

Rise 322

Chapter 322: An Invitation from the Yan Residence

These past days, the mischievous brat had been living in what could only be described as deep waters and scorching fire.

He could no longer slack off, no longer find ways to shirk his duties. His resentment toward Zhu Ping'an had reached explosive levels.

Fortunately, on the third day, the brat was finally liberated—because that country bumpkin of a brother-in-law was invited to a banquet by the damned Yan Residence! The brat added those two words—damned Yan Residence—purely out of spite, since the man who came from there had been unbearably arrogant, eyes practically fixed on the heavens. He gave not the slightest respect to his father, and on top of that, carried away a large amount of valuable goods from the household!

For the past two days, Grandmother and Mother had seemed upset. Grandmother had even lost her temper at Mother, snapping that all the money was gone—wasted, gone like stones thrown into a river! If the money was gone, then why still give so many fine gifts to those damned people from the Yan Residence?

But of course, such grievances didn't bother the brat for long. As soon as Zhu Ping'an left for the Yan Residence's banquet, everything else vanished like smoke—because it meant he could once again happily play with his little sister Niu'er.

That morning, the messenger who had delivered the invitation to Zhu Ping'an had accepted Marquis Linhuai's gifts, tossed down the invitation with a curt warning not to be late, and then swaggered off without another word. Such arrogance—it was truly the air of a great man's servant.

The invitation itself was simple, bearing only one line: "On this day, there will be wine and discourse, from midday to dusk, with no need to divine the night." Yet the signature beneath was not to be underestimated—two characters: Donglou.

This was the courtesy name of none other than Yan Shifan, son and sole heir of the Grand Secretary Yan Song, one of the most notorious members of the Ming Dynasty's "Prince's Party." Known by his given name Yingqian, styled Deqiu, and with the sobriquet Donglou, he already held the high position of Right Vice Minister of Works.

This man was no ordinary figure. At court, there were now two nicknames on everyone's lips: the "Great Chancellor" and the "Little Chancellor." The Great Chancellor referred to Yan Song, the Grand Secretary himself; the Little Chancellor referred to his son, Yan Shifan.

Zhu Ping'an's curiosity about Yan Song and Yan Shifan burned strong. History had already nailed the father and son onto a cross of infamy, yet he still wanted to see them with his own eyes. Last time, on West Chang'an Street, he had seen old Yan Song spit phlegm on the road—a disgusting sight. Hopefully this time wouldn't be so nauseating.

Thus, once the messenger departed, Zhu Ping'an tucked the invitation into his robe, mounted his eccentric black horse, and rode alone toward the Yan Residence.

While the brat and the little girl were crouched in a garden of the Marquis' household, bottoms in the air as they dug for worms and raced them in the dirt, Zhu Ping'an was already arriving at West Chang'an Street.

This street lay close to the Western Garden, where the Jiajing Emperor indulged in alchemy and Daoist practices. Those who lived along this street were all high-ranking officials with true power. And among them, the most prestigious of all was the Yan Residence.

In front of the Yan gates bustled an endless stream of carriages and horses, with officials in robes coming and going. To an outsider, it would look as though all the ministers of court had gathered here for audience.

Zhu Ping'an looked at their fine steeds and grand sedans, then glanced down at his own odd black horse. At once, he felt as though he had driven a second-hand Chery QQ into a parking lot filled with Ferraris and Lamborghinis. And to make matters worse, his black horse carried itself with unbearable arrogance, head tilted to one side as though it lived on wind and dew alone.

The road before the Yan gates was crowded with carriages and palanquins. Zhu Ping'an dismounted at a distance, leading his horse on foot toward the entrance.

Majestic and imposing, the Yan Residence loomed before him.

Even from the outside, it screamed of extravagance. Towering walls and grand halls rivaled the majesty of the imperial court itself. Unlike ordinary households, whose gates opened inward from within the ward, the Yan gates opened directly onto the street, massive and painted bright vermilion.

In the feudal order, vermilion gates were reserved for the palace and nobility—it was a mark of rank.

On the gates gleamed golden studs and bronze rings clutched in the mouths of jiaotu beasts, one of the nine sons of the dragon in legend, famed for their dislike of intrusion. The symbolism was clear: wealth that entered this household would never leave.

A fitting image indeed.

Before the gates, crowds lined up to offer gifts and calling cards, each vying for favor. Boxes of treasures and carts of goods flowed in like an endless stream, though most senders themselves were denied entry. Even so, having their gifts accepted filled them with excitement, as if promotion and fortune were already at hand.

Some, however, offered gifts deemed too paltry. Their calling cards were returned with dark scowls from the gatekeepers, and they were driven away. Yet even then, the rejected could only bow and smile, swallowing their anger.

Only a select few were personally invited inside.

Into this scene walked Zhu Ping'an, leading his ridiculous black horse, empty-handed and plainly dressed, his sleeves fluttering with nothing inside them. The sight drew many curious glances. A fool, they thought—did he really expect to enter the Yan Residence like this? Especially those who had just been driven away lingered to watch, eager for the spectacle of Zhu Ping'an being scolded and tossed out.

The gatekeepers worked efficiently, and before long it was his turn.

“Your gift list?” one of them asked, without even looking up, hand outstretched by habit.

“None.”

The clear reply startled the gatekeeper enough to raise his head.

No gift list? Impossible!

He saw only a fourteen- or fifteen-year-old boy, leading an unimpressive horse, standing before him with the faintest of smiles tugging at his lips.

No gift, no offerings—and you dare to smile at me? Are you stupid?

The gatekeeper’s face darkened, and he was about to bark a rebuke when the youth calmly extended a card toward him.

It was a gilded invitation, simple yet elegant.

At the sight of it, the gatekeeper swallowed his words. He took the invitation, eyes narrowing as he examined it. Could this be a forgery? The boy looked far too ordinary, especially with that disgraceful horse by his side.

But when he opened the card and saw the signature “Donglou” penned within, his doubts vanished. The handwriting was unmistakable, the invitation genuine. Moreover, today’s banquet was strictly for select guests only—no impostor could possibly sneak in.

Quickly, the gatekeeper closed his mouth, stepped aside, and invited Zhu Ping’an into the Yan Residence.

What?! Just like that?

The onlookers outside stared in disbelief. The boy had brought not a single coin’s worth of offerings, yet he was invited in as an honored guest?

Could the rumors be false, then? Could it be that Lord Yan was in fact a man of spotless integrity, a heart as pure as ice in a jade vessel?

One or two men, emboldened, tried to imitate Zhu Ping’an—approaching with empty sleeves as if they, too, carried special privilege. But they were met with curses and blows, chased from the gates like dogs.

At this, everyone could only look on enviously at Zhu Ping'an. To be welcomed into the Yan Residence—surely, this young man's future would soar to the heavens.