

Chapter 951: The Old Bachelor in The Village

She limped and hobbled forward. As she walked more, her leg would easily feel some pain, but she could still find it tolerable. But, when she was about to reach the place, she was blocked by a person.

She looked up. With the wind blowing everywhere and snow filling the whole sky, her eyes were slightly blurry. She blinked a few times which melted a few snowflakes and moistened her eyelashes.

When she saw clearly the person in front of her, she lowered her head again and walked past the man with the firewood on her back.

“I don’t think you can survive any longer.” The man said with the accent of the local dialect. It sounded much like Mandarin even with the accent, but it was not difficult to understand.

Yan Huan did not stop. It was not for other people to say whether she could survive or now. She had fallen into the Sea River and survived it. She did not believe that she could not survive now that she had food to eat, water to drink and a place to live in.

“You might as well stay with me. At least, you can live.”

The person behind her spoke another sentence again. His tone held a hint of annoyance within as if he was offering Yan Huan a mouthful of food to eat out of charity, unlikely to go so far as to let her starve to death here.

Yan Huan was still walking forward. She stepped on the snow-covered ground with one deep and one shallow footprints. She also left behind a long series of footsteps. The wind blew her hair from time to time, and also added some white snowflakes on her.

The snow was pure white but also icy cold.

The snow continued to fall on her body. Her hair, shoulders, as well as her face, were still so cold and indifferent. At the end of that line of footprints, a man around thirty years old stood there. He was skinny like a monkey and his forehead was full of wrinkles. His eyes were small like two green beans and his mouth was also turned downwards. Coupled with a mouth full of yellowed teeth, his appearance was so disgusting. And at the mention of a monkey, he really looked like a monkey.

He was the oldest bachelor in the village, aged about thirty years old. He was called Jin Gen. His family was the similar as Changsheng’s, with only a widowed mother and no children nor wife. He lived in a run-down house. He was ignorant and incompetent. He only dallied with women all the time and did not tend to his fields properly. It was all thanks to that old mother of his that he could survive. If it had not been for his old mother, he could not have survived in this way. It would be strange if he did not die.

Jin Gen’s family was poor, his character was also not good, and he was ugly looking. Even if the village had a really ugly woman, she would rather be married to a one-legged mute person than to marry such an old bachelor like Jin Gen. Of course, it would be impossible for a family with a daughter to want such a son-in-law. As a result, Jin Gen was more than thirty years old and still had not found a wife until now. Even though he was said to be thirty years old and still considered young in other places, it was different

in the village. A thirty-something year old man who did not marry a wife, would really become an old bachelor whom no one wanted and the old bachelor in the village was quite a disgrace.

Yan Huan opened the door and the house had cut off the cold air outside. All of a sudden, she felt much warmer. She piled all the firewood she picked up on the edge of the window. Not only would it help her block the cold wind from outside, it could also dry the firewood so that it was much more convenient when she wanted to use the firewood.

Well, when she stood up and walked to the front of the broken window, she reached her hand over and touched the window, which was recently secured with nails. The window was nailed shut and several pieces of wooden board were nailed over it. Although it could be said that it reduced the light some, it also blocked out the outside wind. No wonder, she felt it was not as cold.

Who had helped her to nail the window properly? She crouched down and piled the firewood well. There was still enough time. She would go out again in a while. Anyway, she was not like she had something to do and there was nothing entertaining here to do. She would pick up more wood to give herself an additional buffer.

As for the person who nailed the window, it should be Changsheng, who treated her the best in the village. The rice, noodles and other necessities at her place were all secretly given to her by Changsheng. But she could not accept other people's good intentions without reason and a peace of mind.

No one would be nice to her unconditionally. Moreover, she had already owed him a debt for saving her life. As for the rest, she still did not know how to repay.

It was easier to pay back a debt of money, but it was difficult to repay a favor.

She touched her face. She did not know how ugly she was at the moment, but she must not look good and she also had this lame leg. She did not think that there would still be a man who would like her.

With her current appearance of a disfigured face and crippled leg, it might not be a bad thing for Yan Huan. If she had her face from before, then, in fact, it was not hard for her to imagine what her life would be like in such a quiet mountainous village with a bunch of old bachelors who could not get a wife.

And with her face being like this, she thought no one would pay her any notice and have ideas about her. She only had to wait until the beginning of Spring for someone to come to the mountains. When the time came, she would find a way for her to definitely leave the mountains. She must go back, she wanted to go home.

At this time, the snowfall outside seemed to be getting heavier. That series of footprints, which extended from a distance was finally covered by the snowflakes once again. It was as if no one had ever walked on it like it was still an untainted world.

Jin Gen went back to his house and directly walked into the kitchen. He opened the pot and took out a bowl from inside to start wolfing down noisily. He continuously stuffed rice into his mouth. His pair of beady eyes also endlessly gleamed. Even if he opened his green bean sized eyes wide, they would not look too big. And now as he narrowed his eyes, he looked like he only had slits for eyes.

Whenever Jin Gen's mother saw her old son, she would cry all the time and was about to cry her eyes out. He was thirty years old and also an old bachelor. Once she had a foot in the grave and was no longer around, what was her old son going to do? He did not even have a child for the future.

Jin Gen finished stuffing his face with the meal. He wiped his mouth and dropped the bowl on the table. Then, he just went to sleep on the heated brick bed. Because they were Northerners, so the people in the mountains had heated brick common beds in their houses. Once it was heated in the winter, it would be warmer than anything else.

As he laid on top of the stove in his house, he tossed and turned and could not sleep. He thought to himself that the woman had curves of a woman's figure and was really not bad. And there was the snow-white skin all over her body. He felt itchy in his heart just thinking about it. Although it could be said that her face was ugly, it could not be helped. After all, she was still a woman and also young. Perhaps she would be better after she took off all her clothes.

He did not know how a woman felt like despite growing so old. Although he was a bachelor, he had also secretly stayed outside other people's houses and heard other couples do that thing. He certainly wanted to, and his heart was itchy. He dreamt of it and wanted to have a woman at night to do that kind of thing with. But his family was poor and no one in the village was willing to be with him, not to mention outside the village.

Chapter 952: A Thief

A lady finally showed up. Although she was ugly and limping, he did not mind since he would not be able to see anything after the lights went off.

Also, no one would want a woman like that. It would be better if she followed him.

He got up in the middle of the night and put on his clothes. His elderly mother was still sleeping soundly despite all the noises he made.

Jin Gen opened the door and ran outside while wrapping the cotton top around his body. The rustling sound he made while stepping on the snowy ground might frighten anyone this late at night.

He habitually ran to another house and climbed over the wall. As he hid outside of the house, he saw that the lights were still on and heard someone speaking.

It sounded like a man and a woman were chatting. The voices should belong to the newlywed couple from the Hu family because this house belonged to them. The woman, who was the goddess of the village, ended up getting married to this man from the Hu family. Nonetheless, it made total sense because the Hu family was rich and owned a lot of land. On top of that, the husband was good-looking and young. Any smart woman would choose to get married to someone from the Hu family.

Jin Gen thought he was not that bad compared to the man. In his opinion, this lady must be blind to not choose him as her partner.

The lights suddenly went off. Jin Gen got nervous and rubbed his hands subconsciously. The noises inside changed. They started taking off their clothes, kissing each other and so on.

