

Rise 169

Chapter 169: Private Room

More than a dozen accountants sat at two tables, with the wealthy Master Li and the cunning young lady Li Shu sitting at one table alone. The maid Baozi, also known as Hua'er, stood by to serve them.

Zhu Ping'an was invited by the elderly accountant, whose hair was graying at the temples, to join their table. Everyone at the table was very friendly. Although Zhu Ping'an was still young, no one at the table dared to look down on him. In their conversation, they treated him as an equal, or even with higher regard.

Master Li, the wealthy man, was generous, offering many dishes that were hard to find even in the county town, but there was a whole table full of them.

The food was delightful in both appearance and taste.

Zhu Ping'an, of course, didn't hold back. He ate freely and comfortably, showing no signs of the awkwardness that villagers sometimes had while eating. It all looked very harmonious, with no sense of discomfort.

During the meal, Master Li suddenly said, "Young Master Zhu, come over here and help me out, would you?"

Zhu Ping'an, who had been enjoying his meal, paused for a moment at the sound of the words, then looked up at Master Li.

Master Li lightly tapped the table, extended a hand toward Zhu Ping'an, and said, "You'll help me, and I'll pay you this amount per year."

"Fifty taels?" one accountant asked in surprise. For a young boy of thirteen or fourteen, earning fifty taels a year was quite a good deal, and Master Li was indeed generous.

However, to their surprise, Master Li shook his head.

"Uh, could it be five taels? That's too little," the accountant said, somewhat doubtful, thinking that Zhu Ping'an was certainly worth more than five taels.

Master Li smiled and shook his head again. "No, it's five hundred taels."

Five hundred taels?

Many of the accountants gasped at the number, truly amazed at Master Li's generosity. They were envious.

As soon as Master Li finished speaking, the sly young lady Li Shu slammed down her chopsticks and pouted so much that she looked like she could tie a cow with it.

"Why? I don't agree!" Li Shu scowled, her face full of displeasure.

"Shu'er, be good..." Master Li hurriedly soothed his precious little one.

Under the envious and jealous gazes of the accountants, Zhu Ping'an slowly stood up. He cupped his hands toward Master Li and, with an apologetic expression, said, "Thank you for your recognition, Master Li, but my ambitions lie elsewhere. Please forgive me."

For some reason, after Zhu Ping'an said this, he felt as if the scheming young lady Li Shu had lifted a heavy weight from her heart.

As for why... wasn't it just five hundred taels? This girl was so petty!

Indeed, Zhu Ping'an almost forgot—this girl was a gold-digger!

Zhu Ping'an couldn't help but silently complain.

This matter was dropped, and afterward, everyone continued eating and chatting. The Li family's cook was skilled, and the food was absolutely delicious.

After the meal, the sun had already set, and Zhu Ping'an packed the books he had chosen into his bag and stood up to take his leave.

The double-entry bookkeeping method had already been mastered by the accountants. Next, they only needed to check the books from several years using this method. Any discrepancies would be identified, and naturally, Master Li would decide how to handle them.

Therefore, Zhu Ping'an no longer concerned himself with the account checking.

As dusk fell, the setting sun, like blood, slowly slid down, turning the western sky a bright red. In the last rays of the sun, Zhu Ping'an, carrying his bag, slowly walked toward the village of Xiahe.

Along the way, Zhu Ping'an encountered villagers returning home from the fields, and he greeted them one by one. However, the villagers kept calling him "Young Master Zhu," which made Zhu Ping'an feel a bit uncomfortable.

When Zhu Ping'an returned home, his father, Zhu Shouyi, was already there, tending to the family's prized ox—Big Black. His father took very good care of Big Black. As soon as he arrived home, he unloaded the burden from Big Black's back, brushed its fur, and provided it with water. When Big Black saw Zhu Ping'an, it raised its head high, as though showing off how well it was treated.

Zhu Ping'an's mother, Chen, asked him with concern whether he had eaten well at the Li family's place and whether the accounting books were troublesome.

