

Rise 282

Chapter 282: If Only One Could Grow Old with Another

“Break off the engagement? Of course! Who wants to be with a stinky toad like you!”

Li Shu’s pretty face was dark with anger, and her jet-black eyes glared fiercely at Zhu Ping’an, as if they were about to shoot flames and burn this stinky toad into a lump of blackened toad jerky!

“Very well, then let’s break it off.”

Compared to Li Shu’s fury, Zhu Ping’an remained unusually calm. After she finished shouting, he simply replied with composure.

Then, the scheming Li Shu seemed to run out of steam. She snorted coldly and sneered at Zhu Ping’an.

“You think I don’t want to break it off? Hmph, if it weren’t for your mother crying, making a fuss, and threatening suicide to ‘force’ my father to agree to this marriage!”

“My father only agreed because of that. No matter how much he spoils me, he wouldn’t agree to break off the engagement at a time like this—he’s a man who values saving face!”

“Once some time passes and Father is in a better mood, I’ll definitely beg him to cancel the engagement. I’m not marrying you, stinky toad.”

So that’s how it was. Upon hearing this, Zhu Ping’an finally understood why this scheming “girl” was so angry earlier. It turns out she detested the arranged marriage but couldn’t break it off because her father temporarily disagreed, hence her anger. Hmm, it seemed this girl had already pleaded with Master Li at home, but he refused to dissolve the engagement. In ancient times, marriages were arranged by parental order and through matchmakers—nothing like modern freedom. Engagements and dissolutions required parental approval. No wonder this brat had such a bad temper.

However, he was a bit curious. The Li family was wealthy and powerful—definitely a top-tier household. Why would Master Li value someone like him so highly?

Zhu Ping’an didn’t quite understand. Though he had passed the county-level imperial exam, compared to those from aristocratic families, he was still far behind.

Frankly, Master Li didn’t understand it either—why his beloved daughter, whom he had pampered since birth, insisted on this poor boy from Xiahe Village despite crying, making a fuss, and threatening suicide! His sister-in-law in the capital had introduced several sons of noble families, and she wasn’t satisfied with any of them—yet she latched on to this dirt-poor boy from three generations of farmers in Xiahe Village!

Li Shu. The character “Shu” (殊) is composed of “female” (女) and “Zhu” (朱).

Master Li deeply regretted naming his beloved daughter “Shu”—as if fate had already decreed she belonged to the Zhu family. He regretted it so much it hurt. Ever since agreeing to the marriage, Master Li had lost his appetite...

Of course, Master Li wasn't one to sit idly by. Conveniently, it was the old madam's birthday. Using "official business" as an excuse, he sent Li Shu off to the capital to convey his birthday wishes. He hoped that amid disapproval and resistance from family members there, his daughter might come to her senses and turn back from the brink.

That's how Master Li always tried to console himself.

"Then why did you come here?"

Zhu Ping'an asked again. Since she couldn't cancel the engagement yet, why did she come to the capital? It couldn't be just to say all this, right?

"I came to work toward breaking off the engagement."

Upon hearing Zhu Ping'an's question, Li Shu's cherry lips curved ever so slightly into an imperceptible smile. She tilted her head at a 45-degree angle and answered proudly.

Work toward breaking off the engagement?

So, she came to persuade him—to get his agreement to the breakup. She must be afraid he'd object and cause complications.

“Then you can rest assured. I fully support the breakup—hands, feet, everything.” Zhu Ping'an smiled faintly.

Upon hearing this, Li Shu's pretty face darkened again. She rolled her eyes fiercely and sneered, “Don't flatter yourself. Who cares whether you agree or not? Even if there were ten thousand Zhu Ping'ans, I'd still break off the engagement!”

“Uh...”

Zhu Ping'an was speechless. Why did this brat explode so easily? Who could handle that?

“In a few days, it'll be my grandmother's birthday. My father and older brother are busy, so I came to send birthday wishes.”

