

Rise 294

Chapter 294: Though the Divine Tortoise Lives Long

There were constant disdainful looks throughout the entire marquis's residence.

Zhu Ping'an, unfazed by the cold glares he received along the way, returned to his guest room as if nothing had happened. He washed up, laid out his brush, ink, paper, and inkstone, opened an ancient scroll, and sat at his desk, slowly reading through it.

As night gradually fell, the starry sky arrived without warning. The moon was hazy, the night was hazy—everything went unsaid.

However, in the backyard courtyard of the fifth young lady of the marquis's residence, lights were still brightly lit, and maids were constantly coming and going. Under the direction of the little bun-faced maid and two old nursemaids, the maids bustled about in an orderly manner, rearranging the courtyard. Potted plants were replaced, dressing tables changed, bedding and more were all swapped out anew.

The sixth young lady of the marquis's residence had already washed up and was preparing to sleep. But the commotion from her fifth sister's courtyard next door caught her attention, so she sent her personal maid to investigate. The maid soon returned and reported the information she had gathered to the sixth young lady.

“Fifth young lady disliked the rough texture of the cotton quilt and had it replaced with a silk one.”

“Fifth young lady said the style of the dressing table was too outdated and unpleasant to look at, so she had a custom-made set delivered upon arrival.”

“Fifth young lady said the incense burning in the room wasn’t pure, so she had both the incense burner and the incense replaced.”

In Li Shu’s courtyard, the little bun-faced maid and the two old nursemaids directed the maids to and fro, efficiently redecorating the courtyard. Though the workload was heavy, it didn’t take much time. The reason was simple: there were a lot of maids and nursemaids waiting to serve in this courtyard. The reason for that? Li Shu was generous. Every maid or nursemaid who came to help carry items received a reward of one or two taels of silver.

Everyone could get one or two taels of silver. Even a second-class maid or nursemaid in the marquis’s residence only earned about that much per month. The lower-ranking maids earned even less.

So, all the maids and nursemaids from other courtyards eagerly came to the fifth young lady’s place to take orders.

This even caused a certain young lady to throw a tantrum because she didn’t have enough hands to serve her in her own room.

“Miss, why should we be giving them silver for free? You’re already the mistress of this residence. Ordering them around is right and proper.”

After the maids and nursemaids from the courtyard left joyfully with their rewards, the little bun-faced maid Hua’er pouted painfully and grumbled to her mistress.

“To take from others beforehand, you must first give.”

Li Shu lazily leaned against the embroidered couch. Her watery eyes were deep and bright, her lips slightly curved as she spoke faintly.

The little bun-faced maid frowned and scrunched her doughy face, unable to understand what her lady meant. But it sounded very profound.

As night deepened and the once noisy marquis’s residence quieted down, all had gone to sleep except for the night guards. Only one guest room still had its light on. Through the window, a silhouette could vaguely be seen, someone still engrossed in reading.

The next day, Zhu Ping’an got up and washed as usual. Afterward, he ground ink and practiced calligraphy. He wrote two large characters before hearing the stirrings of the marquis’s residence waking up. The servants and maids were bustling again, helping their masters rise and wash.

By the time Zhu Ping’an finished his calligraphy and morning reading—and had even written an essay—only then did a servant arrive, carrying a food box with his breakfast. Although it was a bit late, the quality of the meal was quite high. Even a pseudo son-in-law like him, who wasn’t valued by the residence, got a breakfast of two meat dishes and two vegetables.

Shortly after breakfast, another servant came to deliver a message.

“The private tutor responsible for teaching Young Master Yan Gong in the marquis’s residence requested a day off due to family matters yesterday. Originally, Young Master Yan Zhou was supposed to teach his younger brother Yan Gong. However, Young Master Yan Zhou caught a chill during the night, so the old madam thought of you, Young Master Zhu. You passed the county-level exam at such a young age, so she’s considering having you supervise Young Master Yan Gong’s studies for today. Don’t worry, you won’t have to exert yourself too much. Just make sure he reads his books and studies. Please don’t refuse.”

Having been asked so thoroughly, how could he refuse? Besides, having eaten two of their meals already, how could he say no?

Besides, supervising reading wouldn’t interfere with his own reading.

So, Zhu Ping’an packed a few books and followed the servant toward the study of Li Yan Gong in the marquis’s residence. On the way, he pondered which of the young masters Li Yan Gong could be. Could it be that bratty one?

When they arrived, and he saw the provocative chubby little face in the study, Zhu Ping’an couldn’t help but laugh. Damn, it really was that brat Li Yan Gong.

“You country bumpkin, what took you so long? I already read a whole page by myself!”

The brat clearly knew Zhu Ping'an was coming. He wasn't surprised at all to see him. From the get-go, he was taunting, calling him a bumpkin and complaining he was late.

This kid must be the little tyrant of the residence. You could tell from how quickly the servant who led Zhu Ping'an to the study fled—he had probably been tormented by this brat before.

Inside the study, only Zhu Ping'an and the brat remained.

Zhu Ping'an ignored the brat's provocations and walked into the room with a faint smile. There were only two seats in the study: one for the brat and the other, slightly higher and facing him, for the tutor.

Zhu Ping'an walked to the tutor's seat and made as if to sit down.

The brat saw Zhu Ping'an preparing to sit and grinned smugly, but the next second, Zhu Ping'an paused, still smiling, and calmly removed two nails from the seat.

Seeing this, the brat let out a long groan of disappointment.

Then came groan after groan. The bugs hidden in the book, the ink spilled on the table, the glue on the brush handle—Zhu Ping'an dealt with all of it effortlessly.

The brat stared across at Zhu Ping'an, who was reading with focus, his chubby face contorted like a bulldog. He looked like he was dying to take revenge.

Not long after, a servant came to report that the Marquis would return at noon and would inspect the homework assigned to the brat ten days ago.

This news scared the brat out of his wits. His father was very strict, and he had spent these past days just playing around. He had long forgotten about the homework. Since the tutor couldn't control him, he hadn't done a thing.

"Though the divine tortoise lives long..."

So, after the servant left, the brat no longer bothered making trouble for Zhu Ping'an. He picked up his book, swayed his fat face side to side, and began to recite with a deep sense of suffering.

Oh, Cao Cao's "Though the Divine Tortoise Lives Long".

Watching the brat recite with such melodramatic sorrow, Zhu Ping'an suddenly curled his lips in a grin. As the brat began to recite, "Though the divine tortoise lives long," Zhu Ping'an chimed in using the same tone:

"Though the divine tortoise is skinny, it still has some meat. First, boil it in soup, then gnaw on the meat!"

The brat immediately lost his place. He couldn't remember the original lines anymore, his fat face on the verge of breaking down.

So, he started again, "Though the divine tortoise lives long..."

"Though the divine tortoise is skinny, it still has some meat. First, boil it in soup, then gnaw on the meat!" Zhu Ping'an grinned and chimed in again.

This happened three times.

And the next time the brat recited the poem, he too began with: "Though the divine tortoise is skinny, it still has some meat. First, boil it in soup, then gnaw on the meat!"

Hearing this, Zhu Ping'an nodded in satisfaction, his gaze full of encouragement.

And so, the brat strayed forever onto the path of the skinny tortoise—boiling soup and gnawing meat—never to return.