mu Family, and he says his words wouldn't carry much weight with cousin-in-law," Mu Shuangshuang said.

"How about... Let your cousin-in-law follow Dalang to raise and feed pigs. Not being at home means these tasks wouldn't fall on her."

Part of why Huang Bitu is often ordered around is because she doesn't have much to do and is always at home.

Women who are at home are expected to do this and that.

Lu Yuanfeng's suggestion struck Mu Shuangshuang's heart.

If Mu Dalang really wanted to get into the pig farming business, he would certainly need to build a pigsty.

With a pigsty, they would definitely need someone to look after it, and Huang Bitu is indeed a good candidate.

In this way, even though they haven't split from the Old Mu Family, it would seem as if they were.

The only issue is that building a pigsty requires money, and the land is difficult to obtain.

The place where they built the private school was originally a residence; it wasn't too difficult to organize.

If Mu Dalang wanted to build a pigsty, he would have to open up new land and dig foundations, which would cost at least ten taels of silver to build.

"Fengzi, I just remembered something," Mu Shuangshuang said.

"What's that?" Lu Yuanfeng asked.

"Do you remember the dryland we bought in Tie Dao Village? My mother planted rapeseed on those drylands before the new year. During that time, she often chatted with the women in Tie Dao Village, and everyone got acquainted.

I also heard from my mother that the old Liu who sold us the land seems to have been taken by his daughter to Dahuo Village and might not come back anymore."

"Are you suggesting we build the pigsty at old Liu's place in Tie Dao Village?"

"Yes! His backyard has a vegetable plot, which is perfect for building a pigsty. Plus, we already have dryland there, so it would be convenient for Brother Dalang to go there.

There's also the fish pond; we dug up the silt before the new year, so we'll need to buy fry soon. When the fish grow bigger, someone will need to watch them.

In short, if Brother Dalang goes to Tie Dao Village, it would benefit both him and cousin-in-law, as well as us."

Mu Shuangshuang's analysis made Lu Yuanfeng think it might work.

But raising pigs is a dirty, smelly, and noisy affair—would the villagers allow someone from outside the village to do it there?

Lu Yuanfeng thought of the problem, and Mu Shuangshuang did too.

She said, "Then it depends on whether cousin is willing. In town, pork is fifteen wen per jin, but if someone from Tie Dao Village buys pork, he can charge fourteen wen, and if the villagers benefit, they naturally won't cause trouble."

Chapter 925: I Want a Child

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng were discussing their next steps while helping Huang Bitu wash pots and scrub dishes.

After Huang Bitu carried a bowl of tofu pudding back to her room, she decided to clear up something that had been on her mind.

"Da Lang, this tofu pudding is from Shuangshuang's house. I served you a bowl because you've worked hard these past few days."

Mu Dalang, having been busy all day with pig farming, had been up early and working late without resting.

From buying piglets to selecting the pig farm location, Mu Dalang had personally handled everything.

In just a single day, Mu Dalang appeared much more worn out.

He accepted the tofu pudding that Huang Bitu handed over, just about to drink it when he looked up to ask her.

"Did you have some?"

"Yes! I had some fresh from the pot. Hurry up and drink it while it's still good," urged Huang Bitu.

Mu Dalang downed the entire bowl of tofu pudding in one go.

After he finished, Bitu stepped forward to take the bowl.

But instead of returning the bowl, she kept her eyes fixed on Mu Dalang, looking thoughtful.

"What's wrong? Bita, is there something you want to tell me?"

Huang Bita, holding the bowl, thought for a moment before speaking, "Da Lang, there's something I want to discuss with you. I... I want to have a child."

It's not unreasonable for Huang Bita to want a child, considering the usual desires of newlyweds.

But ever since their wedding day, the two hadn't been intimate, so having a child wasn't realistic.

"Bita... could you give me some time? I... I want to think about having a child later."

Mu Dalang never expected Huang Bita to bring up the subject of children.

Regarding this matter, he had always had a burden on his mind.

The trouble in his heart wasn't about anything else; it was about the shadow outside their door every night.

Countless times, Mu Dalang had noticed that shadow.

Whenever he looked towards the door, he could see that shadow.

It pressed against the window, constantly staring at him and Huang Bita's room.

Many times, Mu Dalang had the urge to go out and see, but he never had the courage, fearing what might be outside the door could harm him and Huang Bita.

"Da Lang, be honest with me, alright? Do you... think I'm too old and regret marrying me?"

This was the answer Huang Bitā feared the most.

Even more than Mu Shuangshuang's suggestion that Mu Dalang had health problems, it scared her.

Initially, when Mu Dalang wanted to marry her, almost the entire Old Mu Family was opposed.

If it hadn't been for Shuangshuang, who came up with that plan, the two would never have come together.

Mu Dalang was stunned, looking at Huang Bitā with a face full of astonishment.

He didn't understand why Huang Bitā would say such things; deep down, he had never minded that she was older.

He had always felt that Huang Bitā was the bride he was looking for.

"Bitā, I don't know why you'd think that. But I want to say, I married you entirely because I love you as a person," Mu Dalang declared.