It was normal for the newlyweds to do so and of course, they did not hold back. The moaning was so loud that Jin Gen's body turned numb and his lower parts tensed.

After a while, the noise reduced and could hardly be heard anymore.

He rested his ear against the window and pushed to open the window slightly to hear them better. However, he stumbled over the boulder he was stepping on and fell to the side.

With a thump, he fell onto the ground and hit his head on the boulder. He groaned from the pain and frightened the people inside the house.

It became chaotic in an instant. The people inside the house thought he was a thief although burglary never happened in this rustic village.

However, no one was comfortable with the fact that there was a thief in the village.

Of course, the most suspected person was definitely the only outsider who was carried back by Changsheng – the lady who was living in the damaged house outside the village.

Yan Huan had no idea that she was a theft suspect just because she was an outsider. However, she did notice that the whole village was being xenophobic to her.

She woke up in the middle of the night. Since the windows were nailed shut, no wind could enter and she felt much warmer than before.

The house was warmed up because of the stove. She thought the house would be warmer if it was smaller. Moreover, she had to leave some space over the window for air ventilation. She would rather freeze than get poisoned by carbon monoxide from the stove.

She lifted the blanket, walked to the stove and added more firewood to it. On top of the stove was a kettle – she would have warm water to use and drink when she woke up in the morning.

She went back to bed after adding firewood and tugged herself in the blanket. The atmosphere was still humid because of the weather. It had been snowing since she arrived and she had never seen the sun. Moreover, the damaged house had leakages everywhere which made it even more humid.

She sighed lightly and lied down again. She rolled herself up into a ball because that was the only way she could keep herself warm.

She should sleep because she needed to wake up in the morning to collect more firewood. Days like this seemed not as hard to pass. She thought to herself that she could endure and bear with it.

As the days passed, she would be closer to going home and closer to staying alive.

She fell asleep and dreamed about Lu Yi making her food. He made her favorite dishes and also his favorite meat.

She picked up the chopsticks to take a piece of meat. However, Su Qingdong slapped the back of her hand forcefully when she was about to take a bite. Her fingers jerked and the meat fell on the floor instantly. She stared at the piece of meat tearily, her heart ached.

Tears started streaming down her face.

The sky was already bright when she opened her eyes. She touched her face and smiled wryly. It was just a dream, which explained why there were meat and dishes. Anyway, it did not matter since she did not get to have a proper meal.

She thought that it was still nice to occasionally dream about food even though she did not get to eat them. She only wanted to have a look, reminisce and think about food for a bit.

She got dressed and walked up to the stove. It was a relief that the fire did not burn out. She woke up at least thrice in the night just to make sure that the fire was still on. She would not have the money to buy matches to light up the fire in case it burned out.

She never knew that lighting up a fire would be so difficult sometimes.

This place was falling behind, they did not even have a lighter. Perhaps things like matches were hard to find in Sea City.

She carried the small container filled with rice. She was happy whenever she saw the rice as it assured her that there was nothing to be worried about.

There was nothing to be concerned about when there was food. The small container would be sufficient to maintain her for a few months as she only needed a small portion each day.

Chapter 953: Who's A Thief

She did not think about how full she could fill her stomach. It was fine as long as she would not be starved to death. So, she counted the amount of rice. She definitely could make it last till the beginning of Spring next year if she was frugal with her eating.

Once she finished her dinner, she then walked to the door. After she opened the door, she saw that it was still snowing heavily outside. She finally knew the reason why everyone in the entire village did not go out. With such a heavy snowfall and the village surrounded by mountains, not even a road could be found. How was anyone able to go down the mountains?

If the person really wanted to go down the mountain, he would either lose his way or fall to his demise.

She wrapped up her neck. The wind and snow streamed into her collar from time to time, and her thin clothes could hardly maintain her body temperature.

She was so cold that she could not stop shivering uncontrollably. Even her upper and lower teeth were constantly knocking against each other. She closed the door, shrank her body and walked outside once more. She was going to pick up some firewood.

The mountains were everywhere here. So, there was nothing much around here except these trees which they had the most of. She did not know if she would be lucky enough to actually pick up a rabbit that hit a tree.

However, it seemed that it was nice to imagine but the reality was always merciless.

She had gone up the mountain for so long and also picked up so much firewood but did not find a dead rabbit that had hit a tree in the end. She did not know if it was because there were less rabbits now or it could be said that the rabbits had become smarter.

She picked up a large bundle of firewood, which she was supposed to bring back. But when she walked to the village entrance, she stopped in her tracks, and then headed into the village. The small house that she lived in was just on the edge of the village. The other people lived in the village, wanting to be warmer, but also to be safer by coming into the village. Yan Huan did not think that other people would arrange for her to live inside the village. After all, she was an outsider. She was already fortunate enough to have people who could take her in and let her receive medical treatment. She already considered herself lucky.

It was already good that she had a place where she could be sheltered from the elements. At the very least, she was still in the village and not living in the mountains. Otherwise, even if she had become a monkey, it would be impossible for her to survive any longer.

“Hey...” She had initially wanted to say hello to the villagers who came over. In the end, the villagers just gave her a brief glance and ignored her after. And Yan Huan clearly saw a kind of dislike, displeasure, and something that could be called loathing in those villagers’ eyes.

She touched her face and bowed her head. Then she dragged her leg to limp away and hobbled forward. While she was on her way, she met several villagers. Everyone was not very nice toward her and did not like the sight of her. So much so that some people even slammed their doors shut when they saw her. It was as if she was some kind of monster, or virus.

She opened her mouth and wanted to ask the reason. She did not steal or rob and did not do anything untoward to others. Why were they so afraid of her? Or was it because they were afraid of her?

She touched the wound on her face again, and then turned her head to look back at her leg which she no longer felt pain in. In the past, she was an international film star. As long as she went out, she would be surrounded by a horde of fans. They all liked her and supported her.

She had never received such obvious looks of aversion.

In terms of the two lives that Yan Huan had led, this was something that she had never experienced.

All of a sudden, she felt very aggrieved in her heart. Could it be because her face was destroyed, so other people acted like she was an unclean thing of unknown origins?

She bowed her head and continued to walk on. Later, she stood at the door of a family. It was a house built from tiles and bricks. It was half new and not quite old, similar to the many families’ houses in the village. The houses in the village were mostly built this way and most of their condition were in such a not quite new and not quite old degree.

So, it could be seen that this family was considered fairly good in the village. At the very least, the house was well-built and good as compared to many families inside the village. The front of the house was well-kept and clean with little fallen snow. Come to think of it, it was just swept clean. This was a family of diligent people. The door was also very clean and there was no stuff being heaped messily at the doorstep.

She stepped forward and put her hand on the door. Next, she gently knocked her hand on the door. Once the people around saw her knock on the door, they all started chattering at the same time among

themselves. Their voices were quite loud. They consisted of the local village women who liked to gossip about other people the most.

It could be assumed that when it came to gossip, it was the same in any place no matter. People would gossip and people would listen. People would also speculate.

“Tell me, what does she want, coming to Changsheng’s house?”

“Who knows? From the looks of her, you can tell she must be here because she has ideas about Changsheng.”

“She’s a cripple and she has her eye on such a good lad? Even if Changsheng’s mother agrees, I will object.”