Li Shu took off the fox-fur cloak draped over her shoulders. Her jet-black eyes gave Zhu Ping'an a sidelong glance as she pouted and explained.

The bun-faced little maid eagerly took the cloak from her young lady and carefully folded it. Then, thoughtfully, she placed a soft cushion behind Li Shu's back to let her rest comfortably.

“Birthday wishes, huh...”

So it was for the birthday. What did that have to do with breaking off the engagement? And she claimed she came to “work on it”? Zhu Ping’an wasn’t impressed by her explanation.

“What do you know? As long as I perform well at the birthday celebration and make my father happy, it’ll be easier for me to get him to agree to the breakup when I return.”

Li Shu rolled her eyes at Zhu Ping’an and replied coyly.

“What does that have to do with me then? Why did you come looking for me?” Zhu Ping’an shrugged and asked again.

“Of course it has something to do with you. You’re not blind—you know what you’re holding in your hand. It’s Grandmother’s birthday—you have to attend. Besides, something this important must pass before the elders.”

“So, hmph, Zhu Ping’an, don’t you dare mess things up behind the scenes. This time you have to behave, make Grandmother and the elders satisfied. I need to perform well at the banquet, and so do you. You have to make my father satisfied. Once he’s happy, it’ll be easier for me to get him to agree to breaking the engagement.”

“There’s no chance between us. Don’t even think about it—you’re a toad dreaming of swan meat. Hmph, if you behave and perform well, I’ll give you lots and lots of money so you can marry a pretty little wife. Just cooperate, okay?”

“Hey, Zhu Ping’an, did you hear me?”

Li Shu looked at Zhu Ping’an very seriously and spoke solemnly. Behind her back, her jade-like hands were nervously twisting the hem of her robe.

“The sun is shining, the breeze is calm. I, Zhu Ping’an, have hands and feet—why would I need your money, Li Shu?” Zhu Ping’an smiled faintly with disdain.

This brat was so full of herself. Did she really think everyone was as materialistic as she was? In the modern world, she’d definitely be one of those gold diggers who’d rather cry in a BMW than laugh on a bicycle. He had hands, feet, and a working brain—he could create his own future.

“Then what do you mean? You’re really a toad dreaming of swan meat?”

Li Shu’s pretty face held a mocking smile. Her big watery eyes stared at Zhu Ping’an, looking slightly angry—but the small hands behind her back had relaxed.

“I’m vegetarian.”

Zhu Ping’an rolled his eyes at her.

“Hehehe, so you admit you’re a toad...” Li Shu laughed, her slender hand covering her lips in amusement, looking even more radiant.

“Childish.” Zhu Ping’an shook his head disdainfully. Playing word games at a time like this?

“You’re the childish one!” Li Shu retorted angrily, glaring at Zhu Ping’an. Then she asked, “So will you agree or not? Forced melons aren’t sweet, you know.”

Indeed, this whole thing had to rely on the brat. If he took the initiative to cancel the engagement, it would defy his mother’s wishes, which would upset her. He still didn’t know why she had even sent a matchmaker to the Li family. Also, right when his academic success was within reach, proposing a breakup would attract gossip and ruin his future. So, yes, it really had to be her to bring it up—it was the only way.

“It’s all I could ask for. I won’t take a single coin.” Zhu Ping’an thought about it and agreed. Although something still felt a little off, the bright future of a broken engagement was just too tempting. Of course, he made sure to emphasize—“not a single coin.” Joking aside, if the breakup worked out, he’d gladly give her money.

“Suit yourself then.”

When Li Shu heard Zhu Ping’an agree, her pretty face bloomed with joy, like sunlight breaking through a cold winter’s day. When she noticed Zhu Ping’an looking at her, she held a delicate embroidered handkerchief to her lips and posed as a refined young lady.

But if you looked closely, you’d see a tiny poem stitched on the handkerchief:

The long road is cold and bleak,

Fate is light as weeds at our feet;

If I could grow old with one true heart,

Each day and night would be sweet.