Huang Bitā replied, "If that's the case, why don't you touch me? Could it be that you really have a problem? Da Lang, tell me the truth, alright? If you are sick, we can... go see a doctor together. We can surely cure it."

"I'm not sick, really! Bitā, could you please give me some more time on this matter? I promise I'll take care of it."

Mu Dalang never dared to tell Huang Bitā about the shadow, fearing that he might frighten her.

"Da Lang, I'll be honest with you. Grandma cursed at me today! She called me a barren hen like my aunt and even kicked over the footwashing water I prepared for her.

And our mother, she also mentioned that since I married into the Old Mu Family, there's been no movement in my belly? Da Lang, I really don't know what to do anymore. Can you help me, please?

Aren't spouses supposed to be open with each other? I've told you everything that happened today, so please tell me what's on your mind, so we can face it together, alright?"

Looking at Mu Dalang, Huang Bitā's eyes were already brimming with tears.

Large teardrops hovered in her eyes, ready to fall at any moment.

"Don't cry... I'll tell, can't I?"

At this point, Mu Dalang realized that if he kept silent, it would be truly unfair to Huang Bitā.

He sighed and said, "I don't know if it's just my imagination. But every night, I feel there's a shadow outside our room.

It keeps watching us, observing our every move. Whenever I have the thought of being intimate with you... that shadow appears before me. I'm really scared..."

As the truth emerged, Huang Bitā couldn't quite believe it. The reason she had imagined all along wasn't the real reason.

Da Lang didn't dislike her for being older or regret marrying her.

Nor was it because Da Lang had any health problems.

Instead... it was a shadow.

At this moment, Huang Bitā didn't know how to handle the situation. She wanted to consult Mu Shuangshuang and get her advice.

"Da Lang, you rest for now! I'm going to return the empty bowl to the third branch and then come back."

Mu Dalang, seeing that Huang Bitā was going out, struggled to get up from the bed.

"I'll go with you."

But his hand was held down by Huang Bitā.

"No need, you rest! You've had a long day, and you have to go out early tomorrow. I'm just going for a bit and will be right back."

"Will you be alright by yourself?"

Mu Dalang indeed felt tired, and if he could rest immediately, it would be ideal.

"Of course, no problem! You can rest assured!"

Having said that, Huang Bitā took the bowl and headed in the direction of the third branch.

As she passed by the kitchen, she glanced inside and found Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng cleaning up.

By the time she entered the kitchen, the only thing left was to sweep the floor.

The pots, bowls, and stove in the kitchen were all cleaned and orderly.

"Wow, Shuangshuang, you and Fengzi, why did you finish everything? Didn't we agree that I would do it myself?"

Mu Shuangshuang smiled, "Fengzi and I happened to be free, so we finished it for you. Only the floor is left. Give me the bowl; I'll take it back myself."

Instead of immediately handing the bowl to Shuangshuang, Huang Bitā asked, "Shuangshuang, can you step out for a moment? I have something I'd like to discuss with you."

Mu Shuangshuang handed the broom to Lu Yuanfeng.

She followed Huang Bitā to the dining area where the family usually ate.

"Sister-in-law, did Brother Da Lang tell you something that you're uncertain about and want to ask me?"

Huang Bitā nodded, "Yes, your big brother said that the reason he hasn't been intimate with me is that he sees a shadow outside our room every night, watching us.

But I've never seen it. Do you think... do you think your big brother is possessed?"

Chapter 926:

"Possessed by evil spirits? Impossible! My cousin is a man of integrity; no filthy thing would dare approach him. Sister-in-law, don't scare yourself."

After all, it was ancient times, and deep down, everyone still believed in the existence of so-called ghosts and gods, including Huang Bitā.

Therefore, when Mu Shuangshuang was explaining, she did not stray from this general premise, lest it caused discomfort to Huang Bitā.

"Shuangshuang, you're right. Your big cousin has always been healthy, so it can't be possession, but how to explain that shadow? He said he sees it every night. Surely there isn't someone camping outside my room, right?"

These words from Huang Bita seemed to be directed at Mu Shuangshuang, but to Mu Shuangshuang, they sounded more like self-consolation.

Mu Shuangshuang frowned, thinking: Why would Mu Dalang claim to see a shadow, and see it every night? Could it be a hallucination?

If it wasn't a hallucination, could it be real?

Suddenly, she remembered that on the night Huang Bita and Mu Dalang married, Mrs. Lin from Old Mu Family cried out loudly about a thief.

At that time, the thief seemed to come from the direction of Mu Dalang and Huang Bita's bridal chamber, and the next day, her family's latrine looked like it had been bombed with firecrackers, with excrement everywhere.

It nearly made her sick to death.

Based on the filthy traces left on the ground at that time, Mu Shuangshuang felt that someone had fled to her family's latrine, afraid of being discovered, so they jumped into her latrine to hide from everyone's sight!

The more Mu Shuangshuang thought about it, the more she felt that this was likely what happened.

She said, "Bita, do you remember your wedding night? The commotion you heard in the bridal chamber at the time when Second Aunt called out about a thief.