“Ha ha...” Someone laughed again, “What’s the point of your objection? You’re someone else’s daughter-in-law. Don’t tell me you’re still getting ideas in your head?”

“Pah! So, what if I, an old woman, am getting ideas in my head? Besides, I, an old woman, am stronger and better than a cripple and a thief. I don’t know after she has stolen people’s things today, if she will try to steal a man tomorrow?”

“Steal a man, surely there has to be a man available for her to steal first? With a disgusting appearance like hers, I don’t think I’d want her if I were a man.”

“But that’s precisely what’s happening here. Isn’t this a case of Changsheng finding himself in a bit of trouble, is it?”

“I’ve also secretly seen Changsheng send her things.” Someone whispered with a tone that was filled with all kinds of disdain.

The more Yan Huan listened, the tighter her eyebrows knitted together. She also felt increasingly uncomfortable in her heart. She had never stolen anything from anyone else. She had always conducted herself with integrity and was upright and honest. No one had ever said she was a thief, but these people repeatedly called her a thief. It really hurt and stabbed her and her heart which was already very fragile at the moment.

She held back the tears that were about to spill out from the wells of her eyes with great effort. Then she looked up and knocked on the door of Changsheng’s family house.

Soon after, the door of the Changsheng family was opened and Changsheng’s mother came out. She was surprised when she first saw Yan Huan.

“Aunt, I came over here to give you some firewood. I don’t have anything on me, only the firewood.”

Yan Huan put down the wood that she carried on her shoulders. She did not think to step past the door of Changsheng’s house and go inside. These people had repeatedly used the word thief and said she was a thief, so she’d better mind her actions and it was better for her not to step into other people’s houses.

Besides, her body was covered with the fallen snow. What would happen if she were to dirty other people’s floors? Although it could be said that the floors here were not like the wood floors and floor

tiles in the city; they were made of brick, stone, or bare ground, she still did not want to go in. She did not want to cause unnecessary trouble to others.

“Oh child, what are you doing, sending these over?” Changsheng’s mother had a good heart. She hurriedly opened the door wide and told her to quickly come inside to have a drink of hot water.

Chapter 954: It Was Not Her

“There’s no need.” Yan Huan’s throat stung slightly. She really needed a cup of hot water, even a mouthful would do. Yet, she was also painfully aware of the villagers’ exclusion toward her, so she would not go.

“Aunt, I’ll be leaving first,” Yan Huan turned around. She dragged her limp leg as she took each step further away from the place. There was not much snow accumulated in the village aside from the thick layers dusted upon the roofs of the cottages across the entire village.

Changsheng’s mother was unable to persuade her to stay. The sight of the bundle of firewood lying by the door was ineffably heavy on her heart.

It’s not easy for a woman to be on the streets when it’s snowing this heavily.

“Changsheng’s mother, you should stop talking to that cripple.” a woman uttered to Changsheng’s mother. “I’ll have you know that she’s a thief! Though we have very few valuables, it will still be quite a bit of hassle for us to replace things if they are stolen, not to mention if it is something precious!”

“She’s right, Changsheng’s mother,” another woman chimed in. “Don’t they say that one must always remain vigilant to the harm of others? You ought to be more careful.”

“What nonsense are you talking about?” Changsheng’s mother only realized how heavy the bundle of firewood was after she hefted it. The bundle was heavy enough to be a burden to a man, much less a woman, not to say for someone who was crippled.

Just before she entered the cottage with the bundle of firewood, she turned to the crowd of middle-aged women. “Since none of you have seen her steal, how can you be certain that she was the thief?”

“Who else could it be if it wasn’t for her?” one of the women responded shrilly.

“We’re all honest people in this village, surely none of us would do such a thing. Only penniless outsiders would consider doing such sneaky deeds.”

“There’s a fly in the ointment,” Changsheng’s mother sighed. She was well aware of who the true culprit was.

“Didn’t you mention that the thief left a large boulder under the victim’s windowsill?” Changsheng’s mother opened the door as she added.

“You don’t say, that boulder is still lying there.”

“Yeah, I saw it for myself. It was this big,” said another woman, making a gesture of a large object. “It was quite large indeed, large enough for someone to climb on.”

“Oh, if so...” Changsheng’s mother shook her head. “If the boulder is that large, even a man will not be able to carry it, much less a woman so obviously thin. How strong is she to be able to carry such a gigantic boulder and climb on it? Isn’t it obvious that she is crippled? Do you really think that it’s possible for a crippled woman to move such a large boulder and climb on it?”

Changsheng’s mother’s words made the women’s faces burn with shame.

Changsheng’s mother carried the firewood into the cottage. She could understand how difficult things would be for a single woman. Now that Yan Huan came to this village, she would do everything within her capabilities to help her despite the village’s poor condition. After all, it would be a noble deed to save a life. She simply could not let them say such horrible things about a girl who was helpless.

Changsheng found an extra bundle of damp firewood when he returned to his cottage. He was certain that he had gathered enough firewood before autumn to avoid a situation where one would have to go out into the snow to collect firewood. In such cases, not only would the firewood weigh more, one’s clothes would be pretty much drenched by the time of return.

“Mother, where did this bundle of firewood come from?”

He placed the damp firewood aside, realizing in the process that the bunch was surprisingly heavy. This could not be their stockpile of firewood that got buried under snow after being left outside, could it be? But then again, he had just arranged those earlier this morning. It was quite unlikely that he had left such a large bundle in the snow either.

“Oh, that?” Changsheng’s mother emerged from the kitchen. “The girl you saved brought it over. I’m sure that child is uninvolved, but the other villagers insisted that she was the burglar at Uncle Dongsheng’s place last night.”

“Mother, it wasn’t her.” Changsheng placed the firewood and walked out. He had never suspected Yan Huan since the beginning as he had faith in his judgment.

“I believe you,” Changsheng’s mother sighed. “I am not undiscerning. That boulder they spoke of was so large, it could not possibly be moved by a woman. Not to mention, your uncle Dongsheng’s place was locked. How could a cripple like her climb over the wall? I wonder who’s the sneaky one in the village who’s been doing all the thieving recently.”

Speaking of the sneaky one, a person came to her mind. Who else could it be other than Jin Gen?

The father was to be blamed for a poorly mannered child. Similar to Changsheng, Jin Gen lost his father when he was young. However, surely one must not spoil a child simply because of that. Whenever he had nothing better to do, he would nick some crops here and there or take an egg or two from someone else’s hen. Rather than properly tending to his crops, all he thought of were sneaky schemes to gain without effort. It was no wonder that he could not find a wife despite his age. It only made much sense for young ladies who were dumb to tie the knot with someone from the Jin family.

She had a hunch that the whole ordeal was probably Jin Gen’s doing. As a woman of experience, she could see deeper than the others so naturally, she thought further too.

The boulder was placed right outside the young couple’s window. Its height was just right for a man to stand on it and peek in. Clearly, it was not meant for stealing, it was meant for eavesdropping.

Who else in the village would be so free as to eavesdrop in the middle of the night? Those who were too young would not have thought of such a thing, while the older ones would long have gotten a wife. Who would go out in the middle of the night when there was a warm and toasty bed to sleep in? Only an old single man would think of doing such a despicable act.

