

## Rise 293

### Chapter 293: New Tea and Old Tea

Fresh crucian carp eaten as shredded raw fish, fragrant celery soup from a jade-green stream.

A typical banquet in the marquis' residence was already this extravagant—ingredients were exceptionally refined, cooking techniques extremely meticulous, and the dishes were incredibly diverse. It was like a full Manchu-Han Imperial Feast. The taste was also astonishingly superb, like someone who had eaten in a cafeteria for ages suddenly dining at a gourmet restaurant. Just one such meal must have cost an immense amount of silver—certainly not a small sum.

After the meal, a little maid carried a small tea tray with a cup of fragrant tea and handed it to Zhu Ping'an.

Zhu Ping'an noticed that the Old Madam of the marquis' residence hadn't yet received her fragrant tea, yet this little maid brought it to him first. From the corner of his eye, he noticed several young ladies of the household, including the plump Zhou, watching him with a curious and mocking gaze—as if waiting for this country bumpkin to embarrass himself.

From their expressions, Zhu Ping'an quickly deduced that this cup of tea was no accident.

Since his reincarnation into the Ming dynasty, he hadn't developed the habit of rinsing his mouth with tea after meals, but having read *Dream of the Red Chamber*, he was aware of the custom among wealthy families to rinse with tea after eating.

So, he could only disappoint them. Zhu Ping'an accepted the cup of tea with a faint smile on his lips.

Look, that country bumpkin took the cup! Haha, is he really going to drink it? Haha...

The sixth young lady of the marquis' house stared at Zhu Ping'an without blinking, her eyes sparkling with excitement.

Zhu Ping'an raised the cup, as expected by all. The porcelain was white as jade, and the long thin tea leaves floated like sparrow tongues. The tea was a clear green, emitting a faint fragrance—it truly was good tea. What a pity it was meant only for rinsing. Such luxury.

Under everyone's watchful eyes, Zhu Ping'an raised the cup and took a large gulp. A big one.

He really took such a big gulp...

Like a cow chewing on peonies—how uncultured...

Everyone in the room, except for Li Shu and her maid, had a smile tugging at the corners of their mouths, waiting to laugh at Zhu Ping'an's embarrassment. The sixth young lady had already shifted her gaze from Zhu Ping'an to Li Shu, ready to see how she would react once he made a fool of himself.

But to her disappointment, Li Shu showed not the slightest sign of concern. In her heart, even if Zhu Ping'an didn't know the tea was for rinsing, so what? This marquis' house was nothing more than a bunch of frogs at the bottom of a well, clinging to the faded glory of their ancestors. They were narrow-minded and self-important.

The next moment brought yet another disappointment to the group.

After taking a large sip, Zhu Ping'an turned his gaze to the little maid who had brought the tea. Under his steady gaze, she slowly brought out a rinsing basin. Zhu Ping'an then used the tea to rinse his mouth and returned the cup to the maid.

This wicked man always likes to mess with people. Li Shu's lips curved into a faint smile, then she also took the tea to rinse her mouth.

After rinsing, another maid came forward with a tray carrying a fresh cup of tea—this one truly meant for drinking after the meal.

Li Shu picked up the cup. Her slender jade-like hand gently tapped the lid against the rim, then she lightly blew on the tea. Lifting the cup to her lips, she sniffed the aroma gently, then set it down again.

"Fifth Sister, why aren't you drinking it? Are you not used to it? How about asking someone to prepare a sweet soup for you instead?"

The sixth young lady blinked her large watery eyes and asked curiously, like a concerned younger sister. But her mention of “sweet soup” seemed to carry a subtle condescension, hinting at Li Shu’s rural origins.

“Yes, I’m not used to it.”

Li Shu responded with a faint playful smile, her big eyes looking at her younger sister, half amused, half teasing.

Before the sixth young lady could break into a smile, Li Shu continued:

“This tea resembles sparrow tongues in shape, golden-yellow and tender green in color. The brew is clear and bright, with a lofty aroma. Is this authentic Huangshan Maofeng?”

The sixth young lady was slightly surprised. “Sister, you have a sharp eye.”

“But what a shame. Though this is Huangshan Maofeng, the tea buds are shriveled, and among the tender green, there’s a touch of yellowing. The fragrance is dull and heavy—if I’m not mistaken, this is aged tea, isn’t it?”

Li Shu gently wiped her lips with an embroidered handkerchief, a clear look of disdain deliberately shown in her jet-black eyes.

The sixth young lady's lips parted slightly in astonishment. She hadn't expected Li Shu not only to identify the tea, but also to discern that it was aged.

"Tea should be fresh, wine should be aged. At home, I'm used to drinking fresh tea. Unlike you, dear sister, I really can't get used to aged tea. In past years when I visited, the tea served here was still fresh—how come this year it's aged?"

Li Shu put down her handkerchief, her clear eyes fixed on her younger sister. Her gaze sparkled, and she smiled faintly as she turned to the bun-faced little maid behind her and casually instructed:

"Hua'er, send word by carrier pigeon back home—have them send two carts of this year's fresh tea. Oh, and make sure it's pre-rain Longjing. Once the new spring tea is harvested, send another two carts."

"Yes, Miss."

The bun-faced maid puffed up her chest and answered energetically, turning to leave, walking with exaggerated pride and high steps.

The people of the marquis' residence...

This girl really hasn't changed at all, Zhu Ping'an thought, glancing at Li Shu who was demurely covering her mouth like a noble lady, and quietly curled his lips.

Thus, the banquet at the marquis' residence came to an end. Everyone left one by one. Aside from the Old Madam telling Zhu Ping'an to take a seat at the beginning, she didn't speak to him again—not treating him like the marquis' son-in-law in the slightest.

Of course, Zhu Ping'an didn't take it to heart at all.

After the banquet, Zhu Ping'an walked back to the guest room the way he came. Along the way, many maids and servants passed by. However, the looks they gave Zhu Ping'an were strange, seemingly filled with mockery.

These servants knew their masters well. When they saw Zhu Ping'an's unfamiliar face, they figured he must be the new Fifth Son-in-Law. To them, the most powerful in the household was the Old Madam, followed by the eldest master who inherited the Marquis of Linhuai title. But the wealthiest was the third master—each year, he filled the family's financial gaps, sending over carts and carts of silver.

What baffled them was why the beloved daughter of the third master, the precious Fifth Miss, had been married off to a poor scholar from the countryside. This news had spread throughout the household at the time, stirring resentment among many servants and stewards. A poor country scholar? He's not even better than us. Jealousy and envy gave rise to countless tales and rumors about the Fifth Son-in-Law.

Things like “marrying into the wife’s family” or “reverse entry into the household”—none of the stories were flattering.

So, now that they were seeing the real Fifth Son-in-Law in person, they couldn’t help but recall those rumors. Though they didn’t dare say anything aloud, in their hearts, they scorned him bitterly.