Can you tell me roughly what hour it was and what happened? I suspect that the shadow Big Cousin sees is the thief from that night."

Huang Bitu had an impression of that incident too.

That night, she and Dalang were preparing to consummate their marriage, but because of the thief, Dalang rushed out, and in the end, she waited an entire night without Dalang returning, and she eventually fell asleep, leaving the consummation matter unresolved.

"Oh my God, could it be something so terrifying? What thief would lurk outside my and Dalang's door all the time?" Huang Bitu cried out in alarm.

"Perhaps, it wasn't a thief," Mu Shuangshuang said with a serious expression, and deep down, an answer was about to emerge.

"Sister-in-law, don't forget that at our Old Mu Family's banquets, whether for red or white events, the bride price collected is all kept by our grandma.

Even you and my Big Cousin as the ones involved don't know the amount or where the dowry is kept.

If it was really a thief, do you think they'd foolishly guard outside your and Big Cousin's room instead of risking it in grandma's room? I think the person's purpose for watching outside your room was not money at all."

"If not for money, then for what?" Huang Bitu was puzzled.

She was in a haze, completely unable to grasp the meaning of Mu Shuangshuang's words.

If not for money, what else would a thief be after?

"People!" Mu Shuangshuang replied. "Sister-in-law, don't think I'm scaring you, but I suspect... that so-called thief might be Fifth Uncle."

Besides Mu Danian, Mu Shuangshuang really couldn't think of anyone else so vile that they'd stake out and eavesdrop outside someone else's room.

Sure enough, Huang Bitā's body swayed and almost fell to the ground upon hearing Mu Shuangshuang's words.

If not for Mu Shuangshuang's timely support, Huang Bitā might have already fallen and cracked her head.

"Oh my God, why won't he let me go, why... sob..." Huang Bitā began to cry, heartbroken.

A woman, marrying into another family, with no kin or relatives.

The mother-in-law disliked her, would beat and humiliate her at will, and grandma insulted her with words, even suggesting she was having an affair with the grandfather...

Recalling these things, Huang Bitā nearly died of heartbreak.

Tears welled up and fell continuously.

Mu Shuangshuang felt distressed watching her, wondering if she should have refrained from telling Huang Bitā these things.

But if she didn't say anything, she genuinely feared Huang Bitā would suffer even more harm.

"Bitā... I know you feel hurt inside, and I'm aware that Grandma and Second Aunt don't treat you well.

Being a daughter-in-law in Old Mu Family is this miserable; look at my Big Aunt, she's a scholar's wife, yet my Big Uncle still engages in a secret love affair.

Grandma will still scold however she pleases. I'm telling you this not to make you despair, but to let you know that only by jumping out of this fiery pit can you live a better life. Only by resisting will you not be oppressed for a lifetime."

Mu Shuangshuang gently patted Huang Bitā's back.

"Look at my mother; although she doesn't hold a position in Old Mu Family, now that she doesn't rely on Old Mu Family for food and drink, Grandma can't do anything to her as long as she doesn't come over here."

"So you should learn from my mother, like our third branch, to become independent from Old Mu Family and live your own life," Mu Shuangshuang said.

Mu Shuangshuang's words moved Huang Bitā.

If they could separate, she wouldn't have to suffer her mother-in-law's unwarranted scolding, nor would she be ordered around by Old Mrs. Mu...

"But how should I do it? Shuangshuang, I'm not as capable as you. I can't earn money; all I can do is embroidery and handicrafts, cooking, and laundry.

But these are things every woman can do; I'm afraid if we leave Old Mu Family, Dalang and I will starve."

Mu Shuangshuang shook her head, "Have you forgotten that Big Cousin is currently preparing to raise pigs and butcher them?"

Huang Bitā sighed, "Shuangshuang, to be honest with you, the money that your Big Cousin has is not enough; the three piglets were borrowed.

Wang Erma's old sow was supposedly agreed upon to be given to us, but your Big Cousin hasn't paid yet, so no one knows how it will end up."

Deep down, Huang Bitā wasn't as clueless as she appeared.

She actually understood that although her husband wanted to accomplish something, without startup funds, what he wanted to do was far from easy.

"Sister-in-law, this should be discussed with Big Cousin, including the things Fifth Uncle did before.

As I said before, there should be honesty between husband and wife. Brother Da Lang is your husband, and when you face difficulties, it is only right for him to share these burdens."

In Mu Shuangshuang's view, this was probably the sorrow of the women of this era.

When trouble arose, the only person they could turn to was their own husband.

Unlike her, when something happened, she could take a wooden stick, by herself, and beat those who bullied her until they wet themselves, to the point where their parents wouldn't recognize them.

However, such a violent method was only suitable for her.

Women of this era generally lacked her kind of ferocity.

"Really... really need to find your Big Cousin?" Huang Bitao was still a bit hesitant.

"Of course, this matter can't be solved by anyone but Big Cousin," Mu Shuangshuang said.

Chapter 927: You're Too Naive

Encouraged by Mu Shuangshuang, Huang Bitao returned to her room, apprehensive.

