

Rise 159

Chapter 159: Shock

The cunning girl, after throwing the plate, proudly tossed her head and walked away.

She raised her head so high; doesn't she fear tripping?

Zhu Ping'an watched the food and broken pieces of the plate scattered on the ground, then glanced at the cunning girl who tilted her head at a 45-degree angle. A mischievous thought of giving her a good scolding stirred in his heart.

"You really don't know what's good for you. No wonder our young lady is upset. Our family's chef was hired at a high price by the master from outside the region, and the dishes are exquisite, truly, the flavors are so good they could make you swallow your tongue," Baozi the maid, Hua'er, complained to Zhu Ping'an on behalf of her mistress.

Tasty?

The dish that was just presented could easily compete in the realm of dark cuisine, Zhu Ping'an sneered.

"Ah, you still don't believe me? Here, try this." Seeing that Zhu Ping'an had not repented, Hua'er picked up a small plate from the table and walked over to him. She pierced a piece of food with a small bamboo skewer and without waiting for his protest, stuffed it into his mouth.

Before Zhu Ping'an could even react, a piece of food was shoved into his mouth, and his face nearly turned green. Could it be dark cuisine again?

However, to his surprise, the food that Hua'er placed in his mouth made him pause the moment it touched his tongue. It was an absolute contrast to what he expected—this food tasted so delicious that it was hard to resist.

"How is it? Tasty, right?" Hua'er asked, pouting.

Zhu Ping'an nodded.

"So, you really didn't know what's good for you, being ungrateful when kindness was extended," Hua'er pouted again, clearly displeased.

Zhu Ping'an looked at the scattered food on the ground, seeming to understand why the cunning girl had thrown the plate. The most dangerous thing is the heart of a woman—she must have intended to destroy all evidence.

"Alright. Hua'er, don't forget, he's a scholar. Aren't you worried he'll report you to the authorities for insulting someone of higher status?" The cunning girl, sitting on the soft couch, spoke with an air of indifference.

At this, Hua'er froze. It seemed like I hadn't read enough; Mistress, please don't deceive me.

"I don't care. I don't believe that if he's wrong, people can't say anything," Hua'er puffed her cheeks again.

"Miss, miss, the master is home!"

At that moment, a small maid's excited voice came from outside, and soon, a maid came rushing in, breathless.

"Miss, the master is back! He's almost home!" the small maid said, panting, as she reported to the cunning girl, Li Shu.

Li Shu had already leapt off the couch with a bright expression, her lips curved upward in a crescent moon smile. As she moved, her skirt swished around, like a joyful butterfly.

"Really?" the cunning girl asked with a smile, her voice as sweet as a yellow oriole, soft and melodious.

"Yes, miss, I was almost at the door when I heard it," the small maid nodded repeatedly.

"That's wonderful! Quick, Hua'er, let's go to the door!" The cunning girl gleefully lifted her skirt and ran outside.

"Miss, wait for me!" Hua'er hurriedly chased after her.

Soon, all the maids and servants followed, and the study became quiet.

The wealthy Mr. Li had returned home. What a coincidence—today, Zhu Ping'an had come for two things. One was borrowing books, but the main reason was to express his gratitude to Mr. Li. He had passed the imperial exams thanks to the collection of books Mr. Li kept as a cultured person. Also, in three days, there would be a banquet at his house. Mr. Li probably wouldn't be interested, but Zhu Ping'an knew he had to follow the proper etiquette and extend the invitation.

Thus, Zhu Ping'an also stood up and walked outside.

When Mr. Li returned home, the commotion was huge. Four or five carriages rolled through the wooden boards laid out for them at the gate. Two of the carriages were covered, completely sealed off, while the other three were packed with all sorts of items, a dazzling array. More than ten servants accompanied Mr. Li back from outside.

"Father..."

The cunning girl saw Mr. Li from a distance and, with a joyful shout, lifted her skirt and ran towards him like a swallow returning to its nest, her joy radiating off her.

It turns out that even the cunning young girl can have such a little daughter moment.

Zhu Pingan watched from a distance, feeling a bit emotional.

Mr. Li, still as plump as ever, wore a watermelon hat on his round head and a large gold ring on his hand, as though he wanted everyone to know just how wealthy he was.

"Shu'er, slow down, slow down, don't trip!" Mr. Li called out to his precious daughter, waving his chubby hands urgently to signal Li Shu to slow down as she ran toward him.

What a scene of a loving father and daughter.

While Zhu Ping'an was feeling sentimental, suddenly a figure caught his attention. Though it was fleeting, Zhu Ping'an's surprisingly good memory—thanks to his life in the Ming Dynasty—allowed him to recognize the person immediately.

The person had been following the carriage, blending in with the group of servants. At first, there was nothing special about them, but the moment Zhu Ping'an peeked out of the study, the person seemed to notice something, quickly bending down and stepping aside. It was this sudden movement that drew Zhu Ping'an's attention. Though the figure quickly vanished, Zhu Ping'an had clearly seen enough to recognize them.

Then, Zhu Ping'an felt as though he had been struck by lightning.

He was absolutely sure—it was the person who had asked for his name in Huaining and Anqing and then gave him silver.

Thinking back...

Zhu Ping'an stared blankly at the scheming young girl, Li Shu, who was sticking to Mr. Li. It felt like thunder was rolling inside his mind. The person who gave him silver—could it really have been this girl who always called him a toad, a poor fool?

This discovery was more shocking than if he had seen his reflection in a mirror at night and found himself stepping out of it to greet him.

As for why Zhu Ping'an immediately assumed it was the scheming young girl who had instructed the person to give him silver instead of Mr. Li, there was a reason.

When he was younger, Zhu Ping'an had been blocked at the door several times when trying to borrow books from Mr. Li's house. If it hadn't been for Li Shu and the maid Baozi, Hua'er, who were returning from walking a little red horse, he wouldn't have been allowed into the study to borrow books. Over the years of borrowing books from Mr. Li's house, he had rarely seen Mr. Li himself. Mr. Li was usually out on business, seldom returning home. How could he have known about Zhu Ping'an's robbery or have someone deliver silver to him? He had no time for such things.

In fact, the main reason Zhu Ping'an suspected it was Li Shu's orders was because of one thing the person who gave him the silver had said. The person had mentioned that they had been instructed by the master and were not to speak much with him.

Looking back, that kind of command seemed very much in line with the style of the scheming young girl.

Although that was the case, it was still hard for Zhu Ping'an to believe. Could the cunning girl really have secretly given him silver? And not just once, but twice?

Zhu Ping'an stared unbelievably at the door.

In his line of sight, Li Shu had started to show her temper again.

"Why are you so late? Did you bring the things I asked for? What about the coral? Didn't I tell you to bring me two corals from the seaside?"

The plump Mr. Li smiled obsequiously, "I brought them, I brought them, my little ancestor, they're all in the carriage."

"That's more like it. You're the best, Father." Li Shu, with her delicate hands, grabbed Mr. Li's arm and began to shake it.

Mr. Li looked as though he had eaten honey, utterly delighted.