

Rise 222

Chapter 222: Arrogant Li Shu

The girl before him was as lazy as a cat, twirling strands of black hair between her snow-white fingers. Her watery eyes rolled dramatically in a large, exaggerated eye roll.

What an arrogant and rude brat!

Zhu Ping'an grumbled inwardly.

"Hey, Zhu Ping'an, are you a block of wood?"

Seeing Zhu Ping'an's silence, the girl furrowed her brows in dissatisfaction and let out a coquettish complaint. Her rosy lips were quite enticing.

"Then are you a sparrow? Chirping so loudly," Zhu Ping'an glanced at the lazy girl and responded casually.

"You're the one who's a scrawny sparrow!" The arrogant girl, who had been lounging lazily, instantly flared up like a Persian cat that had its tail stepped on. She jumped up in a gust of wind, stomped over to Zhu Ping'an, glared at him fiercely, and pouted.

Too close.

Zhu Ping'an could clearly see the fine, delicate fuzz on her flawless little face, smell the faint orchid fragrance from her body, and even hear the sound of her teeth grinding beneath her rosy lips...

Then, Zhu Ping'an reached out his hand...

"You lecher—"

The arrogant girl, who had been all fired up, was startled by Zhu Ping'an's sudden movement. She instinctively took several steps back and glared at him, but before she could finish calling him a lecher, her voice abruptly stopped.

Because in her eyes, Zhu Ping'an's lips had curved into a faint smile, and he had very naturally reached into the satchel slung over his shoulder, pulling out a thick book sewn together with thread-bound xuan paper. The top page had the title Heavenly Sword and Venomous Serpent Chronicle.

A faint blush crept over the arrogant girl's delicate face, but she still haughtily waved her slender, jade-like hand and ordered the round-faced little maid, Hua'er, to take the book from Zhu Ping'an.

Aside from the arrogant girl, everyone else in the study—including the old maid and several servant girls—looked at Zhu Ping'an with admiration and reverence. In their minds, a juren (a scholar who had passed the provincial examination) was practically an official, a grand figure, someone to be looked up to.

Now that she had Heavenly Sword and Venomous Serpent Chronicle, the arrogant girl finally quieted down, reading while nibbling on fruit.

Zhu Ping'an, meanwhile, walked over to the bookshelf and started browsing for books he needed. In just a short while, he noticed that Master Li's collection had nearly doubled since his last visit. There were three more rows of shelves now, filled mostly with books related to the imperial examination. While flipping through them, Zhu Ping'an occasionally found books he was looking for.

"I'm going to change clothes. No one needs to follow me."

After reading for a little while, the arrogant girl stood up, walked to the door, and waved away the little maid Hua'er and the other attendants before heading out of the study alone.

Zhu Ping'an continued selecting books behind the bookshelves, carefully picking out the ones he intended to borrow. Time passed unknowingly. Once he had chosen three books, he stepped out from behind the shelves—just in time to run into the arrogant girl as she returned to the study.

"You?" Zhu Ping'an was slightly taken aback upon seeing her.

Her jet-black hair was tied up with a light purple silk ribbon, with a few strands playfully draping over her shoulders, making her fair skin appear even more luminous. She wore no makeup, yet she looked fresh and charming.

But... something about her seemed off.

Zhu Ping'an took another look and realized what it was—there was a tiny black smudge on the tip of her nose. Perhaps she had accidentally gotten some eyebrow pencil on it while doing her makeup.

"What are you looking at?"

Noticing his gaze, the arrogant girl swiftly wiped her nose with her slender fingers, instantly restoring her flawless complexion. Then, she discreetly rubbed her hand with a handkerchief hidden in her sleeve.

This action was so quick that when Hua'er and the other little maids excitedly ran up to attend to their mistress, none of them noticed anything unusual.

Zhu Ping'an walked to the desk, recorded the names of the books he was borrowing, then placed them in his satchel, preparing to leave and find a quiet place to read. There would likely be many visitors at home today, with greetings and conversations dragging on endlessly. The hui shi (the metropolitan examination) was approaching, and the capital was filled with juren from all over the country—all brilliant minds. Competing with them required serious preparation.

"Hua'er, go to the kitchen and bring something over. We wouldn't want to be accused of lacking courtesy."

Just as Zhu Ping'an was about to leave, he heard the arrogant girl's casual voice, laced with a hint of playful sarcasm.

Has this girl lost her mind?

Zhu Ping'an lifted his head and looked at her.

"What are you looking at? Don't overthink it. Just consider it a payment for that," the arrogant girl said while waving Heavenly Sword and Venomous Serpent Chronicle in her hand.

Soon, Hua'er returned, carrying a food box. She opened it and took out three plates of snacks. Under the dark-bellied girl's direction, one was placed before her as a treat, another was given to the maids and old servants, and the last was set before Zhu Ping'an.

The snack served to him was a plate of sweet and sour pork ribs, accompanied by a cup of tea. The ribs looked delicious, with their rich color and enticing aroma. Zhu Ping'an was about to refuse, but seeing the tempting dish, he swallowed his words. Well, having something to eat and drink while reading didn't sound too bad.

"Thank you," Zhu Ping'an said, offering a slight bow.

"Good that you know."

The arrogant girl pouted arrogantly, shot him a casual glance, then picked up a piece of candied fruit with a toothpick and popped it into her small mouth, chewing contentedly.

This brat... I pity the poor fool who marries her!

Zhu Ping'an mocked her in his mind, but on the surface, he remained composed as he picked up a piece of sweet and sour pork rib and took a bite.

The meat was tender, the color was rich, and the flavor was crisp, sweet, and sour. The taste was simply amazing—perhaps even better than the dishes he'd had in the Li household before.

"Did your family hire a new chef?"

Zhu Ping'an savored the flavor for a moment before curiously asking.

"What do you mean?"

The arrogant girl suddenly seemed a little nervous, her large, watery eyes staring directly at him.

"These ribs?" Zhu Ping'an licked his lips.

"Not good?" She seemed slightly disheartened.

"They're absolutely delicious," Zhu Ping'an shook his head and praised sincerely. Annoying as this brat might be, she had incredible luck—born into a wealthy family with a top-tier chef at home. She really had everything going for her.

"Really?"

A glimmer of joy flashed in her eyes, and her red lips curled into a radiant smile. Her excitement even made her cheeks flush a little.

I was complimenting the chef, why are you so happy?

Zhu Ping'an silently complained in his heart.

"The kitchen changed up their seasoning? I wasn't aware. Hua'er, tell the steward to reward each chef with a silver tael. Hmm... also, have them make the same dish for me tonight."

The arrogant girl quickly regained her usual haughty demeanor, giving a casual order to Hua'er before returning to her book, as if her brief moment of excitement had been nothing but an illusion.

Make it for her tonight too...

So she's a foodie!

Zhu Ping'an suddenly understood.