

Rise 316

Chapter 316: The Results Are Announced (1)

As the morning sun slowly rose, the Linhuai Marquis Residence grew increasingly lively.

Nearby noble households such as the Duke of Wei's Mansion, the Founding Duke's Mansion, the Marquis of Dingyuan's Mansion, the Marquis of Lingbi's Mansion, and the homes of various civil and military officials with family ties came one after another to celebrate the birthday of the Old Madam of the Linhuai Marquis Residence. The visitors came in an endless stream, making the residence bustling with activity.

All the guests brought gifts. The stewards of the Linhuai Marquis Residence registered each one meticulously, resulting in a thick stack of records.

In the main hall of the Linhuai Marquis Residence, a large table was set up and covered with a red carpet. The birthday gifts brought by the guests were placed on the table one by one by the maids and servants for the Old Madam to inspect before being stored away in the warehouse.

Ruyi jade longevity stars, peach-offering amethyst immortals, longevity-themed fans and utensils, South Sea pearls, coral ornaments, agarwood canes, Kanan beads... There was no shortage of rare and delightful treasures. The Old Madam looked at them for a while, very pleased, smiling with joy as she waved her hand for the maids to take them to the warehouse.

"Hee hee, Ancestor, you didn't look at the others' gifts, but you must admire the ones from us juniors," joked the sixth young lady of the Marquis Residence, with a round little face and tiger-like teeth, as she clung to the Old Madam's arm playfully.

“You little monkey, teasing your Ancestor again. Alright, alright, as you wish,” the Old Madam affectionately patted her arm and nodded with a smile.

Then, starting with the second young lady, each presented a birthday gift to the Old Madam in turn.

The second young lady presented a hand-embroidered Buddhist scripture for long life; the third brought a jade cup of eternal good fortune; the fourth gave a painting of the Peach Offering for Longevity. Li Shu presented a South Sea coral statue of the Goddess of Mercy, and the sixth young lady gave a complete longevity-themed backrest cushion set.

The Old Madam smiled with satisfaction at all of them, clearly delighted by her granddaughters’ filial piety.

Then, somehow, someone suggested bringing out the gifts from their future husbands as well, laying them before the Old Madam.

The gifts from the future husbands of the second and others were all lavish and of high value, which greatly pleased the Old Madam. The only exception was the future fifth son-in-law of the Marquis Residence—Zhu Ping’an.

Zhu Ping’an’s gift consisted of two items: one was a birthday congratulatory letter he had written himself. The other was a jade statue of the Goddess Magu offering blessings, which Li Shu had instructed her maid to send over just to pad the offering.

However, when the sixth young lady teased that she had seen that same jade statue in the fifth sister's room before, the Old Madam's expression darkened. According to the sixth young lady, the jade carving belonged to the fifth young lady. Which meant that Zhu Ping'an had only gifted a piece of writing... like a beggar!

As a result, the Old Madam's face turned grim, and she waved for all the gifts to be taken away to the warehouse.

Meanwhile, the front courtyard of the Marquis Residence was even more lively. Among those who had come to celebrate the birthday were six or seven youths around the same age as Fatty Zhou. They were all dressed in fine clothes, exuding the air of spoiled noble brats. These were sons of dukes and marquises—regular companions of Fatty Zhou. After presenting their gifts, they pulled Fatty Zhou to a table to drink and chatter loudly.

Zhu Ping'an sat at a table in the corner, along with some inconspicuous distant or impoverished relatives of the Marquis Residence.

Fatty Zhou's table wasn't far from Zhu Ping'an's, since they were in the same courtyard, though Zhu Ping'an's table was slightly more tucked away. Zhu Ping'an found all the faces at that table familiar. If he wasn't mistaken, they were the same group of rich brats who had barged recklessly through the city gate in fox-fur robes when he left the capital.

Zhu Ping'an's table was relatively quiet, probably because they were poor relatives. The Marquis Residence hadn't assigned many attendants to them. Apart from serving dishes, no maids or servants came to attend to them.

In contrast, Fatty Zhou's table was lively. Two maids stood by, serving tea and wine attentively.

From their conversation, Zhu Ping'an could tell that this group of second-generation nobles looked down on Fatty Zhou.

"Hey, Fatty Zhou, why haven't you been riding horses with us lately? Lost too many times and got scared?"

"Exactly. So what if you lost a few fancy horses? Didn't you ride pretty well at night anyway?"

