

Rise 33

Chapter 33: The Truth Comes to Light

Before bed, there was a little incident: Auntie Xiao Si came to visit. She entered the house and closed the door, then leaned close to Chen and whispered something about the outside.

"Second-sister-in-law, did you know?" Auntie Xiao Si started with this question.

Zhu Ping'an felt speechless; she hadn't said anything yet but immediately asked if he knew. What was there to know when she hadn't said anything at all?

"What is it?" Mother Chen put down the shoe sole in her hand and asked.

As the saying goes, you shouldn't strike someone who is smiling at you. Although Chen and Auntie Xiao Si didn't have a very harmonious relationship as sisters-in-law, they were still family. Plus, since Auntie Xiao Si had come to visit, Chen was polite and accommodating.

"I just saw first-sister-in-law asking for two guan from Father and Mother," Auntie Xiao Si said, casting a mysterious glance at the window before speaking softly.

"What?" Upon hearing this, Chen raised her voice, clearly agitated by Auntie Xiao Si's words. Two guan was not a small amount; that was four taels of silver, enough for the family to get by for half a year.

Auntie Xiao Si hurriedly put her hand to her mouth, signaling Mother Chen to keep her voice down so that Grandma Zhu wouldn't hear, and then continued with indignation, "Exactly! When I first heard it, I was just like you. Why should the eldest branch be able to take so much money from the parents? Later, you won't believe what happened."

"What happened?" Chen played along.

"First-sister-in-law told Mother that first-brother-in-law is going to the county town to visit friends and study for a few days. She said that her friend's teacher is the instructor at the county school, and she also mentioned that her friend's teacher might participate in the next imperial examination," Auntie Xiao Si said quietly to Chen.

Upon hearing this, Chen squinted slightly, a habit of hers when she was thinking.

"You mean, first-brother-in-law and first-sister-in-law are colluding with her in-laws to trick us? They said that her in-laws would contribute one guan to support Jun'er's education, but in the blink of an eye, first-sister-in-law took two taels from Grandpa and Grandma Zhu, and then she gave one tael to her in-laws, leaving them with one tael of private money," she speculated.

A reluctant smile appeared on Chen's face, "That can't be true; their family isn't unreasonable."

Seeing that Mother Chen was unwilling to take a stand, Auntie Xiao Si chatted for a bit longer before finding an excuse to leave, seemingly to find Third Aunt.

Zhu Ping'an, listening from the side, was truly impressed by his uncle. From his understanding of his uncle and aunt over the past few days, it was highly likely that this scheme was his uncle's idea. First, he had his in-laws provide the money, then he asked for money from grandmother under the pretext of studying with friends. Besides what he returned to his in-laws, he would still have some left over for himself.

It was a clever ploy, using the left hand to take from the right. His uncle, the only scholar in the family, had them all spinning in circles.

However, his uncle was also a bit too hasty. Jun'er had only started school for a few days, and his uncle pulled this trick already; it would surely raise suspicions. Although Mother Chen forced a smile and said it wouldn't be the case, she must have had her doubts, just like Auntie Xiao Si. If his uncle had waited a year or so before using this tactic, it would have left no trace at all.

Family matters are bustling again at home.

Without mentioning how Fourth Aunt, Mother, and Third Aunt are dealing with things, Zhu Ping'an rode out on Old Yellow Bull after having breakfast at dawn. This time, besides bringing yesterday's fish basket, he secretly took some salt and seasoning from the kitchen, placing them in an old pouch sewn by Chen, which he hung at his waist.

Zhu Ping'an arrived a bit earlier today. While tying up Old Yellow Bull, class had not yet started.

The teacher, with the elegance of the Wei and Jin dynasties, wore loose clothing and wide sleeves, carrying a scroll of ancient books. As he ascended the slope, he happened to see Zhu Ping'an bending over to tie the cow to a tree. It turned out that the mischievous child who had been playing the game of watering stones in the school these days was actually a little herdsman. Watering stones to make them bloom? At such a playful age, it was quite amusing.

Zhu Ping'an realized that the teacher had already stepped into the bamboo grove.

"At the beginning of man, nature is inherently good. Although natures are similar, habits differ. If not taught, nature will change. The way of teaching values specialization..."

As soon as the teacher entered the private school, the sounds of children reciting the Three Character Classic rang out, each child nodding and shaking their heads as they read aloud.

Attending classes, practicing writing...

Time slowly passed, and the sun rose higher and higher. With no shade, Zhu Ping'an started to sweat a little from the heat, the sweat sliding down the side of his face, down, and down...

Feeling something was off, Zhu Ping'an wondered why he was sweating so much today; it had been hot before, but never this much.

When he looked up, he saw a quirky little girl with a mischievous smile, dripping water from a bamboo tube onto her forehead drop by drop.

It was that cunning little girl, Li Shu.

"Ah-ha! I caught you eavesdropping on the teacher's lecture! I'm going to tell the teacher," Li Shu exclaimed, seizing Zhu Ping'an's weakness, her eyes gleaming with mischief as she threatened him softly, her little legs ready to dash into the school.

Zhu Ping'an had to admit that he was caught by this sly little girl and didn't dare take the risk, so he had no choice but to back down.

"No, no, no..." Zhu Ping'an hurriedly grabbed Li Shu's hand to stop her from running away.

Seeing Zhu Ping'an's frightened expression, the cunning little girl felt quite pleased.

"You said no, so it's no, huh? Hmph! Just because you said no, I'm going to do it anyway," she declared.

The cunning little girl just enjoyed watching this little brat look scared. You want to bully me? You want to be clever? You don't want to flatter me? Hmph!

"Little beauty..." Zhu Ping'an clasped his hands together in a pleading gesture.

The little beauty snorted softly, thinking to herself, "So now you realize I'm a little beauty!"

So, although the cunning little girl shouted that she would tell the teacher, inside she felt quite pleased.

"How pitiful. Alright, alright, since you're so pitiful, I won't tell the teacher... for now," the cunning little girl revealed her proud nature, acting as if she were bestowing a favor.

However, the cunning little girl was also very calculating. By agreeing not to tell the teacher for now, it implied that if she felt unhappy in the future, she might just tell him.

When under someone else's roof, you have to bow your head. Zhu Ping'an, under the threat of the cunning little girl, had no choice but to lower his head; after all, he had been caught by this pesky girl.

"I don't like it here," the cunning little girl, Li Shu, said with her head held high, proudly walking away with her hands behind her back.

Zhu Ping'an obediently followed behind, watching the proud and haughty little girl in front of him. Suddenly, he had a mischievous thought about growing up to achieve great success and taking this cunning brat as his eleventh concubine, teasing and bullying her.

Of course, this thought only flashed through his mind. Marrying this quirky, proud, willful, cunning, and gold-digging girl would surely lead to chaos at home. He certainly didn't want to be the unlucky one.

"Why are you so slow? Are you trying to make me tell the teacher?!" The cunning little girl noticed Zhu Ping'an lagging behind and immediately raised an eyebrow in a cold threat.

Indeed, the cunning little girl was the least adorable of all!