

Rise 283

Chapter 283: This is a humble room

After the imperial examination ended, the sky had already brightened. A spirited horse pulled the carriage smoothly along the long street, flanked by rows of shops and bustling pedestrians. The vibrant and prosperous street diluted the presence of the carriage, and gradually, it disappeared at the far end of the road.

“Hey, Zhu Ping’an, where’s your toad hole?”

Inside the carriage, Li Shu glanced at Zhu Ping’an, seemingly displeased by the smell of sweat on him from not bathing. With a delicate hand holding a handkerchief to her nose, she drew out her words and asked with a hint of teasing.

Toad hole? Toad your sister! This brat is as sharp-tongued, arrogant, and conceited as ever, thinking the world revolves around her! What a waste of a pretty face!

“Inside Chongren Gate, Dongsheng Inn,” Zhu Ping’an replied calmly, eyes closed as he rested.

Upon hearing that, Li Shu gave her bun-faced maid a look, and the maid stuck her head out the carriage to quietly relay instructions to the coachman. The coachman acknowledged and began steering the carriage toward Chongren Gate.

“Dongsheng Inn? What a tacky name. It must be some cheap little inn. But I guess it’s good enough for your toad hole,” Li Shu said with disdain, curling her lips and rolling her eyes.

“This humble room is plain, but my virtue fills it with fragrance,” Zhu Ping’an said faintly, curling the corner of his mouth.

“Pfft~”

Li Shu’s delicate nose twitched. Her jet-black eyes glanced at Zhu Ping’an mockingly. “Humble room with virtue, my foot! Smelly wooden toad.”

Hearing Li Shu’s sneer, Zhu Ping’an slightly opened his eyes, glanced at her with a half-smile, and then closed his eyes again to continue resting.

The carriage twisted and turned, and before long, it arrived at Chongren Gate. Following the main street inward, they soon saw a tall and grand inn. A tall flagpole stood in front, with a fluttering flag that read “Dongsheng Inn” in large characters. From its exterior alone, the inn was clearly of high quality.

When the carriage stopped in front of Dongsheng Inn and Li Shu stepped out, she was stunned by the obviously luxurious scale of the place and stood with her mouth agape in disbelief.

“This place is...?” Li Shu looked the inn up and down, full of doubt.

“My so-called toad hole,” Zhu Ping’an replied coolly with a faint smile, brushed off his clothes, and walked in first.

“Zhu Ping’an, wait for me!”

Li Shu looked up at his figure entering the inn, pouted, and muttered, “What’s with the attitude?” Then she called out and followed him inside.

“Young Master Zhu, you’ve finished your exam! I had a feeling you’d be back soon, so we’ve already prepared hot water for you. Oh, and I heard magpies chirping outside your window this morning—surely a sign of good news! I believe it’s a sign you did well on the imperial exam. Congratulations in advance, Young Master!”

Just as Li Shu entered the inn, she saw an exceptionally eager attendant bowing deeply in front of Zhu Ping’an and speaking flatteringly. Looks like this stinky toad is doing quite well here, she thought.

“This must be the young mistress, right? Young mistress, you’re as beautiful as a fairy descended to earth. Young Master is truly fortunate.”

When the attendant saw Li Shu, he immediately turned to flatter her as well.

“Thank you for taking care of him during this time. Hua’er, reward him.”

Hearing the attendant refer to her as “young mistress,” a blush crept up Li Shu’s pretty cheeks, and joy bubbled up inside. Even her brows lifted slightly, though she maintained a calm and indifferent expression. She glanced at Hua’er and gave a faint order.

“Alright, go about your business.”

The bun-faced maid took one of the many pre-prepared red envelopes and handed it to the attendant, then sent him on his way.

“Thank you, young mistress!”

The attendant weighed the red envelope in his hand, beaming like a flower, and quickly thanked Li Shu.

Li Shu brought only Hua’er upstairs with Zhu Ping’an, leaving the others to wait below. When they reached Zhu Ping’an’s room, she once again opened her mouth in surprise at the luxurious furnishings.

“How could you bear to stay here?” Li Shu asked after entering.

“A few days ago, the inn held a ‘meeting through poetry’ event. Anyone who could match all the couplets correctly received free room and board for a month. So, here I am—still have over half a month left,” Zhu Ping’an replied casually as he dropped his bag on the floor.

“You’re still carrying that thing? Just throw it out, it stinks...” Li Shu pinched her nose, her face full of disgust.

“Do me a favor and step outside, I’m going to change clothes,” Zhu Ping’an said with a glance, his tone flat.

“Pervert! Who’d want to look at you?!”

Li Shu rolled her eyes dramatically and pouted.

Zhu Ping’an ignored her, walked over to the cabinet, opened it, and took out a set of clothes.

“Ugh, you’re going to wear that?”

Li Shu’s expression was full of disdain as she looked at the clothes Zhu Ping’an had chosen. Her inky eyes radiated disapproval. She turned to Hua’er. “Hua’er, go downstairs and bring up the clothes I prepared.”

Hua'er responded and trotted downstairs.

Once she was gone, Li Shu stood in front of Zhu Ping'an and spoke seriously, "Zhu Ping'an, you know how important this birthday banquet is. If I can get on my father's good side, I'll be able to go back and ask him to cancel the engagement. Besides, everyone at the estate knows we're engaged. We have to pretend to be a happy couple. Don't mess this up—and don't get any ideas!"

"Is that really necessary?" Zhu Ping'an looked at the serious Li Shu, feeling something odd. If she wanted to break off the engagement, why go to all this trouble?

"Of course it's necessary! If the banquet goes well, Father will be happy; if Father's happy, I can go back and ask for the engagement to be called off. You don't want this engagement either, right? So we're on the same page."

Zhu Ping'an looked at her for two seconds, then nodded. Seeing this, Li Shu's face lit up with a touch of joy. Her eyes sparkled as if a weight had been lifted from her heart.

"I just had someone casually pick out the clothes, just to get through the banquet. Don't get any funny ideas, okay?"

As the sound of Hua'er's footsteps approached, Li Shu quickly added the clarification, as if worried Zhu Ping'an might misunderstand.

Soon, Hua'er returned upstairs carrying a bundle like a treasure. Two strong servants followed, bringing up a steaming tub of hot bath water. They placed it in the bedroom and then went back downstairs.

"So filthy! Go scrub yourself properly,"

Li Shu shot Zhu Ping'an a look of disdain and led Hua'er out to prepare the clothes, leaving Zhu Ping'an to bathe in the room.