She mustered her courage and explained everything to Mu Dalang.

As expected, Mu Dalang jumped up from the kang, and a loud clattering sound echoed in Mu Dalang's room.

"Beast... beast, I'm going to kill him, kill him...!" Mu Dalang yelled angrily.

Frightened, Huang Bitao hurriedly stepped forward to grip Mu Dalang's clothes, preventing him from waking the other members of the Old Mu Family who had already eaten and rested.

Mu Dalang clenched his fists tightly, the muscles on his face tense.

At this moment, Huang Bitao was teary-eyed, with tears continuously streaming down.

"Da Lang, it's my fault for this matter; I should have never married you!"

"Don't cry, Bitao, this isn't your fault—it's that beast's! Rest assured, I will certainly seek justice for you."

Mu Dalang said.

Thinking about the agony his wife suffered during this period made Mu Dalang wish to tear that beast to shreds.

"Big Cousin, how do you plan to resolve this matter and reclaim justice for Sister-in-law Bitao?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"I want to kill him, tear out his sinews, flay his skin, and make him understand the consequences of bullying Bitao."

Mu Shuangshuang shook her head, "Big Cousin, if you do this, before you manage to kill Uncle Five, Sister-in-law Bitao will be caught by Grandfather and Grandmother under the accusation of instigation.

By then, Mu Danian will be fine, but you and Sister-in-law Bitao will be the ones to suffer." Mu Shuangshuang said.

"Impossible! Mu Danian is the one who did wrong, how could we suffer?"

Even if this matter escalates and Grandfather, Grandmother, Father, and Mother know, they will surely side with me and Bitao."

Mu Dalang always believed that Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu would stand with him in such matters, even if they favored the first family and protected Mu Xiangxiang.

Likewise, his mother—no matter how much she dislikes Bitao—Bitao is her daughter-in-law, and Mu Dalang can't imagine that she wouldn't stand with him when outsiders bully Huang Bitao.

Mu Dalang's naivety greatly troubled Mu Shuangshuang.

Indeed, Mu Dalang, as a man, didn't understand how cruel this era could be to a woman.

A wife could be easily divorced or even sold.

Just like Lu Yuanfeng's mother back then, because of Lu Yuanfeng's father's gambling debts and his uncle needing to marry, for such trivial reasons, the Lu senior couple teamed up with Lu Yuanfeng's father to sell Lu Yuanfeng's mother.

Whenever she thought of these, Mu Shuangshuang felt a burning pain all over her body.

"Big Cousin, do you truly believe if Grandfather and Grandmother know about this, they would kill their son for a granddaughter-in-law like Bitao?"

Wives can be found again, but what about sons? Moreover, Grandfather and Grandmother, to protect Old Mu Family's reputation, might ask you to divorce Bitao.

Even if consistently siding with you and Sister-in-law Bitao benefits the first family, they will surely find an excuse to imprison Sister-in-law Bitao, preventing anyone from contacting her." Mu Shuangshuang said.

Mu Dalang couldn't believe what Mu Shuangshuang said; he turned to Huang Bitao for confirmation. But the look in Huang Bitao's eyes clearly told him Mu Shuangshuang was right.

If the matter escalated, they would be the ones to suffer.

"Why, when Bitao wasn't the one who did wrong, does she have to face punishment?"

"Big Cousin, don't you understand the misery of being a woman? As long as it involves a man, even if you're right, in the end, you'll be deemed wrong.

Do you believe that Grandfather and Grandmother, who value the Old Mu Family's reputation so much, would let you do something to ruin it?"

Mu Dalang was almost going mad with anger; he stomped fiercely on a nearby chair.

The chair snapped in two with a loud clatter, clearly showing his immense rage!

He said: "This doesn't work, that doesn't work, then what should I do? Should I let that beast go?"

"Who said we're letting that beast go?" Mu Shuangshuang sneered; she had long thought of a way to deal with Mu Danian but lacked the opportunity to implement it.

"Shuangshuang, do you have a solution? Please help Bitao and me; in the next life, Mu Dalang will repay your kindness even if it means being a beast of burden."

Mu Dalang finished speaking and was about to kneel before Mu Shuangshuang, but Mu Shuangshuang held him back.

"Alright, enough talk about repayment; let's not mention it. In my opinion, this matter should be handled covertly, not openly.

Tonight, we will keep watch outside to see if the shadow that comes every night is really Mu Danian!"

-

Inside Mu Dalang and Huang Bitao's room, they kept watch for most of the night but didn't see any sign of the so-called shadow. It was then Mu Shuangshuang remembered what Huang Bitao had said during the day: since Mu Dade's farewell party, Mu Danian hadn't been seen at the Old Mu Family.

He hadn't even had dinner at home tonight.

Mu Shuangshuang cursed herself for being too stupid; she gathered Mu Dalang and Lu Yuanfeng and went to Mu Danian's room.

Sure enough, he wasn't in the room.

The room was in disarray; clothes were strewn everywhere, leftover bones and various trash littered the place; Mu Danian's room resembled a garbage dump.

