

Rise 290

Chapter 290: The Marquis Residence's Bratty Child

“In the first year of Yonghe, the year of Guichou, at the beginning of late spring, we gathered at the Orchid Pavilion in Shanyin, Kuaiji...”

Because he was unsure what plans the marquis' residence had next, even though Zhu Ping'an was utterly exhausted after several days in the examination hall, he did not go straight to rest. Instead, he laid out brush, ink, paper, and inkstone on the guest room's desk and began practicing calligraphy with a suspended wrist.

If nothing unexpected happened, he should soon be participating in the palace examination. The palace exam was the only imperial examination that wasn't transcribed — what you wrote would be directly submitted to the Emperor without being copied. To some extent, in the palace examination, calligraphy was often more important than the essay itself.

Apart from preparing the writing tools, Li Shu had also arranged for many books, one of which was a copy of the Lantingji Xu (Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Gathering). Though it was a copy, the strokes were neither forceful nor rushed, the brushwork smooth and controlled, the spacing deliberate, the dots and strokes elegant and restrained. From beginning to end, it exuded a calm, unhurried, and graceful aura — a truly high-quality reproduction.

Even though it was in semi-cursive script, it was still quite useful for studying calligraphy.

By now, Zhu Ping'an had already copied the Lantingji Xu twice. He was just about to finish the third copy — only three characters remained.

Just as Zhu Ping'an was about to complete those last three characters and take a short break, he suddenly heard a gust of wind. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a parabolic arc in midair — and then a toad came flying right onto the rice paper he was practicing on, splattering ink all over the page. After landing, the toad bounced once from inertia and knocked over the ink he had carefully prepared.

Then the toad crouched at the edge of the desk, bulging its eyes and staring at him innocently.

It probably had been hibernating and was dug up by someone.

When the toad landed on the paper, Zhu Ping'an heard a burst of gleeful laughter behind him — the kind of laugh a mischievous child makes after a prank succeeds.

Zhu Ping'an turned around and saw a brat about six or seven years old, with a round head, thick black eyebrows, and a smug expression on his chubby face. He wore a fluffy padded coat and short black boots.

When the brat saw Zhu Ping'an turn around, he laughed loudly, full of gloating satisfaction.

"Is this yours?"

Zhu Ping'an, entirely unafraid, picked up the toad and looked at the little brat who had somehow entered his room. He asked gently with a smile, not showing the slightest anger.

“If it’s not mine, is it yours, you bumpkin?!”

The brat glared at Zhu Ping’an defiantly, arms crossed, speaking rudely without a shred of respect.

Calling him a bumpkin right off the bat — clearly someone had been poisoning the child’s mind.

Still, despite the brat’s provocation, the smile on Zhu Ping’an’s honest face didn’t fade at all. In fact, it grew even gentler, as if he didn’t catch the challenge in the boy’s words.

“Oh, so it’s yours. Well then, little friend, where are your family?”

Zhu Ping’an continued smiling warmly, his voice soft and kind, as if speaking to a younger sibling.

Pathetic — just like the servant girls and underlings at home. So spineless. Can’t respect that at all!

Looking at Zhu Ping’an’s gentle smile, the brat raised his chin at a 45-degree angle and let out a snort of disdain.

“Little master came out to play alone, you bumpkin!”

Oh, alone, huh.

Hearing that, Zhu Ping’an felt reassured. Then, still smiling, he walked over, picked up the chubby boy, placed him on his lap, and without much force, gave his bottom a few firm pats.

As he listened to the child’s wails, Zhu Ping’an felt extremely satisfied.

This little brat — acting so smug even when alone!

Not caring for animals — should be spanked.

Knowing you’re wrong but not changing — should be spanked.

Rude to others — should be spanked.

Disrespectful to an elder — should be spanked...

“You bumpkin! How dare you hit me? Just wait, I’m going to call someone to deal with you!”

The little brat wailed, his chubby face red with rage. He couldn’t understand why someone who had looked so soft and timid — just like the household maids and servants — had suddenly dared to hit him. Thinking about how even his grandmother had never scolded him harshly, yet this bumpkin had just spanked him... it felt like the ultimate humiliation. He shrieked that he would go call someone to take revenge.

Still unrepentant, eh?

“Not caring for animals — should you be punished? Knowing you’re wrong and not changing — should you be punished? Being rude — should you be punished? Disrespecting elders — should you be punished?”

Zhu Ping’an gave him a few more light swats as he asked, teaching him a lesson.

“You dare hit me again? Just try it!” the brat howled threateningly.

“Try it? Alright, I’ll try it.” Zhu Ping’an replied with a simple, honest smile — and then did exactly that.

“You hit me again?! You just wait...!”

Although it didn't actually hurt much, the brat felt like his whole world had collapsed. This bumpkin dared to spank him — something he, the tyrant of the marquis' household, had never experienced! He couldn't accept it and screamed that Zhu Ping'an would regret it.

What a stubborn little rascal.

Zhu Ping'an chuckled and shook his head, ready to continue teaching this brat a lesson, when suddenly he heard a clear, childish voice from outside the door — it sounded like a little girl politely greeting her aunt.

“Hello, Auntie. You're here!”

Auntie? An adult must be nearby, Zhu Ping'an thought, and paused to look outside. In his line of sight was an adorable little girl, around four years old, with big eyes and dark pupils. She was smiling sweetly in his direction — her expression pure and utterly charming.

She was dressed very well, clearly another little master of the marquis' household.

However, Zhu Ping'an didn't see the aunt she was greeting.

“Stupid Rui-ge’er, run!”

Just then, the little girl shouted loudly — then turned and ran, her tiny legs pumping furiously, as if she were being chased by dogs.

Almost like they had rehearsed it many times.

At the same time, the brat who had been pinned to Zhu Ping’an’s lap suddenly rolled away and darted toward the door. As he fled, he even threw a final taunt at Zhu Ping’an:

“Bumpkin, how dare you hit young master! Just you wait!”

Then, as if terrified Zhu Ping’an might chase him, the brat bolted like a wild dog and vanished in the blink of an eye.

So that little girl was playing a diversion — an empty city stratagem. So clever at such a young age! She was almost as sharp as Li Shu was as a child. Most likely, she had been the one who told the brat to throw the toad. He’d been the decoy while she kept watch outside. Otherwise, she wouldn’t have shown up so conveniently. Heh, the brat probably even thanked her.

Heh — that little rascal was sold out by the girl and would probably help her count the money for it.

Interesting. She's probably going to grow up to be a cunning little schemer.