

Rise 321

Chapter 321: Worthy Nephew

“Congratulations to Young Master Zhu for achieving first place as the top scorer in the metropolitan exam, and for having his name listed in the imperial gazette!”

After the messenger realized that he had delivered the congratulatory notice to the wrong person, he offered a quick apology, retrieved it from the stunned Young Master Zheng, then made his way through the crowd to stand before Zhu Ping’an, respectfully presenting the notice with both hands.

Just as the messenger handed over the notice, the sun—momentarily hidden behind thin clouds—broke free, spilling golden rays over Zhu Ping’an, as if a brilliant spotlight had been cast upon him. It made him stand out all the more, giving him a special aura.

“Much obliged.”

Zhu Ping’an accepted the notice with a soft word of thanks. His right hand instinctively slipped into his sleeve pocket to retrieve some coins for a tip, only to realize there were just two bare silver ingots left. There were three messengers, and what he had wasn’t enough for all of them.

Not far away, Li Shu noticed his movement and smiled, leaning toward the bun-faced young maid beside her to whisper something.

The little bun-faced maid came running, slightly out of breath, plump little hands offering a pouch embroidered with a plump duck, as if presenting a treasure.

This pouch solved Zhu Ping'an's immediate problem. Inside was prepared silver; he took out enough to reward the three messengers. They accepted the tips with smiles, offered a few more compliments, and took their leave—they still needed to report back, and besides, there was another tip waiting for them elsewhere on the street.

After handing over the pouch, the bun-faced maid quickly lifted her skirt and trotted back; this was the men's guest area, and it wasn't proper for her to linger.

Since the little maid had called him "young master-in-law," that meant she served the fifth young lady of the marquis' household.

The spoiled young heirs at Zhou Fatty's table instinctively followed the maid's retreating figure with their eyes, wanting to see what the newly betrothed fiancée of this fresh provincial champion looked like—and whether she was as ugly as they had assumed.

Before the congratulatory notice arrived, when Zhu Ping'an was still the "country bumpkin" they mocked, their guess had been: if the marquis' fifth young lady was willing to marry even a bumpkin, she must be hideous indeed.

They followed the maid's path and found their target. And then—they were stunned:

Before them stood a beauty, unmatched and aloof. One glance could topple a city, another could bring down a kingdom. Didn't they know what "city-toppling" and "kingdom-toppling" meant? Such a beauty could never

be found twice. So this was the marquis' fifth young lady—so delicate and lovely. Zhou Fatty's earlier boast that she was even more beautiful than Princess An'yang had been no exaggeration—it was entirely true.

“My worthy nephew, the palace examination will be held at the end of this month. You mustn't grow complacent—rest well these days. Stay here in the residence and prepare with peace of mind.”

At some point, Marquis Linhuai, Li Tingzhu, had waddled his plump frame over to Zhu Ping'an, patting his shoulder and offering heartfelt advice.

In the eyes of the onlookers, Li Tingzhu was now the picture of a caring elder, radiating warmth and benevolence.

Worthy nephew?!

Seeing the marquis' gentle, concerned manner, Zhu Ping'an smiled faintly. He felt a little flattered by the address, though such enthusiasm took some getting used to.

“Thank you for your guidance, Marquis.”

He returned the smile and bowed in reply.

Once again, firecrackers thundered throughout the marquis' residence, and it was awash in celebration.

Yet today's events had overturned many people's perceptions.

From this day forward, people remembered the marquis' fifth son-in-law, Zhu Ping'an, the top metropolitan graduate, a gifted young scholar.

After this, the servants of the residence—maids and footmen alike—would greet Zhu Ping'an with respectful bows and heartfelt salutations. The ugly rumors about him seemed to vanish overnight, replaced with positive tales, often pairing him with the fifth young lady—stories of a perfect match, beauty and talent in harmony.

In short, Zhu Ping'an's status in the marquis' household rose significantly from that day on.

Of course, there were exceptions—such as a certain troublemaking child, who still looked at him with the same sideways scowl, full of long-held grudges.

The reason was simple. While Zhu Ping'an had been preparing for the exams in the marquis' residence, the troublemaker had also been "sentenced" there, tossed daily into Zhu Ping'an's guest room by the marquis—hoping the boy might improve academically under Zhu Ping'an's influence.

Except for the day after the results were announced—when Zhang Siwei and Wang Shizhen dragged him out for a meal—Zhu Ping'an had spent every day diligently preparing his policy essays.

Of course, during his reading breaks, he would occasionally tease the troublemaker, fulfilling his role as a supervisor. None of the boy's usual tricks for slacking off worked on him; every attempt ended with the child baring his teeth like a bulldog. Still, the results were impressive—his memorization improved greatly, and his handwriting showed marked progress under Zhu Ping'an's "torment."

Early this morning, after breakfast, the boy was once again sent to Zhu Ping'an's guest room to study.

He was extremely lazy, with no real interest in reading. Barely three minutes after opening his book, he tossed it aside and zoned out, scowling with his pudgy face in the classic troublemaker pose of "What can you do to me?"

During a break from his own reading, Zhu Ping'an glanced over and told him to pick up his book again.

"Do you know what books are made of?" the boy asked, folding his arms, squinting at Zhu Ping'an with a sideways look.

"Books are made of paper. Why?" Zhu Ping'an replied with a faint smile, curious to see what excuse the boy would use to get out of studying today.

“Oh, paper? I think I might be allergic to paper. Every time I read, I get a headache,” the boy said, dead serious.

Allergic to paper? Well, that’s... creative. Come here, kid, I promise I won’t beat you senseless.

The boy met Zhu Ping’an’s gaze with smug confidence. In the past, this line had always worked—either the tutor would storm off or he’d get his way and avoid studying altogether.

This time, however, was different.

“Oh, you’re allergic to paper, are you...”

Zhu Ping’an nodded thoughtfully, looking at the boy.

The boy nodded back vigorously, thinking his “country bumpkin” brother-in-law had no counter.

Then, in the next instant, his heart shattered.

“Oh, you’re allergic to paper? Well then, I’ve never seen someone have an allergic reaction to it before—come on, show me one.” Zhu Ping’an’s grin was full of wicked amusement.

The rebellion against the bumpkin brother-in-law had failed once again!

The boy shot him a venomous glare, then grudgingly picked up the book from the table and began to read.