

## Rise 49

Chapter 49: IQ is a hard nut to crack

The incident involving Uncle's study abroad trip and the girl was resolved under Grandfather's furious reprimand. The girl was kicked out of the house and Eldest Uncle would return her to a friend in the county town early tomorrow morning. After Eldest Uncle returns, he will kneel in the ancestral hall for a day, then be grounded at home for six months to diligently study, without Grandfather's permission to leave the Zhu family compound.

In fact, upon reflection, Grandfather still favored Eldest Uncle, and the punishments given to him were rather mild. The issues were not truly resolved, such as the problem of the two guan, or Uncle's flirting outside; they were only addressing the symptoms rather than the root causes.

The matter was suppressed like this, but the aftereffects couldn't be eliminated.

For instance, the relationship between Eldest Uncle and Eldest Aunt became tense because of this incident. After returning to their room at night, Eldest Aunt was still heard arguing with Eldest Uncle. Eldest Aunt loves Eldest Uncle very much and takes pride in him, but this time, Eldest Uncle's actions hurt her. Eldest Aunt coldly asked Grandmother for two guan, but in the end, Eldest Uncle spent it all on entertainment and even brought the girl home, which left Eldest Aunt deeply hurt. No matter how Eldest Uncle explained, it didn't matter; she just wanted to cause a scene.

By nighttime, everyone had gone to bed, but not long after, a wailing sound came from the courtyard—it was Zhu Pingjun crying.

"Let's see what's wrong with the child, why is Jun'er crying?" Mother Chen had just fallen asleep when Zhu Pingjun's cries startled her awake. She couldn't help but pull the snoring Zhu Shouyi up, and together they got dressed and went out to the courtyard to see what was going on.

Eldest Brother Zhu Pingchuan also woke up, got dressed, and stepped out of the room. Zhu Ping'an put down his brush and followed suit, curious about what was happening, wondering why Zhu Pingjun was crying while Eldest Uncle and Eldest Aunt were quarreling.

Third Uncle and Fourth Uncle's families from the west wing also came out, and everyone surrounded Zhu Pingjun in the courtyard, asking what had happened and why he was crying.

Then, from Zhu Pingjun's account, the events were pieced together:

During the argument between Eldest Uncle and Eldest Aunt, in an effort to better undermine each other, they began to recruit Zhu Pingjun to their sides.

Eldest Aunt asked, "Jun'er, is your mother good to you?"

Zhu Pingjun nodded and said she was.

Eldest Uncle, unwilling to be outdone, chimed in, "Jun'er, is your father good to you?"

Zhu Pingjun also nodded and said he was.

With both sides having equal claims, this was obviously not the result Eldest Aunt and Eldest Uncle wanted, so they pressed further, "Jun'er, who treats you better, mother or father?"

Zhu Pingjun glanced at his parents and then answered, "You both treat me well."

So far, Zhu Pingjun's responses had been very good, almost exceeding expectations.

Eldest Uncle and Eldest Aunt quickly followed up with, "Now that your parents are arguing, which side are you on?"

Without thinking, Zhu Pingjun raised his head and replied, "I'm on the side..."

"I'm on the side..." Hence, Zhu Pingjun was caught in a mixed double team by Eldest Aunt and Eldest Uncle, with them both saying, "You're on the side, you're on the side..."

Zhu Ping'an was also speechless; "Standing to the side, you can just get hit." His intelligence really was a hard injury. But upon reflection, Zhu Pingjun was indeed a victim; why should a child be involved in adult quarrels? Yet adults are like this; parents always like to ask children such questions during arguments to find a sense of presence, but how can a child answer such a dilemma? However, Jun'er's response was truly deserving of a beating; any answer would have been better than that. Even if he leaned towards one side, it would be better than getting hit by two fists.

Everyone didn't know what to say and just comforted Zhu Pingjun. Mother Chen instructed Zhu Pingjun to keep Zhu Ping'an and Eldest Brother company, cramming into one room for the night, and then everyone dispersed.

