

Rise 205

Chapter 205: The Young Lady is Acting Strange (2)

The little maid, who was as timid as a quail, secretly thought to herself as she watched her young mistress spare her with just a single sentence.

After finishing her reprimand of the little maid, the cunning young lady, Li Shu, was about to leave. But in the instant she turned around, she seemed to finally notice Chen, who was tending her stall. She took two quick steps toward the stall, and a bright yet sweet smile appeared on her delicate face. With great politeness, she called out:

"Auntie, it really is you! I almost thought I was mistaken."

Chen looked at the beautiful, well-mannered, filial, and capable young girl standing before her, calling her "auntie." For a moment, she was stunned. Was she really addressing her? Shu'er... That name sounded somewhat familiar.

"Auntie, have you forgotten me? When I was little, I used to visit your house to play with Brother Ping'an. You even gave me a basket of fruits and snacks. They were so delicious!" Li Shu's voice was as soft and coquettish as that of a girl next door.

"Oh! You're Li Shu from Shanghe Village!"

Only then did Chen remember—this was the same obedient and sweet little girl who had once ridden her red pony to the old house to play with Zhi'er.

She had been stunningly beautiful as a child, and now, she had grown even more so.

"Auntie, you look like you have something on your mind. Would you like to talk to me about it?"

As Li Shu chatted with Chen, her words were as sweet as honey. She lavished praise and compliments, coaxing Chen into high spirits. In the midst of their lively conversation, Li Shu noticed a trace of worry in Chen's expression and casually inquired about it.

Chen had already grown comfortable in the conversation. When she heard Li Shu's question, she answered without hesitation, "My son, Ping'an, has gone to Yingtian for the imperial examination. It's been more than half a month now, and I don't know how he's managing with food and lodging over there."

"Auntie, you can set your mind at ease! Brother Ping'an has been smart since he was a child. He will surely take good care of himself. Who knows? He might even return home as a successful scholar this time!"

Li Shu's words filled Chen with so much joy that she could hardly close her mouth. Every single word she said touched Chen's heart in the most comforting way.

"He has no such fate of becoming a scholar! I only hope he returns to me safe and sound." Chen waved her hand repeatedly as she spoke, but her face was brimming with pride for her son.

"Hehe, you never know! Brother Ping'an might really pass the exams and bring you back a scholar's title!" Li Shu laughed charmingly, her bright, water-like eyes shining.

After chatting with Chen for a while longer, Li Shu spotted her little maid, Hua'er, returning from the candied hawthorn vendor in the distance. She knew it was time to take her leave.

"Auntie, my maid has returned. I must bid you farewell. I still need to offer incense and pray for my father and brother." Li Shu stood up and took her leave.

Chen, upon hearing that Li Shu was going to offer prayers for her family, did not stop her. However, she took half of the homemade pastries she had brought for her own lunch and stuffed them into the hands of the timid little maid following Li Shu, telling her to eat them on the road.

"Thank you, Auntie! I've always loved eating the treats you make." Li Shu sweetly expressed her gratitude. She then instructed her little maid to retrieve a packet of pastries from the carriage as a return gift before boarding the carriage.

Her dress fluttered gracefully as she moved, her silhouette light and elegant. Her slender figure swayed beautifully before vanishing into the carriage.

Chen watched as Li Shu entered the carriage, thinking to herself that this girl was not only extraordinarily beautiful but also well-spoken, well-mannered, and highly cultured. She had a good personality, was filial, and carried herself with grace and elegance. In every way, she was better than any girl Chen had ever met.

However, once inside the carriage, Li Shu seemed like an entirely different person.

And no one knew this better than the timid little maid.

The moment the little maid followed her mistress into the carriage and lowered the curtain, before she even had a chance to react, everything went dark—her young mistress had slapped her across the face.

When she looked up, she saw her mistress shaking out her hand and staring at her coldly.

"What are you standing there for? Didn't you see how dirty that old woman who just fell was?" Li Shu flicked her small hand and reprimanded coldly.

"Oh, oh, I'm sorry, Miss." The little maid, timid as a quail, hurriedly put down the half-pack of pastries given by Chen, then took out a handkerchief and handed it to her mistress.

Li Shu took the handkerchief and wiped her hands with disgust. Then, she had the little maid pour some clean water so she could wash her hands. After drying them, she carelessly tossed the handkerchief onto the half-pack of pastries and casually ordered, "Eat that later."

"Ah? Oh." The quail-like little maid was surprised, but after receiving a glare from her mistress, she quickly nodded and agreed.

"Do you know why I brought you here?" Li Shu absentmindedly toyed with the ornament on her waist as she spoke to the little maid.

The little maid looked up with a confused expression, her face still marked with a handprint.

"Because you're a mute gourd." Li Shu glanced at her and said indifferently.

Shortly after Li Shu boarded the carriage, another little maid, Hua'er, ran over, panting. She got into the carriage and pouted, "That candied hawthorn seller was so weird. I kept telling him I wanted to buy some, but he just kept walking forward..."

Once the bun-faced little maid got into the carriage, the coachman cracked his whip again, and the carriage slowly moved forward through the crowd.

Not long after Li Shu's carriage left, a few housewives from neighboring villages came to Chen's bamboo weaving stall to buy some crafts. As they browsed, they gossiped excitedly.

"Oh my, wasn't that the young lady from the Old Li family in Shanghe Village who just got on the carriage? She's really beautiful. I heard that the Old Li family is extraordinary—one of their little maids earns more in a year than we do in three years of farming."

"That's not all. I heard that girl has been obedient and well-mannered since she was young. Just now, I even saw her helping up Granny Li from Bianjia Village."

"She's so well-educated and polite. I heard she's not engaged yet. If someone could marry her into their family as a daughter-in-law, they'd be grinning in their sleep."

"Forget it! How could your son be a match for her?"

As they picked out bamboo crafts, the women chattered away. After paying for their goods, each bought one or two pieces before leaving, laughing and joking.

Their words were spoken casually, but someone was listening intently. An idea suddenly took root in Chen's mind, sprouting and growing rapidly.

Not far away, an old woman emerged from an alley. Her clothes were still stained with dust, and she leaned on a cane while carrying a piece of meat in her hand. She brushed past the housewives carrying bamboo crafts.

A short while later, those same housewives came out of the alley, beaming as they clutched their money pouches. They then parted ways, each returning home. None of them had really known each other in the first place...

At a temple in Kaoshan Town, a certain young lady lit incense, donated a few extra taels of silver, and, unable to resist the temple attendant's enthusiasm, drew a fortune stick.

A supreme fortune—

Fate, one person holds half;

The thread is tied to my finger.