Changsheng's mother felt a bad taste in her mouth as she thought about that. No one would wish for such an embarrassing thing to happen to them. Upon another thought, she silently took note of improving the door security when Changsheng got himself a wife to prevent some shameless person from climbing over and eavesdropping on her son and his wife at night. The thought itself was distasteful enough.

"Right," Changsheng's mother suddenly recalled something. "Don't we have a few old bed frames?"

"Yeah," Changsheng crouched on the ground and began eating. As a young man with a laborious job, he was often hungry and his diet was large. The old bed frames his mother was talking about were left over when he made a new set of bed frames last autumn.

Chapter 955: It's Too Cold

"You will tidy up that room of ours which we do not use and put a board on the brick bed first to let burn it for a few days." Changsheng's mother thought about it and said to her son.

"Ma, what are you doing all that for?" Changsheng raised his head. Why were they clearing out the old room without rhyme or reason? They were not going to live there. If they were not living in it, why were they tidying it up? Moreover, he had to heat up the entire brick bed.

"It's to give to that girl you brought back." Changsheng's mother scooped another big bowl of rice for her son. She said, "No matter how our family situation is again, we also do not lack the food to feed another mouth. I can see that girl is also not having it easy on her own. She gave us the firewood we had today. I can see that she is someone who knows gratitude. You saved her and brought her back here. Then in that case, we will be good people to the end. In any case, at the very least, she won't be able to freeze and starve to death this winter."

Changsheng ate without tasting the food. Maybe he thought of something. After a few mouthfuls, he stuffed all the remaining food into his mouth. Then with a roll of his sleeves, he walked to the unused room in their own house. His Big Aunt previously stayed in the room whenever she came back. But since his father had passed away, his relatives in the family also visited a lot less. Big Aunt also moved far away in the previous years and had not come back for more than a few years. The room had been empty all this time. It was also good to tidy it up now.

In fact, he wanted to do so a while ago. But, he was afraid that his mother would not agree. After all, an outsider had come into the family. And she needed to eat and drink. Moreover, he was also afraid that his mother's impression of the girl was not good. Now that it was his mother who put forth the idea, he was relieved. Worst comes to worst; he would do more work in the future. He could still earn back the money to feed the extra mouth.

He took out all the things inside the empty room, and then put them aside. Then he cleaned and tidied. He dusted and aired the room. He even laid the bricks properly on the surfaces to avoid any big amount of dust falling.

Changsheng's mother was very satisfied with her son's diligence. This son of hers was naturally good. It was only that their family's conditions were not good, and the village did not even have a school. So, most of the lads as old as Changsheng in the village would travel down the mountains to go to school. The back and forth travel would take up a few hours of time. It was also dangerous if the wind was strong and it was raining. As a result, few people went to school and Changsheng was illiterate. But he was strong and also very hardworking. He also had brains and was smart. He would often take some things from the mountains and go outside to sell. He had heard that the people outside value the type of dry goods and so on found inside the mountains as a rarity. It was really hard to walk on these mountain roads. If the roads could be repaired, then the lives of the people in the village would be better. The children could go to school and learn some culture. Once they expanded their knowledge and experience, unmarried women would be willing to marry into their village and the village would not have so many bachelors.

And she was now most worried about the matter of Changsheng's marriage. The village only had this many girls. Those who were young were already married. Those who were not married were still too young. She was just looking at the child of Li Shuang's family in the east end of the village. She was only thirteen years old. The young girl's appearance was nice and diligent with her hands and feet. If she waited a few more years, she would be of a marriageable age and can discuss marriage.

Except, the current situation was many families were knocking on the door of the family with one good daughter. She did not know when it would be her Changsheng's turn.

She sighed again. At the sight of her son busily setting up the brick bed, she could not help smiling.

Indeed, why was she letting her imagination run wild? How could anyone not know her son's character? As long as they had good judgement, they would naturally pick her family's Changsheng. Her family's Changsheng was the best in the entire village.

Changsheng was currently busy and basically did not know at all what his mother had in mind was all about his marriage. He did not have the time to think about these things now. He only thought to quickly set up and heat up the brick bed, to let it burn so that she could live in it when the weather got colder.

It never stopped snowing outside.

Yan Huan took her bedding and spread it to the side of the stove. Although that side was quite dusty, it was warm and also convenient so that she did not have to get up several times in the middle of the night to come over here, for fear that the fire in the would be extinguished. If she messed it up and became sick, then she could only wait to die. But she did really feel that she was tough enough not to die so easily.

She was in the water for so long and had not fallen sick once. Her living conditions were so bad. All she had to eat all the time was rice porridge and she drank unboiled water. And yet she was still alive. If it had been in the Sea City, she might have catch a cold several times. But now she was unexpectedly alive and doing well in her survival.

She laid down and the hot air from the stove gave some warmth to this spot. Although she could still hear the whistling wind blowing over here from outside, the tiny trace of warmth here could let her sleep for a good while.

Until when the night came, she was freezing, and it was almost like a world of ice and snow inside the house. Even the quilt covering her body also felt hardened into ice and was stiff frozen.

She hastened to wear her clothes well. The moment her clothes touched her body, she almost gasped from the cold. It was really cold. The wind blew against the window frame and it even made crashing sounds from time to time. It seemed that it was about to blow down the outside window. The sounds of ghost-like wailing and howling filled everywhere outside. It felt very sinister, accompanied by the wind at this time.

Yan Huan felt for the box of matches on one side, and then she felt around blindly to touch the heap of dry wood. She managed to build a fire and the house was also brighter because of the light from the fire. Piles of firewood could be faintly discerned around the room, as well as the dust and smoke in the air which were rising.

Yan Huan carefully put the firewood inside the stove, and then she hugged her legs. In this way, she was no longer sleepy with the little warmth that she had.

She did not know when the dawn would come. She did not know when the winter would be over. She did not know when she could go home.

She touched a cup to put it aside. As a result, when she touched the cup, that kind of cold caused her to quickly retract her hand. It was truly very cold.

She put her fingers near her mouth and blew warm air on her finger a few times before she took the cup again. She brought the cup to the front of her eyes. She remembered that she had poured some water inside before she went to bed.

She brought the cup to her mouth and poured into her mouth for a while, but no water came out.

Where was the water? She shook the cup, which felt somewhat heavy inside. It was unlike its usual weight. She put the cup in front of her eyes, which made her feel like crying as a result. But in the end she did not shed tears.

The water in the cup was frozen into ice.

She put the cup on top of the stove until the ice inside melted little by little into water before she brought it to her lips. At that moment, the cold water sent chills to her throat and lungs.

So cold, it was really very cold.

Chapter 956: Be My Wife

A slight hint of warmth started to spread only after the fire blazed on the stove, but she remained shivering in cold. She did not know how much longer she needed to endure as she had no idea when the winter would be over.

Her wait seemed to be endless.

She wrapped herself tightly in a blanket. With the warmth of the blanket, she managed to pass through the night in peace.

She woke up early on the second day and spent most of the day outside. What else could she do aside from being anxious and waiting for death?

She wanted to live. Hence, she needed to work harder and be vigilant under difficult circumstances. Even the smallest barely noticeable firewood might save her life. If she was lucky, she might be able to come across a frozen rabbit or a wild chicken. The mountain actually had plenty of resources, she just needed some luck.

