

## Alchemy of Hearts chapter 5

Chapter 5: Mischievous young lady

'shuuuuusssh'

A pair of fair slender fingers grasped the sliding door and pushed it quietly, earning a light sound from the movement.

Gradually one foot stepped into the room, followed by the second one, and on a tiptoe, the figure in Hakama (traditional attire) with embroidered flowers ventured further.

The only source of light in the room was blocked by the sliding window, forcing the intruder to leave the entrance open.

A mischievous smile beamed on the fair face of the beautiful young lady in her late teens as she carefully glanced around, her eyes, searching for something interesting.

In the room, there was a simple legless chair and two light books on the short-legged table in the centre. At the other end, there was a rolled-up futon.

Suddenly, her gaze landed on the sheathed katana next to the futon. The corner of her lips curled as a smile spread across her face like the rising morning sun.

Her long black silky hair was held in a big bun sitting at the top of her head and was fastened with a purple ribbon and a simple wooden stick.

Taking light steps, she approached the futon and bent forward to pick up the sheathed katana that was made of quality leather, which constant usage wearied it out.

Standing erect, she turned to leave but heard a loud noise of ceramics clashing on the tatami floor and froze.

Her shoulders hunched as her eyes widened and her heart rate accelerated. Her mouth was left agape in fear as if almost caught for doing something wrong.

With a guilt-stricken heart, the right thing to do would have been to put the sword down and leave, but she was far too determined to accomplish her agenda to waver a bit.

The next sound that followed after the loud noise from outside, was a familiar female voice.

"Ane, careful!"

"My apologies, Milady!"

Letting out a deep sigh, she placed her left palm on her chest as she used the opportunity of the two women conversing to tiptoe out of the room as fast as her legs could carry her.

Finally, succeeding in sneaking out of the house, she dashed through the busy streets with her long skirt in hand, and the heavy sheathed sword which slowed down her pace.

When she got to the next busy street lined with stalls, inns and restaurants, she immediately stopped to catch her breath.

Her waist bent forward with the free hand resting on her knee as she panted for air. She looked like she would have collapsed if she had run any minute longer.

Men and women that passed by, all glanced her way. Some of them, especially women, all shook their heads in disappointment as different questions went through their minds.

What was a young girl like her doing by running around in the streets like an uncultured lady with a sword in hand?

Even if she was trying to catch her breath, why did she bend her waist in public instead of finding a place to sit?

The young lady was aware of the casual glances thrown her way, but their opinions did not matter. She was relieved to have escaped her mother without being caught in the process.

“Is that not Hana-dono’s daughter?” A woman dressed in a plain colour-patterned kimono whispered to her neighbour with her gaze still resting on the young lady who had at that point, straightened her back.

Exhaling, she wiped the beads of sweat that had appeared on her forehead with the back of her palm and continued on her journey.

“Haruka? She is the one!” The second woman replied with slightly furrowed brows. She seemed to be surprised and unhappy at the same time.

The woman in the patterned kimono finally retracted her gaze as Ito Haruka disappeared into the crowd.

“I cannot understand how Hana-dono failed to educate her only daughter on women’s ethics properly. A young beautiful and unmarried girl like her shouldn’t be roaming about the streets with a sword in hand!”

The second woman shook her head disappointedly, “If the samurais catch her, she is going to be in a lot of trouble.”

"I don't think so, her father and her brother are samurais." The first woman reminded calmly.

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"Haruka... Haruka?" Ito Hana called out with slightly knitted brows as her gaze faced the side of the house.

She was in the small kitchen built outside the main house to prevent smoke from filling the rooms when the fire was set.

There was a wooden spoon in her right hand as she had just started prepping the vegetables and other ingredients that would be used to prepare dinner when she thought to call her daughter out to help.

Someday, she will be married. It will bring dishonour and shame to her family if she was found lacking in the virtue a wife should have.

Just then, Ane, her maidservant returned from the inner house and announced with her heart pounding in her chest, "Milady, I didn't find the young lady, I'm afraid she has sneaked out again."

"What?! She left again today?"

Ito Hana was displeased by her daughter's rash actions. Her young lady was fond of this bad habit of sneaking out of the house but was punished every time, yet, she would still end up doing it time after time.

Where did she go this time around? Does she realize the trouble she could get into?

"Ane, find her and drag her back before her father and brother return!" Ito Hana commanded with worry evident in her tone.

Quickly, Ane nodded and turned to leave.

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This little lady who was supposed to have similar interests in cooking, embroidery, musical instrument and other ladylike talents like her fellow young ladies was out here on an adventure with a stolen sword.

Haruka hummed a harmonious line from a famous war song with a smile hanging at the corner of her lips.

Everything was still going on well until she bumped shoulders with a drunken man she was trying to avoid close to the alley.

The man stumbled and almost fell face forward, but thanks to his two friends who caught his arms on time, saving him from disaster as they hoisted him up into a standing position.

“You witch! Can’t you watch where you are going? How dare you bump into him?” The tallest of the three men scolded aggressively while pointing a finger at her.

From the way, he swayed his head and eyes, added to the small patch of pink shade on both sides of his cheeks, one could clearly see he was tipsy too.

Peeling her gaze from the him, she noticed the third man still held onto the first man while his furious gaze was fixed on her.

If looks could kill, his gaze would have torn her to pieces the moment the incident happened.

Petrified by the wicked aura and deadly gaze being shot at her, Haruka felt her heart clench tight in fright as it began to thump fast against her chest.

Everything had been okay a few minutes ago. She thought sneaking out of the house was the hardest part and after that she was free.

But now... this happened.