It seemed the servants at the Li family had clearly explained everything.

Zhu Ping'an answered one by one and mentioned that he had just eaten and didn't need dinner made for him. His mother, Chen, dismissed it and said, "What's the harm in making a little more? If you're hungry, eat; if not, don't. We still have pigs at home."

"Only a mother is good in this world," Zhu Ping'an thought as he looked at his mother, and the song echoed in his mind.

After feeding the ox, his father went inside the house. After a short while, he came out and asked, "Wife, where are my cloth shoes from under the bed?"

Upon hearing this, Chen nonchalantly replied, "Those shoes were too old, with two toes sticking out, so I threw them away."

Hearing this, Zhu Shouyi became anxious and said, "Where did you throw them? They were still wearable, and the exposed toes don't matter. I've been using them while riding the ox cart. If we can save, we should save. That's how life gets better. I'll go pick them up."

Chen gave him a look, her expression displeased, and said coldly, "Don't bother picking them up. I already took the money out of the shoes!"

Upon hearing this, Zhu Ping'an looked at his father with surprise. It didn't seem like something his father, who was usually so honest and somewhat dull, would do. After all these years, he had no idea his father could hide private savings.

Chen glared at Zhu Shouyi, her eyes filled with cold fury.

Zhu Shouyi turned pale with fear.

"Father, just pray for your own safety," Zhu Ping'an thought. "Who told you to hide private money and get caught by mother? Forgive me, I can't help you."

"Uh, I'll just put the books I borrowed in my room first," Zhu Ping'an hastily excused himself.

Once back in his room, Zhu Ping'an peered out the window, observing the situation outside. If things went wrong, he might have to intervene in the dispute—of course, he would side with his mother. After all, it was his father's private savings that had been discovered.

"Cough, cough, cough... Wife, what's for dinner tonight?"

Outside the window, Zhu Shouyi awkwardly rubbed his hands, finally managing to squeeze out a sentence.

"Why are you asking me? You, Zhu Shouyi, are in charge of your own little treasury, so go buy your own food!" Chen sneered, spraying Zhu Shouyi's face with saliva.

Zhu Shouyi didn't even bother wiping his face, merely giving an awkward laugh. He reached out to pat Chen's shoulder, hoping to appease her. But after opening his mouth for a while, he couldn't say much. "Wife, I... I..."

"What are you stuttering for? You've got your little treasury now!" Chen laughed coldly, swatting Zhu Shouyi's hand away.

"Tell me, why did you hide money? Did I make you eat less or wear less?" Chen was enraged.

"I..." Zhu Shouyi stammered.

"Zhu Shouyi, do you think that with a few measly coins in your pocket, you've forgotten who you are?!" Chen was so furious her eyes were about to tear up, and she started punching Zhu Shouyi on the shoulder with her small fists. "Are you saving up to spend it on some vixen? Answer me!"

Zhu Shouyi's face turned red, and he waved his hands repeatedly.

"Now you're learning how to avoid responsibility, Zhu Shouyi, you..." Chen trembled with rage.

"No, no! Wife, I just wanted to buy you a bracelet for your birthday. I've been saving for months, and when your birthday comes, I'll be able to buy it and surprise you. You can even go to Zhang's Jewelry Store in town to ask about it..." Zhu Shouyi hurriedly confessed when he saw how angry Chen was, forgetting all about the surprise he had planned for her.

Upon hearing this, Chen, who hadn't shed a single tear in her fury, suddenly burst into tears. She hugged Zhu Shouyi and patted his back hard.

After being with Zhu Shouyi for so many years, Chen could easily tell that he was telling the truth.

Zhu Shouyi understood her too, and his worried, tense expression softened. He awkwardly hugged her, trying to comfort her, saying "Don't cry, don't cry."

And once again, Zhu Ping'an was forced to watch the display of love... He turned away and began copying his book to avoid seeing more of it.