However, Yan Huan was not the luckiest person on this mountain. She did not come across any of the things that the others had picked up. The things that she was able to collect the most were dry twigs and barks, which were used to make a fire.

She carried a bundle of firewood back, and just as she reached the entrance of the village, a creepy and skinny man fixed his gaze on her. He approached her, trying to block her.

Yan Huan lifted her eyes slightly and walked right past the skinny man.

“Hey, don’t leave.”

At the sight of Yan Huan leaving, the skinny man turned quickly and raised his arm to block her path.

“What’s the matter?” Yan Huan asked monotonously. Her face showed no signs of expression, frozen like the snow around her at the moment, without a hint of warmth.

Jin Gen looked at the young woman in front of him. She did not have pretty features, and in fact, she was tipping more toward the ugly side. However, the body hidden under the thick coats seemed to be voluptuous. He swallowed involuntarily and could feel his body warming up even on a cold day like this.

“Be my wife. I will treat you well, and you would have rice and meat to eat.” Jin Gen rubbed his hands together. He could not wait to take her home and sleep with her.

Yan Huan bit her pale lips. With the firewood on her back, she went around Jin Gen and continued walking back to her dwelling place.

“Be my wife. If not, you’ll freeze to death.”

Jin Gen ran after her, unwilling to give up.

Yan Huan stopped and lifted her face. She stared coldly into Jin Gen’s eyes which were filled with obvious intentions toward her.

“Hmm...” The corner of her lips curved upward at little, “Even if I were to freeze to death, I will never be your wife.”

Then...she hoisted the firewood on her back. She would not die and would not freeze to death. She would live on just fine, and go home alive.

Having been rejected again, Jin Gen’s face burned red, and he stared daggers at Yan Huan. His expression turned vicious.

As a cripple, you have no choice.

Yan Huan piled the firewood at the window and walked toward the stove. She raised the fire in the stove up by a notch and cooked herself some porridge. She hadn't had vegetables in a long time, and this made her feel a little bit uneasy.

She was thinking if she could trade the firewood for some salt in the village, as it would be nice to add some salt to her porridge. If not, she could perhaps trade it for some fermented vegetables that the farmers had made.

The small pot on the stove gave off a bubbling sound every now and then, and the air was filled with the scent of cooked porridge. She could not help but salivate and lick her parched lips. She took her small bowl and filled it with half of the porridge in the pot. The other half was left for dinner. If she could not finish that half at night, she could warm it up the next morning, and have it for breakfast. With two meals a day, she could pass this winter easily with a small portion of rice.

After she was done eating, she arranged her pot and everything else neatly. Then, she lay down and prepared to sleep. If she would sleep now, she could wake up during the night and watch over the fire. It would be too cold if the fire burned out.

When she opened her eyes again, the sky had already darkened. She divided her leftover porridge into two again for the night and the next morning. If she did not have any appetite, the halved portion would be her meal for the entire day tomorrow.

Having eaten something, Yan Huan was not hungry. She stared blankly into the fire on the stove and wondered how good it would be to have some charcoals. All the charcoals in the village had been prepared and bought from downhill in advance, hence they were extremely precious. The villagers would normally use firewood or some would even use corn stalks or wheat straws that they had planted themselves. Hence, very few of them would venture uphill to scavenge for firewood like her as they had enough supplies to survive the winter.

She laid down again and hugged her clothes tightly to her chest. She closed her eyes, gradually falling asleep with the warmth of fire surrounding her at the moment. Ever since she got here, she had not been able to sleep soundly. In fact, she had always been a light sleeper. It was just that she had spent too much time with Lu Yi, and he always made sure that everything was alright. Hence, she had managed to sleep deeper and was less afraid of the dark. However, everything was back to square one now. She realized that she had been too pampered by Lu Yi to even realize about hardships. After leaving him, she began to realize that the world was much crueler and more dangerous than she had ever imagined.

An unusual sound reverberated from the door outside.

Yan Huan instantly opened her eyes. For a moment, she thought she misheard it until another sound followed. It sounded like someone was trying to open her door.

Perhaps it was some wild animals from the mountain. Yan Huan sat up, added more firewood into the stove, and searched for something to defend herself. She took out a wooden stick from her back. She had actually prepared this a long time ago but tended to forget about it as she ever got to use it.

The villagers would not be interested in a hideous woman like her so she was very safe.

The rattling sound coming from the door could still be heard, and it seemed like someone was trying to pry the door open. It did not sound like an animal was scratching on it.

It must be human.

Yan Huan let out a breath of relief. She was not afraid of humans. Although one of her legs was crippled, she could still deal with an ordinary person. But if it was a wild animal, she was not sure if she could deal with it.

She leaned back again but her hands grasped the wooden stick tightly. She could not understand why anyone would come to her shabby place when she had nothing to offer.

Chapter 957: Caught A Thief

She thought of what the villagers said about the thief who went to people's houses in the middle of the night and stepped on stones to steal things. And she wondered if this was the one. But she only had firewood here. Was it possible that this man could not sleep in the middle of the night and came over to steal her firewood?

The door opened with a creak. It also brought in the wind as well as snow from outside which blew coldly on Yan Huan's face and body. In addition to the familiar chill, it also sobered her up a little as it blew.

She could hear the sounds of the person's breathing as well as footsteps.

It was a man, and he was still gasping for air.

And that man was walking forward quietly on tiptoe. Suddenly, there was a crash and his foot stepped on a branch. He also uttered a curse word.

"Damn it!"

He swore in a low voice. A pair of green bean sized eyes glinted in the dark and stretched his neck from time to time to stare at the woman wrapped inside the quilt.

"I am going to bed you tonight and make you my wife." The man rubbed his hands together and directly pounced over the quilt. He had initially assumed he would pounce on what was supposed to be a person. But why did it not feel right, as if he had flattened the person? Could it be he had directly crushed the person to death?

He reached out his hand toward the torn quilt on the bed and felt inside. He had just reached his hand in when a cloth bag came out of nowhere to fully cover his head. Behind him, blows from a wooden stick came showering down on his body, hitting him until he could not help but wail and scream. However, no matter how he struggled, he was beaten up until he could not get up in the end.

"Help, help..." He hissed and yelled, "Mom, save me, your son is going to be beaten to death. Help, save me..."

He was crying and shouting, calling for help from time to time. But it was now late at night and a world of ice and snow outside. It was also far away from the edge of the village mouth. Not to mention he was yelling for someone to help, even if he yelled till he lost his voice, it was not possible for someone to save him.

Yan Huan knew who this person was, so she did not beat him too hard. When she hit him, she also struck areas with thick skin. It would only cause him pain at the most, but it would not be fatal.

She used a rope to truss him up. She also sat near the stove and added firewood inside the stove. The man constantly shouted loudly and scolded. But, Yan Huan did not pay any attention to him. Perhaps he himself finally got tired from scolding, he felt sleepy. He just laid there and fell asleep like a dead pig. He even snored endlessly.

Only then Yan Huan walked over and removed the piece of cloth covering the man's head. Next, she had a look at him with the dim light at this time.

It was the wretched monkey man.

He was a person from the village.

The man was called Jin Gen.

She found a piece of rag and immediately stuffed it into Jin Gen's mouth. Then she covered his head, as long as he did not suffocate from being covered.

