

Rise 287

Chapter 287: The Marquis of Linhuai's Residence

Xicheng Gonghou Street was famous throughout the capital. As the name suggested, only five or six households lived on this street, yet they occupied the entire several-li-long avenue. These few households were all well-known noble families of the capital—most notably the Duke of Wei's residence, the Founding Duke's residence, the Marquis of Linhuai's residence, the Marquis of Dingyuan's residence, and the Marquis of Lingbi's residence.

After the Tumu Crisis, the power and influence of the nobility in court diminished considerably. In an effort to restore their waning positions, these noble families not only shifted from military to civil service careers, but also strengthened ties through intermarriage to expand their influence. As a result, the nobles living on Gonghou Street were all interconnected by blood or marriage, with relationships that were complex and deeply intertwined. Overall, their efforts were quite effective—they still held a social status far beyond the reach of ordinary people.

At the Marquis of Linhuai's residence on Gonghou Street, things had been particularly lively in recent days, as the birthday of the old marchioness was approaching. Everyone in the household was busy preparing for the celebration. Of course, the ones truly busy were the servants—while the masters enjoyed leisure and ease. For instance, Second Master Li was currently “busy making a baby” while playing games with a maid.

In Peony Pavilion within the Marquis of Linhuai's residence, several young ladies as beautiful as flowers were chatting and laughing with the service of their maids. These young ladies were all around thirteen to fifteen years old, nearing the age of marriage, and were gathered together enjoying each other's company.

“Hehe... I heard Fifth Sister from Third Uncle's branch is arriving today.”

“I wonder what Third Uncle was thinking, running off to that dusty mountain village for a wild woman...”

“Third Sister, watch your words. What wild woman? That’s Third Aunt.”

“Second Sister, how can you call her Third Aunt? Even Grandmother never acknowledged her, and our family never sent a formal betrothal gift. Though, to be fair, Third Uncle really treated her well. It’s just a pity she was born under an unlucky star—died early.”

“Since Fifth Sister is coming today, I’ll pack a box of my jewelry from last year and gift it to her.”

“Better save those to reward your servants. Fifth Sister has quite a bit of pride.”

“Actually, I think Sixth Sister has a point. Fifth Sister came from the countryside. When she sees your gift, she’ll probably be overjoyed.”

“Hehe... I heard Fifth Sister was betrothed to a dirt-poor peasant boy in the countryside.”

“Seriously? Haha... So the proud Fifth Sister is marrying a bumpkin? That’s hilarious! Even my maid would be matched with a petty officer, but Fifth Sister...”

“It’s true. Grandmother was furious. First Aunt worked so hard to find a good match for Fifth Sister—a young master from the Founding Duke’s wife’s family. She kindly told Third Uncle, but just a few days later the news

came that Fifth Sister was engaged to some country bumpkin. It made First Aunt lose face in front of the Founding Duke's wife. Even Grandmother was so angry she couldn't eat for two days!"

"Haha... So Fifth Brother-in-law is a total bumpkin..."

The young ladies chirped and laughed among themselves. Every mention of this "Fifth Sister" was accompanied by laughter—laced with clear disdain. While they were talking, a little maid entered from the second gate and reported that Third Master's carriage had arrived on Gonghou Street.

"Speak of the devil! Fifth Sister really does have perfect timing—we were just talking about her. Let's go have a look at the gate."

"She's just from the countryside. What's there to see?"

"Third Sister, don't speak like that. She's still our sister. Fifth Sister came all the way from the countryside—it wasn't easy. Let's go greet her."

"I want to go too. I haven't seen Fifth Sister in years."

"Let's go. Who knows—maybe her bumpkin fiancé came with her. Haha... I've never seen what a bumpkin looks like!"

The young ladies quickly reached a consensus. Surrounded by their nursemaids and maids, they took the side corridors and passed through the decorative flower gate, heading for the main entrance.

On Gonghou Street, several large carriages slowly approached. A dozen strong attendants followed before and after, along with many older maids and young servant girls, all behaving in an orderly and respectful manner.

As they neared Gonghou Street, Li Shu had already sent Zhu Ping'an to a separate carriage. This was to avoid suspicion—in the Ming Dynasty, men and women were expected to keep a respectful distance. Although Li Shu and Zhu Ping'an were engaged, propriety still had to be observed. Sitting together in the same carriage could spark gossip, so Li Shu sent him to another.

After changing carriages, it wasn't long before Zhu Ping'an felt the carriage come to a stop, and heard the noise of people outside.

"Young Master, we've arrived. Please step down," came a servant's voice from outside the carriage.

"Alright."

Zhu Ping'an responded, then lifted the curtain and stepped down. The first thing he saw was the grand estate of the Marquis of Linhuai.

Standing before the majestic residence, Zhu Ping'an couldn't help but feel out of place. He had no idea what true extravagance meant until now. The estate was vast and imposing. The other residences he had seen earlier—like the Duke of Wei's—were equally magnificent.

Gonghou Street was about three meters wide—very spacious and straight. Even large sedan chairs could move freely along it. But compared to the Marquis of Linhuai's estate, the street felt insignificant. If the estate was a python, the street was merely an earthworm.

The Marquis of Linhuai's residence stood prominently on Gonghou Street, its very appearance shouting "grandeur." Two life-sized stone lions flanked the main gate, crafted with exquisite detail. Above the main gate hung a large plaque, its golden characters reading: "Marquis of Linhuai's Residence."

Shortly after the carriages stopped, the gates opened—but not the main gates. Instead, it was the side gates on the east and west that were opened.

The side gates swung wide, and several finely dressed women emerged. Leading them was a woman in her twenties, followed by a group of neatly dressed maidservants.

"This must be the Fifth Young Miss. What a beauty—she even makes this servant's heart flutter. I am Zijuan, the old madam's chief maid. The old madam just had some wine and fell asleep. Before resting, she instructed me to welcome the Fifth Young Miss. The courtyard where the Third Master used to stay has been thoroughly prepared—all new furnishings—just waiting for you."

The woman in front, who introduced herself as Zijuan, the old madam's chief maid, greeted Li Shu with a cheerful smile and a deep curtsy.

"What unfortunate timing... I had hoped to pay my respects to Grandmother first thing," said Li Shu, with a sigh and a look of regret on her cherry-like lips.

"Despite your long and tiring journey, you still think first of the old madam—such sincerity and filial piety! Though she's already asleep, I will be sure to convey your respect to her when she wakes."

This Zijuan was truly eloquent—her polite words were warm and pleasant to hear, even in a brief exchange.