

Rise 288

Chapter 288: The Country Bumpkin

The previous moment, the head maid of the Marquis's residence had gone out to welcome the Fifth Young Lady, and the scene had been peaceful and harmonious. In the next moment, however, the atmosphere changed. Several beautiful young ladies surged out from a side gate of the Marquis's residence, followed closely by elderly maids and handmaidens. After their appearance, the mood turned peculiar.

"We've been eagerly waiting for you, Fifth Sister. Grandmother was still talking about you during lunch. We sisters have been waiting for quite a while."

A burst of laughter as clear as silver bells came from among the beautiful young ladies.

Leading them was a girl of about fifteen or sixteen. Her hair was styled with smooth temples and a flat bun, the hair above her forehead swept up and braided into a flat knot. Her head glittered with jade and pearl ornaments. She wore a purple sable cape, earrings of precious gems, and a dangling golden fish accessory. Her outfit consisted of a Yangfei-colored crepe robe, a peony-embroidered fox-fur cloak in three shades of blue, and a parrot-green butterfly-embroidered fox-fur skirt. A blue tasseled sash hung from her waist, decorated with two pieces of white jade pendants carved in the shape of lotus flowers. Altogether, she looked noble, elegant, and full of grace.

This young lady had barely stepped out of the side gate and hadn't even seen Li Shu yet when her bell-like greeting laughter rang out.

Zhu Ping'an merely lifted his eyes and glanced at her, then curled his lips slightly—how fake.

“Son-in-law, this is the Second Young Lady of the Marquis’s residence, the daughter of the eldest master. She is very much loved by the old madam,” a low voice reminded Zhu Ping’an from behind.

It was one of the elderly maids Li Shu had brought along. She would visit the Marquis’s residence during holidays to deliver gifts and was familiar with the household, which is why Li Shu had brought her to the capital.

“Where is Fifth Sister? I’ve missed you dearly. You must tell us some of those fascinating rural tales. I heard there’s been auspicious snow this year—surely a good harvest, no? Hehe...”

At that moment, a teasing voice giggled again, and another young lady of the Marquis’s residence walked gracefully past the group, covering her mouth slightly with a handkerchief held by slender jade fingers, laughter carrying a hint of mockery.

She wore a cloud-styled bun adorned with a circlet of jade flowers, a slanted peacock hairpin with a flying blue butterfly at its tip. Her robe was a sapphire silk jacket with wide floral trims. She also wore a fur cloak, albeit a slightly different style from the Second Young Lady’s. Her skirt was a soft yellow gauze with embroidered floral layers and lined with colorful silk threads. She was decorated with coral and pearl jewelry, looking particularly flamboyant.

This young lady’s outfit was eye-catching, and her appearance was rather attractive too, though slightly ostentatious. Her eyes were large, lips thin and sharp—like two blades.

Zhu Ping’an’s first impression of her was that she was someone competitive and sharp-tongued.

“Son-in-law, this is the Third Young Lady of the Marquis’s household, the precious daughter of the second master. She is the old madam’s favorite,” the old maid behind Zhu Ping’an dutifully whispered again.

The Second and Third Young Ladies had strutted past the crowd while giggling, their voices arriving even before they saw Li Shu and the others. It was clear they were brimming with confidence. They hadn’t seen Li Shu in years, and assumed that no matter how well she lived in the countryside, she could never compare to them.

In their minds, Li Shu and her companions must already be dumbfounded by the grandeur of the Marquis’s residence.

But the next scene greatly defied their expectations.

Just as they finished speaking, the sound of a clear and melodious laugh—like a lark—rang out. A stunningly beautiful young lady, around fourteen or fifteen years old, gracefully approached with several maids and handmaidens in tow.

“Hehe... Sorry to keep my sisters waiting. It’s my fault for arriving late.”

The gorgeous young lady—Li Shu—approached, smiling with red lips slightly curled. She gracefully curtsied before them, her dark eyes gleaming with mischief.

This is the Fifth Sister?

At that moment, the Second and Third Young Ladies were utterly stunned. The Fifth Sister in their minds was worlds apart from the one standing before them.