She added some firewood to the stove. Perhaps she would not be able to sleep again this time.

So, she sat by the side of the stove like this and added firewood to the stove from time to time, until the time passed minute by minute and she just passed the time like this.

In fact, at this time, she hoped that the time would go a little faster and that the winter could end earlier.

Now and then the wind beat against the outside door and made a clattering sound. Every time it sounded as if it was going to blow the door off.

Yan Huan looked up and stared outside the window. She could faintly see the daylight. It was a lot brighter as compared to the usual time. She knew very clearly that this was only because of the snow.

She opened the door. It was still snowing outside. Nothing could be seen other than the white color. It had been snowing for half a month or so. She did not know how thick the snow was. The same color covered the mountains as far as the eyes could see.

The pure white was also a cold white color.

And it dazzled the eyes from looking at it for a long time.

Yan Huan walked back and then gave a kick to Jin Gen's buttocks.

"Wake up."

Jin Gen opened his eyes in a daze. Once he realized he could only see black in front of his eyes, he cried and yelled again. He was nearly thirty-something years old and still behaved like this. No wonder, the people in the village were not willing to marry their daughters off to him and these big girls were not blind enough to spend the rest of their lives with such a person. Even if the ugliest and fattest girl in the village was not interested in such an old bachelor like Jin Gen.

Yan Huan kicked Jin Gen again and then pulled the rope that bound Jin Gen.

“Walk or else I’ll kill you.”

She said coldly. The sinister voice sounded icier and colder than the snow outside at this time.

Jin Gen’s body gave a start. He started trembling and then his pants became wet.

Yan Huan smelled an odor that did not smell good. She looked down and saw Jin Gen sitting on the ground in a growing puddle of water not long after.

She gave another kick to Jin Gen’s buttocks and told him to walk.

Jin Gen was hit very hard and his mouth was also crammed with a piece of rag, which completely stuffed his mouth.

He could only be pushed by her to walk forward. He had wanted to run away several times but as a result, a stick frenziedly smashed on his body. He was also afraid of pain, so he could only hold his anger but did not dare speak a word as he followed. If the person told him to go east, he did not dare walk toward the west.

Yan Huan walked to the edge of the village. Then she let go of the rope and man. At that moment, when Jin Gen wanted to run away again, she just directly gave a kick and kicked Jin Gen to the ground. If his face had not been covered with a cloth, he would have absolutely gnawed a mouthful of mud when he fell.

At this time, the people who were early risers quickly ran over at the sight of this scene. Within a short space of time, the news traveled from one person to another until almost everyone in the whole village all came over.

“Girl, what’s going on here?” Changsheng’s mother saw the situation and hurried over to ask, “What happened? Why have you dragged a person over here?”

Yan Huan once again used the tip of her toes to kick the man whose face was unknown on the ground and said, “He came to my house in the middle of the night to steal my things and was caught by me.”

When the other people heard the three words about stealing things, many people were so shocked that they had looks of shame, especially those gossipy aunts who wagged their tongues in front of Yan Huan the last time. Each of them felt that their faces were burning.

When the people in Dongsheng’s family heard there was a thief, they directly went up to hit the thief. They want to hit this scumbag for a long time. It was the first time they had encountered a thief who had stolen from their home. It was extreme hatred to the people in Dongsheng’s family,.

Although they did not lose anything, no one would be in a good mood when their house was patronized by a thief.

The man with his head covered in his head rolled around on the ground as he whimpered and cried out from being beaten.

Well, someone seemed to have seen something at this time.

Chapter 958: The Thief Was Jin Gen

“Isn’t this Jin Gen? He was wearing this attire yesterday.”

Jin Gen? Everyone else was a little stunned when they heard that name. Isn’t this a thief? How could this person be Jin Gen?

Someone stepped forward and pulled off the cloth on the man’s head. Jin Gen’s face was exposed. Although his face was beaten up really badly with something stuffed in his mouth, it was undoubtedly Jin Gen.

“It really is Jin Gen.”

Somebody pointed at Jin Gen’s face and shrieked in surprise.

“But, why did he go to the girl’s house in the middle of the night? Moreover, there is nothing in that broken house. Even if he wanted to steal, he would have picked a better house. Although everyone in our village is poor, we are definitely better off than that broken house. There aren’t even pots and pans in there. What was he planning to do?”

“What else can he do?” Most people could guess his intentions after giving it some thoughts.

“I bet he’s desperate for a woman and wanted to take advantage of her. I’ve seen many shameless people, but haven’t seen one like him. He’s a disgrace to our village.”

“Did he plan to eavesdrop on Dongsheng and his wife the last time he went there?”

Someone continued to comment, and sure enough, everyone’s gaze instantly changed when they heard this.

Dongsheng and his family had a grim expression on their faces when they heard this. Moreover, their faces darkened and reddened as there was a commotion in the neighborhood. They were so embarrassed that they wanted to hide in a hole.

The new wife was hit by it instantly, and her face flushed and turned pale. She covered her face in tears and ran away.

The villagers were very conservative about that matter. Frankly speaking, everyone would do that secretly. Of course, whomever that was seen or heard in the act of doing that would feel uncomfortable, not to mention that someone had eavesdropped on them in the middle of the night.

The young man from the Dongsheng family pointed at Jin Gen furiously, and could not bring himself to speak. He gave Jin Gen a few kicks forcefully and went off to comfort his wife. However, his face

continued to burn with embarrassment. It was not his fault originally, but after listening to how the others had judged and made fun of him, he felt like he was too embarrassed to live anymore.

“Jin Gen, oh my son...”

As soon as Jin Gen’s mother heard about this, she ran over from her house. When she saw Jin Gen sprawling on the floor, being beaten up badly, she rushed over with bursting tears as she held him in her arms. She yelled loudly, asking who had beaten her son up like this.

The head of Dongsheng family snorted immediately, “Jin Gen’s mother, please discipline your child. He went to my house in the middle of the night to steal things.” Of course, he was not going to mention a word about Jin Gen eavesdropping on his son and daughter-in-law. Jin Gen could afford to be humiliated but not their family.

“Yeah,” others began to hoot. “Forget about him going to Dongsheng’s house, he even went to the house of a girl who had no friends or relatives. She is already in such a difficult situation, but he still wanted to take advantage of her. Isn’t he crazy?”

Yan Huan caressed her face. She understood the meaning behind the words of these people. They were saying that she was hideous, and Jin Gen was so lustful that he wanted a cripple like her.

Indeed, she was really sad. She was Yan Huan, the best actress. Although she was not the prettiest person in the world, her beauty and her exquisiteness were recognized in the entertainment industry, ranking as the fifth most beautiful face in Asia. However, she was now ugly in everyone’s eyes, and anyone who had desires on her was considered to be crazy.

As soon as Jin Gen’s mother heard this, she hit her son again and said he was futile. There were so many women, but yet he chose such an ugly one who was also a cripple. Everyone who heard this was restless. She did not blame Jin Gen for going to someone’s house in the middle of the night or eavesdropping on the Dongsheng family, but for finding an ugly person like Yan Huan.

Yan Huan walked over, crouched down, and stretched out her hand to untie the rope on Jin Gen.

