

Rise 44

Chapter 44: The Maid Hua

Zhu Ping'an walked out of the bamboo forest and saw the mischievous little girl riding her little red horse, galloping happily down the hillside. Behind her, a small maid was running along, lifting her skirt and constantly shouting, "Miss, slow down, slow down!"

The mischievous little girl had several maids. This one was clearly not the same as last time, and her attire was more upscale. This little maid appeared to be around eight years old, about three years older than Zhu Ping'an, with her hair tied in a bun and a chubby, baby-faced look.

Such a young girl already serving others—truly a product of the wicked old society.

The mischievous little girl, with her sharp eyes, spotted Zhu Ping'an walking down the slope. Her large eyes sparkled, and she squeezed her legs against the horse's belly. The little red horse sprinted toward Zhu Ping'an.

"Zhu Ping'an, I thought you'd be too sore to run after getting paddled by the teacher," the little girl teased from atop her horse. Dressed in riding gear, despite her young age, she looked rather heroic.

What good is being pretty if she's still so annoying? Zhu Ping'an thought to himself.

"Miss, slow down, wait for me!"

Behind them, the breathless little maid with a bun ran up, her round face flushed and her lips pouting as she spoke in a whining tone.

The mischievous little girl turned her head, showing her small tiger teeth as she threatened the maid, "Hua'er, if you keep nagging, do you believe I'll sell you to Madam Hua?"

The maid named Hua'er shrank her head in fear, looking like a little quail, and replied pitifully in a small voice, "Miss..."

Miss and maid—products of feudal society. Zhu Ping'an had no power or desire to change any of this; after all, he wasn't some saintly figure like the Virgin Mary. In ancient times, there was even the concept of maids accompanying brides as dowry. In a society where such traditions were deeply ingrained, it was better to go with the flow than to be beaten down trying to fight the entire system. In any era, one must do what suits the times; it's impossible to go against the whole world.

"Go get the stuff I brought," the mischievous little girl ordered her maid.

Following her mistress's command, Hua'er lifted her skirt and scurried down the hill.

Zhu Ping'an glanced at the mischievous little girl and knew she had sent Hua'er to fetch food. It seemed she was eager to hear him tell a story again.

"Let's go to the riverbank; it's cooler there," Zhu Ping'an suggested. He wanted to wash his hands by the river, so he proposed the idea to the mischievous little girl.

Since it wasn't far, the mischievous little girl only pouted but didn't object.

After washing his hands, Zhu Ping'an found a clean rock to sit on, ready to start telling The Legend of the Condor Heroes. As for the mischievous little girl, she waited until Hua'er spread a blanket on a rock before she sat down.

Hua'er also found a small blanket for herself, laying it on a rock before sitting down.

"Miss," after serving the mischievous little girl, Hua'er handed her the insulated food container.

The mischievous little girl pouted and gestured for the maid to pass the food container to Zhu Ping'an.

"Miss, this was specially made for you by the master," the little maid said, pouting unhappily.

"Too much talk! You won't get to hear The Legend of the Condor Heroes anymore," the mischievous little girl, Li Shu, glared at her maid displeased.

It turned out that after returning home, Li Shu had told the story of The Legend of the Condor Heroes to the maids who served her, including this close maid named Hua'er. All of them had been so engrossed in the story that they couldn't even focus on eating or drinking, eagerly waiting for the next part. Especially the chubby little maid, who was itching to hear more.

At the moment, Hua'er looked at Zhu Ping'an somewhat doubtfully. Was this little boy really the one telling The Legend of the Condor Heroes? No way, he was just a little kid! Only after Li Shu shot her another glare did Hua'er grudgingly hand the food box to Zhu Ping'an.

Zhu Ping'an took the food box, opened it, and his eyes immediately lit up. Inside was a dish of golden-brown crispy fried pork. Wasn't this supposed to be a famous dish from the Zhang family's royal cuisine in Northeast China during the Republic of China period? How could it exist at this time?

Crispy on the outside, tender on the inside, with just the right balance of salty and sweet—Li Shu's family's cook was certainly skilled.

"Are you going to tell the story or not? If you don't, you won't get to eat anymore," Li Shu looked at Zhu Ping'an disdainfully, urging him as she scorned his eating habits.

Zhu Ping'an licked his lips and prepared to start.

Seeing him lick his lips, Li Shu felt even more disdain—such an unrefined poor boy!

Zhu Ping'an continued from where he left off yesterday, telling the part where Guo Jing first met Huang Rong in her female disguise. Li Shu listened attentively, completely absorbed in the story, while snacking on a small packet of dried fruit. The chubby little maid, Hua'er, had a complete change of heart about Zhu Ping'an from the moment he began speaking. What an adorable little boy, how talented, a boy who could eat while telling a story!

The sky was clear and cloudless, with the scorching sun blazing overhead. The trees and flowers beneath the sun drooped lazily, wilting under the heat. However, neither Li Shu nor Hua'er paid any attention to the sweltering weather—they were completely captivated by the story.

When Zhu Ping'an finished the crispy fried pork in the food box, he had just reached the part where Huang Rong cooked beggar's chicken and introduced Hong Qigong. He glanced at the now-empty food box, looked up at the sky, and figured it was about time for class to start.

"I have to go to class now. I'll tell more next time," Zhu Ping'an said as he returned the food box to Li Shu and dashed off toward the school.

The mischievous little girl, Li Shu, watched Zhu Ping'an's retreating figure, stomped her foot, and scolded, "That scoundrel, he ate and ran without a second thought!"

"Miss, maybe next time we should pack more food," the little maid, Hua'er, suggested softly.

Li Shu glared at her. "Weren't you the one who didn't want to give him any food? Now you want to pack more?"

Embarrassed, Hua'er covered her mouth, thinking to herself, "Well, I didn't know before that it was this little boy telling the story of The Legend of the Condor Heroes. If I had known earlier, I would've told the kitchen to pack more today."

Zhu Ping'an arrived at the private school just as the teacher was walking from the study to the classroom. He had practically made it to class right on the bell—perfect timing.

Zhu Ping'an's seat was in the back. As he passed by that arrogant boy from earlier, the boy gave him an extra glance.

"Hey, did you offend him? He holds grudges, so you'd better be careful," Zhu Ping'an's desk mate, the chubby boy Li Xiaobao, nudged him and nodded toward the arrogant boy, asking.

"Oh, him? He tried to cut in line at the bathroom, and I didn't let him," Zhu Ping'an replied nonchalantly.

"Well, you better watch out. I saw him looking at you several times. He's just like his father—narrow-minded. Oh, you probably don't know who he is. He's Wei Chen, and his dad is the wealthiest man in Wei Village. They're both petty," Li Xiaobao whispered.

Who would have thought this chubby boy was quite the gossip? Still, Zhu Ping'an appreciated the warning and nodded, assuring Li Xiaobao that he would be careful.