A strong smell of urine filled the room, and upon closer inspection, an awkwardly placed chamber pot in the corner had presumably been there for ages.

Mu Shuangshuang rolled her eyes, her disdain for Mu Danian deepening.

"Shuangshuang, what should we look for?" Mu Dalang asked, pinching his nose.

"Search for feathers, and check if there are any clothes that don't belong to Uncle Five."

Searching for feathers, of course, because Mu Danian and Hu Sheng stole chickens from Old Lu Family; having touched the chickens, it's likely some feathers were left behind.

As for clothes, Mu Shuangshuang had seen a piece of clothing in Old Wang Family's yard: soft in texture and seemingly Wang Fugui's.

Therefore, Mu Shuangshuang speculated that Mu Danian also stole Wang Fugui's clothes to sell. He wouldn't take chickens home, but surely clothes.

"Found it, I found..." Mu Dalang suddenly exclaimed.

"What did you find?" Mu Shuangshuang approached.

Mu Dalang shook a purse in his hand, "This thing definitely doesn't belong to Uncle Five; I've never seen it before. Shuangshuang, take a look."

Mu Shuangshuang took the purse and inspected its fabric, finding it somewhat familiar.

While pondering, Lu Yuanfeng reminded her, "This embroidered pouch, I've seen at Old Wang Family's niece Shen Rong's; it's Old Wang Family's."

Mu Shuangshuang's impression of Shen Rong stayed from when Wang Fugui became a vegetable and she diligently helped Wang Fugui's father handle affairs.

However, since then, Shen Rong hadn't appeared in Er Gui Village; there was minimal interaction between Mu Shuangshuang and her.

"Thus, there's evidence proving Uncle Five was indeed the thief that night before New Year's Eve."

Chapter 928: Damn Bastard

"The thief the night before New Year's Eve? Shuangshuang, are you saying that Fifth Uncle was the one who stole the chickens from the Old Lu Family and also the one who injured Old Master Wang?"

Mu Dalang shouted in surprise.

This incident was quite a big deal at the time, but since it was the New Year, everyone said to wait until after the holiday to find the thief and then report to the government.

However, after the New Year, he was preoccupied with his elder uncle's exam matters, and nobody in the village mentioned the incident again.

If Mu Shuangshuang hadn't mentioned it, Mu Dalang certainly wouldn't have known that it was Mu Danian who did it.

"Yes! But there were two thieves, Fifth Uncle was just one of them."

"That beast, truly wicked, stealing from villagers and even daring to hurt people! In my opinion, he should be sent to the government and spend his life in prison!" Mu Dalang cursed angrily.

Ever since knowing what Mu Danian had done, Mu Dalang refused to even call him Fifth Uncle.

He just called him a beast, a beast.

Regardless of family hierarchy, he only knew that anyone who dared to touch his wife deserved to die.

After leaving Mu Danian's room, Mu Dalang and Huang Bitu returned to their room, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng each returned to their respective places, one to the third branch, and the other to the Old Lu Family house.

By now, it was already very late.

If the third branch's house wasn't lacking space, Mu Shuangshuang really wouldn't feel at ease letting Lu Yuanfeng walk the night road alone.

Seeing Lu Yuanfeng to the gate, Mu Shuangshuang still felt reluctant.

Lu Yuanfeng felt the same, but unfortunately, with the night being so dark, he couldn't see the expression on Mu Shuangshuang's face.

"Are you... are you reluctant to go back?" Mu Shuangshuang asked foolishly.

Lu Yuanfeng didn't want his feelings so easily guessed by Shuangshuang, so he nodded, blushing.

"Yes!"

Mu Shuangshuang chuckled secretly, she knew it wasn't just her who felt reluctant.

"Fengzi, once we make money, let's build a big house, with front and back yards, so both our families can live together." Mu Shuangshuang said.

Lu Yuanfeng was stunned and didn't regain his composure for a while.

"What's wrong? Do you feel the goal is very far-reaching and hard to achieve?" she asked.

Lu Yuanfeng shook his head, "No, I just hope this day arrives sooner, without having to wait too long."

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng were just starting out; making money wasn't too difficult, but everything had to be done step by step.

Accumulating bit by bit, this process could be long or short; nobody knew if the future would be good or bad.

However, Lu Yuanfeng always felt a heavy responsibility on his shoulders.

"Haha, it will come soon! People say that when wealth comes, nothing can stop it. Maybe tomorrow, something unexpectedly good will happen." Mu Shuangshuang laughed.

"I dare not think of unexpected good fortune falling from the sky, I'd rather take it step by step, just like when Shuangshuang refused the tavern contract offered by Old Mrs. Xue, saying those words."

Rely on oneself to live the life one wants.

Lu Yuanfeng remembered what was said, making Mu Shuangshuang very happy.

However, it was indeed getting late; if they chatted any longer, it would be dawn.

"Fengzi, you better go home soon, Yuanbao is alone at home, which may not be safe." Mu Shuangshuang urged.

Lu Yuanfeng listened to Mu Shuangshuang's clear voice, her image repeatedly playing in his mind.