Jin Gen’s mother snorted as she thought that Yan Huan had found her conscience, and she said stubbornly, “Have you found your conscience now? Let me tell you this, no matter how you please us, my son will never marry an ugly person like you.”

Yan Huan did not say a word. She slowly untied the rope on Jin Gen, wrapped it, and stood up. Just as Jin Gen’s mother was about to say something, she had already turned and left with the rope.

After taking a few steps, she stopped and patted the rope in her hand.

“There is only one rope left. If it’s gone, what can I use to bundle up the firewood?” She mumbled to herself, but everyone around laughed. Clearly, it was a slap on Jin Gen’s mother’s face.

Probably your son isn’t as important as a rope in her heart. It’s hard to tell who is the one that aims at the moon.

Yan Huan had held her rope and walked to the entrance of the village before Changsheng followed behind her.

Yan Huan stopped and looked at Changsheng. She smiled, and her eyes were very clear and beautiful, but half of her face was very ugly.

Changsheng was assuming that if her face was pretty, she must be a beautiful woman, and would probably be prettier than any woman in their village.

“Does your family have any firewood left?” Yan Huan asked Changsheng. She had nothing left now except for the firewood in her house. If Changsheng needed some, she would give him, and just pick some up again.

“No,” Changsheng shook his head and scratched it in embarrassment.

“I don’t want your firewood.”

“Then?” Yan Huan touched her neck. There was a really expensive necklace on her neck, but she was not planning to sell it. It would probably be her transportation fees when she got out of the mountains.

But if Changsheng really wanted it, she would still think about it. After all, Changsheng had saved her life and compared to a necklace, her life was obviously much more precious.

If she lost her life, she would no longer be able to wear any necklaces on her neck.

Just as she was about to take off her necklace, Changsheng opened his mouth again.

“I don’t think that it’s wise for you to continue staying there. Aside from the fact that the winter has just started, I’m afraid that the incident that had happened today would happen again. Jin Gen is a shameless person. He would definitely do it again if he didn’t succeed this time.”

Chapter 959: Her Food Was Stolen

“Jin Gen is a person from the village. It’s not possible that the people in the village do not know his nature. A dog can’t stop himself from eating shit. He did not succeed this once and was beaten hit like this. How will he be willing to take it lying down?”

“I can catch him once, so I also can catch him twice.” said Yan Huan did not fear Jin Gen. She was still very assured of her own skills. She can still more than easily deal with Jin Gen.

When Changsheng wanted to say more, Yan Huan interrupted his words and said, “Thank you, I want to go back.”

After saying that, she hobbled with one lame leg and walked forward step by step. Although she was thin, her back was quite straight, so much as that even if trials and hardships railed against her, it was impossible to see her bend her back and give in to fate, or life.

Life was like walking among thorny undergrowth, and not turning just because it was hard.

Why did I not say it? Changsheng really wanted to give himself a slap. He was clumsy with words. In fact, he just wanted to come out and say for Yan Huan to go live in his house. He had already cleaned up that empty room and the heated brick bed was also warmed up. As long as she moved there, she could live in it at any time. There was enough to eat and drink at home. She would not go hungry.

But that was what he did not come out and say.

Yan Huan went back to where she lived. She went in and closed the door. She also put the rope on the side before she walked toward the side of the stove. But the fire in the stove had long gone out. She sighed again and took the firewood to light the stove. She also put the pot on top. There was still some rice porridge inside which she left from yesterday. There should be enough to eat for today. She also did not have much appetite. She would eat what she could. After she finished eating, she rested for a while. Then she took the rope and went to the mountains to pick up firewood. There were more and more firewood inside the house, which also blocked out some of the wind from the window side. It was not so hard to bear during nighttime. It could also be because it was no longer snowing.

But also, precisely because it was no longer snowing, the weather seemed to be colder. Yan Huan really felt that the days were getting harder and harder to endure. It was so cold that even the blood in her whole body was also somewhat frozen. Things that were put in the room were almost the same as outside. They would be frozen into ice within a few minutes. Now she was the only living thing here that had not been frozen into blocks.

She crouched down. Her hands and feet as well as her face were so frozen that she had frostbite. Her pair of hands was swollen like radishes. Her feet were the same. Sometimes it seemed that while she was walking, she could not even feel her legs.

It was too cold, really too cold. She now only guarded by the side of the stove day and night, so as not to let herself freeze to death. The firewood inside the house was enough. Until the weather improved, when she was no longer cold and freezing, she could pick up more firewood. No matter what happened, it should be able to let her get through this winter.

After spending a few days like this, it was no longer too cold. But it was still considered cold to Yan Huan. However, as compared to the few days when the snow was gone, the temperature should at least be able to rise to about five or six degrees. At the very least, she could go out.

She dared not stay idle. She was afraid of idling too long that the hope for survival would be idled away. She wrapped her clothes tightly around her and walked ahead once again against the bitter cold wind. The snow had almost fully melted. There was still some accumulated snow occasionally. But it was no longer arduous like how it was a few days ago when she had to hobble with one foot deep and one-foot shallow as the snow fell heavily. It was a lot easier for her to walk now.

Except, it was really too cold.

However, no matter how cold it was to walk, it was better than not moving at all. She thought about how she had been able to live through such a cold winter and not even fall sick. She did not know if the reason was because she had been picking firewood.

Her body had adapted to the current cold air, so she herself had also adapted. And what she now had to do was to try her best to live on. She had to survive no matter how difficult it was. She had to stay alive in order to return home. She had to live to see her Lu Yi, and her three children.

She picked up a bundle of firewood again. What she had to carry on her back was also a lot heavier, and the wood almost pushed her back to bend. She walked forward step by step and did not stop for one step. She might not be able to walk again if she stopped. So, she did not stop and wanted to walk back to the place she lived in one go.

She told herself that she had arrived, yes, she had arrived, she would soon get there. As long as she reached home, she would be able to take a rest. Her stomach was also rumbling, and she was getting a little hungry. It was time to eat when she reached home. Yes, she would cook some rice porridge, eat now, and she could eat again in the evening.

After much difficulty, she had arrived at the place and also put down the firewood from her back. Then she gently patted her shoulders, went to the side of the stove, and checked on the fire first.

Fortunately, the fire was still burning. She added some firewood to the fire, and then put the pot on top. There was still some water inside the pot. The water here was from the river. The people in the village all drank and used the water from this river. The river was not polluted and was very clean. And the water used for their laundry and other usages were from the lower reaches of the river. The water in the upper reaches of the river was mainly for consumption.

When the water started boiling, she went to get her rice jar.

It was just that when she got to the place where the rice jar was, her entire person was struck dumb at the spot.

It seemed her rice jar was gone.

She moved aside the other things in disbelief. She had already placed the rice jar in this spot. But what happened to her rice? Where had all her rice gone? She looked for half a day and had searched everywhere within this square meter area. But still, she could not find her rice jar. All her food was in it. It was her everything. She could be cold, she could stay poor, she could wear tattered clothes, withstand scolding and also be snubbed by other people, she could also do away with her dignity, but she could not go without food. If there was no food, how was she going to stay alive in that case?

She looked around again. There was still a lot of firewood placed by the window, which she had picked up stick by stick from the mountain these few days.

And there was that tottering door that could fall at any time.