Two of them lounged with their legs up, tossing fruits and squinting mockingly at Fatty Zhou. These noble sons, from households like the Duke of Wei's, the Founding Duke's, and the Marquis of Dingyuan's, or from third- and fourth-rank officials' families, were just as wealthy as Fatty Zhou—so they mocked him without restraint.

Fatty Zhou, being overweight, wasn't a match for them in horseback riding, archery, or cockfighting. He wasn't very skilled in literature either. Personality-wise, he was goofy and timid, not the kind of person with guts or pride.

So, he was often the target of their ridicule—and today was no exception.

"Who's scared? Next time, we'll see who's better!" Fatty Zhou said stubbornly, his chubby face tense.

“Alright then, it’s settled.” The group of noble sons exchanged satisfied looks. Great—this meant they’d save some money on winehouse visits in the future.

“Oh, right. I heard your third branch at the Marquis Residence got engaged to some bumpkin from the countryside? Is that true?”

“Hahaha, I just don’t get it. When did your Linhuai Marquis Residence stoop so low? Isn’t this embarrassing for us nobles?”

Some of them had somehow heard the gossip and now pressed Fatty Zhou for confirmation, their tone full of mockery.

Zhu Ping’an, in the corner, smiled wryly as he overheard them. How had news of his engagement to Li Shu spread so far, even to these spoiled nobles? It seemed he was once again being mocked. Well then—what’s wrong with being from the countryside? Who says people from humble origins can’t rise?

Fatty Zhou, hearing their ridicule, was speechless. After all, they were telling the truth. Although his grandmother and father had discussed breaking off the engagement many times, they hadn’t done it yet. Inwardly, he began to resent Zhu Ping’an for dragging him into the mockery.

“What? It’s true? Hahaha, can’t even leave the bumpkins alone, huh? Your fifth sister must be really ugly...”

Seeing Fatty Zhou's expression, one of them laughed.

"Haha, maybe she looks like you—just as chubby..."

The others burst into laughter too.

"No way! My fifth sister is beautiful—prettier than the Princess of Anyang!" Fatty Zhou suddenly straightened up and snapped.

"Oh, give me a break. If she were even half as pretty as the Princess of Anyang, she wouldn't be marrying a country bumpkin..."

Instead of helping, Fatty Zhou's words made them laugh even harder. The Princess of Anyang was one of the most famous beauties in the capital. Few could compare to her. To say his fifth sister was even prettier? What a joke.

"Oh, by the way, I heard you went to take the hui shi recently. How did that go?" One of them remembered and asked, snickering.

“No problem. I’ve got it in the bag,” Fatty Zhou replied confidently.

“Hahaha, heaven really is fair,” someone said, trying to hold back laughter.

“Oh? What do you mean?” Fatty Zhou asked curiously.

“Hahaha, you may be ugly—but you sure have high hopes!” The man couldn’t help but burst out laughing.

The rest of them roared with laughter.

“Come on, we know what you’re like—we grew up wearing split pants together. Just let your dad get you a spot in the capital garrison or something. Why bother with the hui shi? You’re wasting your time.”

None of them believed Fatty Zhou had any chance of passing the hui shi (metropolitan exam).

“You weren’t inspired by Xu Third Young Master, were you? That guy has been studious since childhood. He passed the county and provincial exams without any help from the Duke of Wei. That guy really has it in the bag. Why do you think he just stopped by and left so quickly today? He probably heard the results were coming out and rushed home to wait.”

They were talking about the third young master of the Duke of Wei's family—Xu Laosan—who had inherited the title from Xu Da. Xu Laosan was quite famous in the capital for his sharp mind and photographic memory.

Though he sometimes hung out with the likes of Fatty Zhou, he was genuinely talented in literature.

Recently, after he passed the provincial exam, they all went to celebrate at a courtesan's house. One courtesan whom Fatty Zhou had admired for a long time threw herself at Xu Laosan after hearing he had passed—and didn't charge a single coin. Fatty Zhou was deeply affected and swore he would surpass Xu Laosan and pass the hui shi.

Just now, Xu Laosan had also shown up briefly to deliver a gift—only to leave promptly, but not before mocking Fatty Zhou one last time.

“Hmph, just wait and see.”

Grinding his teeth, Fatty Zhou muttered through his pudgy face—earning yet another round of laughter from the nobles.