

Rise 311

Chapter 311: Embroidery

Young Master Zheng lived out this saying with his actions. After the poetry gathering, he seemed to become addicted-wandering into Zhu Ping'an's little courtyard with or without reason. Before Zhu Ping'an, he would be struck with poetic inspiration, composing poems, writing couplets, and even once lowering himself to offer guidance on writing the Eight-Legged Essay...

The matter of Zhu Ping'an feeling ashamed of his own performance at the poetry gathering also spread throughout the Marquis of Linhuai's residence, thanks to Young Master Zheng's intentional efforts. As a result, there were now many more versions of the Zhu Ping'an story circulating in the residence, and he even gained a new title: the Mediocre Son-in-law.

Zhu Ping'an, however, acted as if nothing had happened-reading his books, practicing his calligraphy, living his days just as before.

But not everyone could turn a blind eye-like the little bun-faced maid, who pouted with her chubby cheeks while delivering clean clothes to Zhu Ping'an, ranting a great deal. It was mostly about how Young Master Zheng wasn't good at either literature or martial arts, yet went around acting like he was the reincarnation of Pan An, flaunting a fan and pretending to be a romantic scholar. How shameless! And so many in the residence gossiped and spoke ill of the young master-why didn't the young master just write poem to dazzle them all...?

"If you were walking on the road and a dog bit you, would you bite the dog back?" Zhu Ping'an asked with a slight curve of his lips after the little bun-faced maid finished her rant.

"Of course not, I'm not a dog..." The little bun-faced maid pouted even more and gave him a discontented look.

"Exactly. Neither am I," Zhu Ping'an smiled faintly.

"But... but so many people in the residence are saying bad things about you-they say you're living off a woman, that you're useless..." The little bun-faced maid pouted again, full of righteous anger, as if they were speaking about her.

"Water flows low to form the sea; a humble man becomes the king," Zhu Ping'an said softly, unbothered.

The little bun-faced maid thought about it for a while, then shook her head and said, "I don't get it."

She looked at Zhu Ping'an with innocent eyes, waiting for him to explain.

"Alright, simply put-I don't have to act pretentious to blind their dog eyes," Zhu Ping'an rubbed his forehead.

That sentence, the little bun-faced maid understood. Her eyes lit up immediately. Though she'd never heard of "acting pretentious" before, she was familiar with the idea of boasting and shameless bragging. And as for

"blinding their dog eyes"-that was easy to understand. Basically, it meant: just wait a few days, and the young master would put them in their place.

The little bun-faced maid folded up the dirty clothes Zhu Ping'an had changed out of and packed them to take to the back courtyard for washing. Then, being very diligent, she cleaned and tidied the guest room once again. Although Zhu Ping'an was quite clean himself, he still couldn't compare with a professional maid.

Looking at the sparkling windows and neatly organized guest room, the little bun-faced maid clapped her chubby hands in satisfaction, her eyes curved like crescent moons.

Zhu Ping'an thanked her generously, making the little bun-faced maid's eyes curve even more like moon crescents.

As she left carrying the clothes, Zhu Ping'an placed the money pouch from last time on top of the clothes, asking her to return it to Li Shu.

It was obviously a woman's money pouch-made of fine silk, with a faint fragrance and embroidery. But the embroidery was rather odd. Normally, it would be something like mandarin ducks, but this one had two fat ducks paddling through clear water! Clearly, Li Shu had an unusual taste. This money pouch had been delivered to Zhu Ping'an by the little bun-faced maid last time when he went out with Zhang Siwei and Wang Shizhen-obviously it belonged to Li Shu. Since the little bun-faced maid was going back to the rear courtyard, Zhu Ping'an used the opportunity to return the pouch and money via her.

When the little bun-faced maid returned to the back courtyard carrying the clothes and money pouch, Li Shu was in her room practicing embroidery. On the table was an embroidery pattern of mandarin ducks playing in the water. But what she had actually embroidered so far was a fat duck swimming, with another half-finished fat duck beside it...

Embroidery, or "women's work," was an important part of "inner education" for girls in scholarly and noble families during the Ming Dynasty. In her early years, the wealthy Li family had even spent a large sum hiring an embroidery mistress from the famous Gu family. But Li Shu lacked the patience for needle and thread. Her father, fond of her, didn't want her to struggle and figured he'd just hire more embroiderers for her in the future. So, her embroidery studies were quietly abandoned.

It was only recently that Li Shu started picking it up again, which the little bun-faced maid saw as just a whimsical phase. So far, Li Shu had only finished one and a half pieces—one money pouch, and the half-finished item in her hands: a shoe insole, clearly too large for a woman's foot.

"Miss, this insole looks a bit too big..." The little bun-faced maid said with a slightly open mouth as she entered and saw the item in Li Shu's hands.

Li Shu looked up at the maid, put down her needle and thread, and stretched her sore wrist before replying casually, "Oh, I just started learning embroidery. It's not good, but it would be a waste to throw it away, so might as well give it to Zhu Ping'an, that stinky toad."

Ah, so the young master was being used for practice. The piece wasn't well done, so it was given to him. The little bun-faced maid completely believed her.

"Miss, this was returned by the young master."

After pouring a cup of water for her mistress, the maid handed the money pouch from Zhu Ping'an to Li Shu.

The moment Li Shu saw the pouch, her expression darkened. Her watery eyes misted over slightly... she looked very upset.

"The young master said to thank you for stepping in last time, and he's returning the money now," the little bun-faced maid said, not noticing her mistress's changing expression.

"He said he wants to return the money?" Li Shu's expression brightened.

"Yes, yes," the maid nodded.

"Put it away. Next time you bring him clean clothes, give the pouch back to him. The embroidery's not very good, and it'd be a waste to throw it out-might as well give it to Zhu Ping'an, that stinky toad." When Li Shu spoke again, her expression had returned to normal.

"Yes, Miss." The little bun-faced maid nodded repeatedly.

She continued serving tea in the room, then went outside during a break to hand Zhu Ping'an's clothes to the young maid in charge of laundry. After chatting a bit with some maids from the neighboring courtyard, she trotted back to the room.

"Miss, I heard from Qin'er in the next courtyard that Madam's nephew is showing off again with a fan, pretending to be some scholar. He's really not that good, but he keeps flaunting himself. The Third Young Miss and others are laughing behind his back. I heard Madam's nephew's father some high official-how did his son turn out like this..." the little bun-faced maid said, pouting in front of Li Shu.

"If he weren't like that, why would Aunt choose to introduce him to me? This was her carefully selected match," Li Shu sneered coldly, her mouth full of disdain.

"Madam is so mean..." the little bun-faced maid puffed out her cheeks.