There was not a trace of a country girl in her. If they hadn't been told, they would have thought a princess had arrived. Her face was exquisitely beautiful, surpassing even the most acclaimed beauties they knew. Her clothes were of a royal style that had just begun to trend—one not yet seen widely in the capital. They had only seen it once on a noble princess at a banquet hosted by the Madam of the Duke of Wei.

Especially the accessories she wore—just the small jade bird with a pearl tassel on her head had a quality and luster far superior to their own jewelry.

“Thanks to you, Sister, the harvest wasn't bad. Pearls? We collected several carts' worth. Coral—over a hundred branches too...”

Li Shu acted as if she hadn't noticed the shock in her sisters' eyes. She pouted slightly and began counting with her slender fingers.

“Ahem, Fifth Sister, your Third Sister was asking about the grain harvest in the fields...” The Second Young Lady coughed lightly.

“Then I don’t know. Third Sister likes farming?” Li Shu replied innocently, glancing at the Third Young Lady as if she were a country bumpkin.

The Third Young Lady’s face turned dark... just as she was about to speak, another voice chimed in.

“Hello, Fifth Sister! I’m Zhu’er. You’re so beautiful—more so than a fairy in a painting!”

This came from the Sixth Young Lady of the Marquis’s residence. Her face was round and sweet. She wore a silver fox cape, a moon-white brocade jacket with gold trim, a white gauze pleated skirt, a mutton-fat jade hairpin, double-circle jade earrings, and white marble bracelets inlaid with agarwood beads.

“Hello, Sister Zhu’er,” Li Shu smiled and responded gently.

“Hehe... I heard Fifth Sister brought the Fifth Brother-in-law along. Zhu’er must take a good look!”

With a giggle revealing her little tiger teeth, she skipped past Li Shu and made her way toward Zhu Ping’an.

Then Zhu Ping’an saw this Sixth Young Lady approach him with a sweet smile.

“Hehe... So this is Fifth Brother-in-law? I heard you’re a bumpkin?” The Sixth Young Lady tilted her round and charming face, flashing her tiger teeth and looking at Zhu Ping’an with wide-eyed innocence.

Before Zhu Ping’an could respond, Li Shu’s face already darkened at the words.

“Fifth Sister, are you tired from your journey?”

While speaking to Zhu Ping’an, the Sixth Young Lady also kept an eye on Li Shu. Noticing her displeased expression, she quickly asked with a look of concern.

“Thank you for your concern, Sister Zhu’er. I’m fine—just a little irritated by crows cawing all the way on the road,” Li Shu replied gently, her slender fingers holding a handkerchief over her lips in a delicate, moved manner.

“Then please get some rest, Sister.”

The Sixth Young Lady said caringly, then turned to Zhu Ping’an and curiously asked again like an innocent bunny:

“So you’re really a bumpkin? I’ve never seen one like you before.”

Honestly, watching the Sixth Young Lady, Zhu Ping’an couldn’t help but think of a certain breed of person sometimes called a “green tea b*tch”—but in this case, she was more like the “cute bunny” type: acting sweet and harmless on the surface, but inwardly cunning and ambitious.

Hearing her cutesy and innocent question, Zhu Ping’an gave a goofy, honest smile.

“Ahem, someone like you—beautiful, with a lovely voice, pure and elegant, intelligent and curious, like a drifting willow in the wind... To tell you the truth, for a bumpkin like me...”

Zhu Ping’an smiled awkwardly as he replied.

A real bumpkin indeed. Completely unsophisticated.

She thought the rest of his sentence would be something like, “I’ve never seen such a lovely girl like you.”

The Sixth Young Lady proudly flashed her little tiger teeth again and shot a smug look at Li Shu.

But to her surprise, Li Shu was also watching with a cheerful smile, clearly entertained. Strange... shouldn't she be annoyed?

"Ahem, someone like you—beautiful, with a lovely voice, pure and elegant, intelligent and curious, like a drifting willow in the wind... To tell you the truth, for a bumpkin like me..." Zhu Ping'an grinned and added,

"I can beat ten like you!"

The Sixth Young Lady stared wide-eyed at Zhu Ping'an, dumbfounded...

"Zhu Ping'an, stop joking around—don't scare Sister Zhu'er," Li Shu said playfully with a laugh, gently scolding Zhu Ping'an.