He chuckled, escorting Mu Shuangshuang to her house, ensuring she locked the doors and windows before turning to leave.

-

The next day, Mu Danian, who had been missing for two days, finally appeared, chewing on a foxtail, his walk a bit unsteady, presumably due to spending too long in a place of warmth and comfort.

His appearance immediately drew Mu Dalang's angry glare.

If not for Huang Bitu signaling him with her eyes, Mu Dalang would have charged forward to smash Mu Danian's head.

"Yo, Da Lang, where are you and your wife heading?"

Since they met outside the yard with Mu Dalang and Huang Bitu looking ready to head out, Mu Danian asked them.

Mu Dalang rolled his eyes, pulling Huang Bitu along to ignore Mu Danian, heading straight to the third branch.

"Hey, this little bastard, acting crazy, doesn't respond when I talk; did that sly Huang Bitu tell him what I did?"

Mu Dalang rubbed his chin with his thumb, pondering the direction Mu Dalang left, muttering to himself.

But soon, he refuted the thought.

"Impossible, if Da Lang knew this sly little dame had been touched by me, wouldn't he have divorced her immediately? It's definitely that little dame who whispered in his ear when I wasn't around last night, telling him not to talk to me."

Once this thought cleared, Mu Danian felt he needed to find an opportunity to teach Huang Bitu a lesson.

Mu Dalang, trembling with anger, brought Huang Bitu to the third branch and immediately told Mu Shuangshuang about the incident.

Last night, before returning home, Mu Shuangshuang had instructed that if they wanted to handle the situation perfectly, they must never confront Mu Danian directly; if they did, it had to be secretly, in a stealthy manner.

For example, putting him in a sack, just never letting Mu Danian know it was Mu Dalang who did it.

"Shuangshuang, I saw that beast; I didn't hit him, but if I see him again, I will beat him to death." Mu Dalang said.

"Big brother, don't be angry just yet; tonight... when night comes, we'll settle accounts, alright?"

Last night was a missed opportunity since Mu Danian wasn't around.

Now that Mu Danian was back, there would definitely be action tonight.

Moreover, since Mu Dalang's attitude was clearly bad when he just saw him, Mu Danian would surely try to find out the reason.

This man is very clever.

"Shuangshuang, whatever you want me to do, just tell me; I'll listen to you, as long as you let me hit him!" Mu Dalang said.

"Then we'll do it like this..."

—

At lunch, Mu Danian's return added some color to the dining table.

Mr. Mu asked a few questions about where Mu Danian had been the past two days before instructing to start the meal.

Suddenly, Mu Danian noticed the chair beside Huang Bitu was empty, and Mu Dalang was also absent.

He casually asked Huang Bitu, "Da Lang's wife, why isn't Da Lang here for the meal? I saw him this morning."

Huang Bitā's hand trembled as she held her chopsticks, forcing a smile, she said, "I... Da Lang went to help Shuangshuang, went to Dahuo Village to buy piglets."

Mu Danian knew Dahuo Village; his second sister Mu Zhenzhen's first husband's family was from there.

Going back and forth takes quite some time.

"Then Da Lang won't be back tonight?" Mrs. Lin also asked.

"Yes! Da Lang said he'd stay at a place Shuangshuang arranged, and return early tomorrow morning." Huang Bitā said.

"I knew it, that damned girl is up to no good; during the New Year, letting my son stay outside, I curse, she's a wretched thing!" Mrs. Lin cursed.

Mr. Mu frowned, "Second daughter-in-law, can't you keep your mouth shut while eating? Later, go serve your mother tea!"

Chapter 929: Fists Like Raindrops (Part 3)

Upon hearing that she had to serve tea to Old Mrs. Mu, Mrs. Lin panicked: "I won't go, Dad. Ever since Mom hurt her back and lay on the bed, she's been like a rabid dog.

Whoever she catches, she curses. This morning, when I brought breakfast, she almost flayed my skin off."

"Second daughter-in-law, are you actually speaking like a human being? What do you mean she's like a rabid dog? Would you dare to say that in front of her?" Mr. Mu asked.

Mrs. Lin quickly explained: "Dad, that's not what I meant. I was... I was just saying that Mom's been in a bad temper lately. If you ask me to bring her tea, aren't you sending me to my death?"

Even though I'm merely your daughter-in-law, you should still treat me a little better."

Mr. Mu was furious.

"Fine, second daughter-in-law. If delivering tea is such a big deal that you'd rather die, then I'll just have someone else do it."

"Bita..." Mr. Mu was about to call Huang Bita, but then recalled how Old Mrs. Mu had used Huang Bita as an excuse during a previous argument.

"Danyan, you've been away for days, your mom must miss you. You should take care of the tea delivery, and greet her too so she won't worry."

Mu Danian nodded hastily: "Dad, leave it to me, don't worry."

After lunch, Huang Bita stayed in the dining hall to clean up, and Mu Danian deliberately lingered to catch a moment alone with her.

Tonight, with Mu Dalang absent, as an uncle, he needed to properly look after his nephew's wife.

"Bita, with Da Lang not around tonight, if you're scared, remember to call Uncle Wu." Mu Danian said.