Under Mother's command, Zhu Ping'an and Eldest Brother had no choice but to take Zhu Pingjun back to their room to squeeze together. It must be said that Zhu Pingjun was indeed the representative of being carefree. When he entered, he was still sniffing, but within two minutes of lying on the bed, he started snoring. He didn't take today's events seriously; perhaps in his eyes, as long as both parents were around, it didn't matter if they fought. Gradually, Zhu Pingchuan also fell asleep, leaving Zhu Ping'an to continue his struggle alone.

Zhu Ping'an sat at the table, continuing to copy from his textbook. This time he was copying the Thousand Character Classic, which had a lot of characters. He didn't plan to finish it all in one night; he intended to split it into two sessions, starting with a few hundred characters tonight. The more he copied, the more he felt that his connection with the brush was increasing. The brush in his hand seemed to become part of his body, giving him the sensation of it merging with him, like an extension of his own arm. This feeling was akin to gaining experience points and leveling up after defeating monsters. At this moment, his brushwork also showed slight improvement, seemingly reaching a new level; he had progressed from being a beginner to just beginning to grasp the basics.

The next morning, before dawn, Eldest Uncle was sent out by Grandfather to return Mei Ji, without even being allowed to eat breakfast. Eldest Uncle wanted some travel money but received a severe scolding from Grandfather instead, leaving him dejected. However, Grandmother caught up with him and secretly slipped him some money, though he didn't know how much it was.

Eldest Aunt seemed to have not slept all night, looking considerably haggard. She only drank half a bowl of porridge for breakfast, and Mother Chen and the other sisters-in-law had also put aside their grievances to

offer kind words of comfort. Zhu Pingjun seemed to be a little more understanding this time, sitting quietly beside Eldest Aunt instead of causing a ruckus at the dining table as before. Zhu Ping'an sympathized with Eldest Aunt but, of course, didn't hold back on eating; Grandfather kept urging him and Zhu Pingjun to eat more. Taking advantage of Grandfather's encouragement, Zhu Ping'an even made a special effort for little Yu'er, adding several pieces of scrambled egg to her bowl, making the little girl's eyes squint into crescent moons from joy.

Eldest Uncle went to the county town to return Mei Ji, looking rather disheveled, but returned looking spirited and glowing, which puzzled Zhu Ping'an.

"Father and Mother, I returned the person! My friend knows what I've been through and kept apologizing, saying he caused me suffering. He gifted me half a guan for travel expenses. I know I have committed grave sins and couldn't bear to spend it, so I brought it back for you two." Eldest Uncle spoke earnestly, showing a strong sense of remorse.

Grandmother was very pleased, repeatedly telling Grandfather that knowing one's mistakes and correcting them showed that the eldest was still a good child, just misled by others.

Seeing that his eldest son had recognized his mistakes, Grandfather's anger eased a bit, but there was still quite a bit of ire left, and Eldest Uncle's punishment was not reduced in the slightest.

Regarding the punishment, Eldest Uncle gladly accepted it, stating that he was at fault and should face the consequences. He vowed to reform and work hard in his studies, aspiring to become a scholar to bring glory to the Zhu family.

Before leaving, Eldest Uncle pulled Eldest Aunt into the room, claiming it was to apologize. Inside, he quietly gave Eldest Aunt half a guan, saying it was a gift from a friend. He told his elders he had brought back half a guan, and this half guan was for Eldest Aunt as an apology, suggesting that such a beautiful and virtuous wife should buy some cosmetics...

Under Eldest Uncle's sweet talk and the lure of half a guan, Eldest Aunt's anger subsided considerably.

While Eldest Uncle was in the ancestral hall reflecting on his mistakes, the anger in the family had already been largely extinguished, with only the remaining grievances being a matter of time. For this, Zhu Ping'an had to admire Eldest Uncle's cunning; reading the Four Books and Five Classics and the Eight-Legged Essays didn't make him foolish. Instead, it made him increasingly sly. It's unclear whether it was because the Eight-Legged Essays of the Ming Dynasty didn't confine thought as strictly as those of the Qing Dynasty, or if Uncle was an exception. The scholars nearby were too few to compare, so he could only conclude this once he left the village.