She took the pot off the stove and then poured herself a cup of hot water. Her shaking frozen and swollen red hands brought the bowl to her mouth, and she drank it sip by sip.

But her tears fell down drop by drop.

She only drank water on this day, but she did not eat anything.

The next day, she was still the same. She had nothing to eat. She only had water to drink. She drank a belly of water but was becoming agitated from the hunger. She was feeling that she was really going to starve to death soon.

She did not go out to look for firewood. She did not have the strength, and she could not even walk.

Chapter 960: Being Taken In

As the third day of starving dawned on her, she felt like her mind was filled with hallucinations, as she lay there with sweat glistening all over her body.

She began to pick herself up from the floor, tightening the cotton rags she wore around her body. Her cotton clothes were not buttoned up at all, the entire piece of cotton clothing looked like it could cover her entirely, and it seemed as though she had gotten thinner. She used to be as thin as a rake before, but now she could pass off as a ghost.

After opening the door, a biting cold wind blew across her skin. As she touched her face, she noticed that it was devoid of nearly any warmth and it felt like she was touching ice.

Suddenly, her body swayed and she fell to the ground. Yet she proceeded to climb back up onto her feet again as she continued to walk even deeper into the village.

The villagers were not very well acquainted with her, and when she stretched out her hand in an effort to talk to a middle-aged lady, the child that the woman was with began to cry.

“Ghost, it’s a ghost...”

The woman immediately picked up her son as she tried to comfort him, her words thorny and sharp.

“With the way you look, what are you doing outside? Do you want to scare us all? If you have no business here, then don’t show yourself around the village.”

Yan Huan’s lips were pursed together in pain, even the corners of her eyes were hurting. She painstakingly swallowed back her tears, then using her own cotton clothes to cover her face as she continued to walk forward. However, whenever someone saw her, they would avoid her, there were even some kids who threw stones at her, claiming that they were attacking a ghost.

As she walked with heavy footsteps, she turned around and began to walk to the mouth of the village. At the moment, no one knew that beneath her lidded eyes, there was a multitude of tears rolling down her cheeks, dominated by profound hurt and pain.

The wind whipped past the corners of her eyes, and the indifference of the people pierced right through her heart.

“Child...” suddenly a voice warmed her ears.

She stopped walking and turned over her shoulder, catching sight of Changsheng’s mother right behind her, the expression on her face was one of uncertainty.

“Is that really you?” Changsheng’s mother walked over to her and grabbed ahold of Yan Huan’s hands. As she did so, she noticed that what she was holding did not seem like hands, but more like stones.

Why were they so cold? When she caught sight of the clothing on Yan Huan’s body, her heart was filled with pity and pain, for who on this earth did not have parents, and who did not have their own children?

A child that no one cared about was indeed a pitiful one.

“Come on, follow me home,” Changsheng’s mother uttered as she began to drag Yan Huan along.

“Aunty Changsheng, why are you bringing her home for? Look at the way she is now, aren’t you in the least bit afraid?” Someone behind them was trying to advise Changsheng’s mother against this course of action, their intent behind this statement was apparent.

“So what if I want to bring her back now?” Changsheng’s mother halted her steps, one of her hands still holding Yan Huan’s. “This child was saved by my Changsheng. Back then, all of you disliked the fact that she was an outsider and she had her own enemies, thus would be a burden to the village. All of you drove her to live in that place. Now that the weather has gotten so cold, anyone would easily freeze to death. Since my Changsheng was the one to pull her out of the water, we can’t allow her to die just like this.”

“Come, child, follow aunt home.”

Changsheng’s mother disregarded all the looks and opposition that came her way, her actions very much signifying how much she wanted to bring Yan Huan back with her.

She opened the door, the interior was extremely clean, the floor was fully furnished with bricks and stone, burnished to a smooth and shiny surface. Even though it was pretty old, it was clear that it had been carefully taken care of. There was also a really big heatable earthen bed, on top of it was a bedsheet, although it was not a new one, after taking a closer look at it, one could see that it was clean.

“My Changsheng mentioned this before,” Changsheng’s mother pulled Yan Huan to a seat as she continued saying, “he said that it wasn’t proper for you to continue staying there, so he made use of this empty room in our house. Actually, when you arrived, I did want you to stay with us, but at the time, the village people weren’t aware of your identity and they were also scared. Furthermore, our house didn’t have much space previously. Now that Changsheng has tidied up this empty room and placed a heatable earthen bed, and I have already warmed it up for you so you can move in with us today.”

“Thank you, aunty,” Yan Huan could say no more, all she could do was cry uncontrollably as beads of tears spilled down her face, revealing the very image of a pitiful person. Especially when coupled with her frail, stick-thin ghostly physique, one could not be sure of the hardships that she had endured.

Changsheng’s mother was a parent herself, if her own son was in the same situation as her, she would definitely be extremely heartbroken about it.

“Alas, it’s all right, it’s all right,” Changsheng’s mother patted Yan Huan’s shoulder lightly, not in the least bit put off by her dirty state.

“Oh right, there’s still some food left in the pot, let aunty get you a bowl. Even though our family doesn’t really have much money, we will definitely not let you starve.”

Yan Huan nodded her head, but she still could not find her words due to her weeping.

After a short while, Changsheng’s mother brought over a bowl of noodles with some leafy greens and a poached egg in it. Yan Huan took the bowl from her and began to wolf it all down.

“Don’t rush, eat slowly, there’s still more in the pot.”

Changsheng’s mother was astonished, witnessing the way Yan Huan was eating.

Yan Huan continuously stuffed the food into her mouth, she was certainly too hungry. She was ravenous, starved to the point that she had even contemplated eating her own flesh. She was utterly and absolutely in hunger, more so than she had ever been in her life.

As she was eating, her tears continuously pitter-pattered down into the bowl, the sight tugged at the heartstrings of Changsheng's mother.

"I'm sorry, aunty." Yan Huan used her own sleeve to wipe away her tears as she smiled and said, "It's just that I haven't eaten in so long, I am really very hungry."

"Oh, I see..." Changsheng's mother thought for a moment and continued, "I recall asking Changsheng to send you some rice though. That amount should be enough for you to sustain for a long time." She really could not understand how Yan Huan, an extremely thin and small woman, could finish a large amount of rice in such a short time. That portion of rice was enough to feed Changsheng for at least one or two months. How could this young lady's appetite be bigger than my Changsheng?

Yan Huan cradled the bowl in her arms, she did not know what to say, her nose twitched in slight distress as she felt disturbed by the truth she had to bear.

"Aunt, all that rice-" she sniffled once more, "-all that rice was stolen away."

"All of it was stolen?" Changsheng's mother was shocked by this statement. Who on earth would have stolen the rice? Such action is similar to taking away someone's life. That portion of rice was supposedly used to save one's life. Who could be so immoral to have wrongfully taken someone else's rice? Without the rice, she could not feed herself, not to say survive in such cold weather.

"Child." Changsheng's mother was filled with heartache as she laid her eyes on Yan Huan who was in such a miserable state, "Tell aunt, how long have you not eaten?"

Yan Huan lifted her eyes, the flesh on her face had sunken in, her image was one of sickly complexion and frail thinness as if she had not eaten for a very long time.

Once again, Yan Huan lowered her head as she lifted up the bowl to her mouth and swallowed down a few mouthfuls of soup.