Huang Bita's eyes turned red with anger instantly.

She cursed, "Get out! Get out, or I'll call for help."

Only then did Mu Danian reluctantly stand up.

"Don't be upset, I'm leaving, I'm leaving right away." With those words, Mu Danian indeed left.

Huang Bitu stood there trembling with rage. If not for the night's major plan, she certainly wouldn't have managed.

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At night, Mu Shuangshuang and Huang Bitu were ambushed inside the house, while Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Dalang were outside.

The two found piles of straw as cover, hiding themselves, waiting quietly for Mu Danian to arrive.

Time passed for quite a while, with Mu Danian not showing up, during which Huang Bitu several times considered going out to call Mu Dalang inside, fearing he'd freeze. If not for Mu Shuangshuang accompanying her, her patience would have worn thin.

"Shuangshuang, it's so late, do you think he'll still come?" Huang Bitu asked.

"Of course he will, as long as it's Mu Danian, as long as he harbors intentions towards you." Mu Shuangshuang replied.

"But, Shuangshuang, I'm scared!" Huang Bitu said.

Mu Shuangshuang held her hand gently and comforted her: "Don't be afraid, I'm here! Besides, Fengzi and cousin are outside.

They'll handle whatever happens, we're safe inside the house."

Although speaking as such, Huang Bitu remained anxious, having to take several deep breaths to calm herself slightly.

Finally, just as Huang Bitu was running out of patience, there was movement outside.

A dark figure appeared outside the door, just as Mu Dalang had described before.

First it wandered around Mu Dalang and Huang Bitā's house, then pressed close against the door and window, seemingly eavesdropping.

Additionally, Huang Bitā felt the shadow dip a finger in saliva and poke a hole in the window.

Huang Bitā grew increasingly tense...

Outside, Mu Danian withdrew his index finger and dipped it back in his mouth, intending to enlarge the hole in the window.

Suddenly, he realized his actions were a complete waste of time!

Da Lang wasn't even home, so what was he afraid of?

Mu Danian suddenly let out a chilling laugh, adding a layer of horror to the dark night.

Huang Bitā started to clutch Mu Shuangshuang's hand, extremely frightened, even knowing there were people outside, she was still scared.

"Bitā, are you asleep?" Mu Danian feigned lowering his voice, creating a scary atmosphere, as he greeted Huang Bitā.

Huang Bitā naturally didn't respond.

Mu Danian straightened up and pushed at the door; when it wouldn't open, he took out a prepared cleaver and slashed at the latch, easily opening it.

The cleaver was tossed into the yard, and he leisurely walked into Mu Dalang's room.

Inside was pitch black, visibility zero.

Yet, one could barely discern the position of the bed, vaguely making out a person on it.

Mu Danian emitted that strange laugh again, the sound was extremely piercing.

Mu Danian thought Huang Bitu was deeply asleep, so his footsteps grew louder!

At that moment, Mu Danian felt heaven was being kind to him, after such a long wait, he finally had the chance for a close view of Da Lang's wife.

But...

"Why's it like this? Is there really no one?" Mu Danian murmured.

"Impossible, there was a cough!"

Suddenly, a burlap sack dropped from above, tightly covering Mu Danian's head.

Then another cough was heard.

A torrent of sticks rained down on Mu Danian's body.

Mu Danian cried out in pain, shouting: "Bitu, Bitu, what are you doing? It's me, I'm your Uncle Wu."

"Uncle Wu? Hmph, why are you in my room?" Huang Bitu asked.

"I... I just came to check on you, release me quickly, I have something to say." Mu Danian tried to persuade Huang Bitu to free him.

"Say something? In the middle of the night? Coming into my room?" Huang Bitu sneered.

"No, listen to me explain, I... ow... it hurts so much."

Before Mu Danian finished speaking, Mu Shuangshuang swung a wooden stick at his lower back, Mu Danian felt his waist split into two, his mouth releasing howls of pain once more.

Chapter 930: Reaping What You Sow

The burlap sack was taken off, and Mu Danian saw a bit of light. Just as he wanted to lean closer to see who had hit him with the stick, a pair of smelly socks were stuffed into his mouth.

His eyes were stabbed by something unknown, causing him to close them in pain.

Mu Danian finally couldn't shout out loud, but the muffled "woo woo" sounds continued, becoming increasingly intense.

"Damned beast, today I'm going to... beat you to death!" Huang Bitu shouted nervously.

"Woo woo..." Mu Danian cried for help from his mouth.

In his heart, he already realized he had fallen for this girl's trick!

But he realized it too late, with his mouth stuffed with disgusting smelly socks. The sounds he made were all indistinct "woo woo", impossible to wake up anyone from the Old Mu Family.

No one would save him.

Mu Daniaan felt deep regret in his heart, almost turning his guts green with remorse.

If he'd known, he would have shouted earlier, his parents would have found out. At most, he'd get beaten, which would be better than being taught a lesson by this girl now.

Outside the house, Mu Dalang and Lu Yuanfeng rushed in after hearing the second coughing signal.

Inside the room, dimly lit by an oil lamp, two women used all their strength to beat Mu Daniaan viciously.

The two men exchanged a glance, then charged ahead without hesitation, throwing punches.

The men's fists were much heavier than the women's, and after a few punches, Mu Daniaan wailed loudly in pain, feeling as if his bones were breaking.

The tone of his cries was all begging for mercy.

But with anger dominating their thoughts, how could the men easily let Mu Daniaan go?

Mu Dalang's fist was as hard as iron, landing a punch on Mu Daniaan's chin with a crack, knocking out one of his teeth.

A mouthful of blood was spat out along with the smelly socks.

"Mu Daniaan, you beast, bet you didn't expect it? Today was my setup, I wanted to see what shameless thing you could do."

"I really didn't expect you to eavesdrop outside my and Bitan's room every night, you shameless thing. Watch me cripple you today."

"Dare to harass Bitan, dare to peep again, and I'll gouge your eyes out to kick!"

Mu Dalang spat on Mu Danian's face, and slapped him twice, sounding like thunder.

Mu Shuangshuang was stunned, she could easily guess that those slaps must've been extremely forceful.

Lu Yuanfeng feared Mu Shuangshuang might get hurt by accident, so he carefully helped her off the kang, shielding her behind him.

Mu Danian's snot and tears flowed out, begging for mercy and kneeling.

"Da Lang, I'm your uncle, you can't kill me. If you kill me, you'll end up in the government."

"I know I was wrong, I swear I'll never touch Bitu again, I was wrong..."

From the moment he heard Da Lang's voice, Mu Danian knew he'd offended a fierce god today.

He must protect his own life, he can't just be beaten to death like this.

Mu Danian cried pitifully, his voice grew louder, so Mu Dalang slapped his hand down.

"Shut your mouth! Bitu's name, do you dare shout it?"

Mu Danian didn't dare shout anymore, only issued muffled cries akin to a beast's lament.

Seeing this bloody scene, Huang Bitu couldn't bear to watch, she tugged on Da Lang's sleeve: "Don't kill him, let's forget it!"

This plea, to Mu Danian, was undoubtedly a lifeline.

Mu Danian began pleading with Huang Bitā: "Bi... Da Lang's wife, I know I was wrong, please beg Da Lang for mercy, I won't have improper thoughts about you anymore."

"Da Lang's wife, save me, or it's going to turn fatal..."

Feeling a twinge of pity, Huang Bitā was about to plead, but Mu Shuangshuang behind Lu Yuanfeng kicked Mu Danian in the chest.

Mu Danian fell directly to the ground, and Da Lang sat on him, continued beating him.

The sounds lasted for half the night, only when Mu Danian's cries grew quieter did Da Lang finally stop.

He had exhausted a lot of energy tonight, just beating alone had made his arms feel unable to lift.

His throat was dry and hoarse now, but none of that mattered compared to getting justice for his wife, Huang Bitā.

"That's enough, what should we do next?" Da Lang somewhat regained his composure and asked Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang initially wanted to strip him and throw him at the village entrance, but it's only the first month, the weather is freezing, if a whole night passes in the cold and he loses his life, that would be over.

A lesson is one thing, she didn't want to cause a death, nor did she want this matter to trouble Da Lang and Huang Bitā.

"Throw... throw him back into his own room! Tomorrow morning, once he wakes up, Brother, take that sachet to threaten him, along with the contract I prepared, make sure he signs it.

Tell him if he even dares to have any crooked thoughts, the sachet and contract will be sent to the county government office, and he'll rot in prison."

"Okay, I'll do it right away!"

Da Lang took the sachet, and, like picking up a chick, picked up Mu Dania's body and left the room. When he returned, it was already late into the night.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng prepared to leave.

Once the two left, Huang Bitu threw herself into Da Lang's arms.

"Da Lang, it turns out you really weren't lying before, there was a shadow outside our house." Huang Bitu said fearfully.

Not only was Huang Bitu scared, Mu Dalang was scared too, just thinking about how Mu Dania squatted outside his house like a ghost every night, wanting to listen to their bedroom activities, made him feel utterly disgusted.

At this moment, Da Lang regretted not kicking him more.

"Bitu, don't be afraid anymore, that beast has learned his lesson, he won't dare come to our house again." Da Lang placed his hand on Huang Bitu's head, gently stroking her hair.

The light touch of skin made Huang Bitu feel safe.

Fear gradually dissipated...

Huang Bitu looked up at the man before her.

Under the dim oil lamp, the man's facial features were slightly delicate, with distant mountain-like eyebrows, almond-shaped eyes, a face without excess meat, not the rugged tough man type.

Even back then, her three brothers didn't want to marry her off to this man.

The family was just one of the reasons, the other was Mu Dalang's physique.

Healthy though he was, compared to those big tall men over eight feet, with bodies full of muscles, Mu Dalang was not impressive.

Doing farm work certainly didn't seem as good as those strong men.

But Huang Bitu just liked him, just liked someone like him.

"Da Lang, tonight, hold me while we sleep, that way I... won't be scared anymore..." Huang Bitu spoke nervously.