

## Rise 72

### Chapter 72: I Raise a Cup of Wine to You, Benefactor

Your tears are soft yet filled with hurt. The girl's reliance and helpless tears tremble softly as she says, "Benefactor, be careful; I'm afraid," as if she has given these ten or so students a shot of adrenaline.

"Rogues, don't be so arrogant!"

The students shouted in unison, rolling up their sleeves to charge forward. Especially the wealthy student, who was tugged at the corner of his clothes by the girl behind him, took the lead like a heavenly deity, radiating an aura of justice.

With many people united, righteousness cannot be infringed upon. The rogues fled in panic, leaving behind a remark: "The green mountains remain, and the clear waters flow. This time, I concede; we shall see what happens next time."

Justice defeated evil, the girl was saved, and the more than ten students successfully accomplished a heroic rescue.

"Thank you, benefactor. Thank you for your help..."

The girl's eyes brimmed with grateful tears. With her delicate hands resting on her waist, she slightly bowed and crouched, her wide sleeves billowing as she performed a deep curtsy, repeatedly thanking her benefactors.

As the girl gathered her clothes and crouched, her originally disheveled outfit slid down further, revealing a snowy white shoulder.

The benefactors couldn't help but swallow hard.

"Punishing evil and promoting good is our duty; how can we accept such great courtesy from the lady?" The more than ten benefactors scrambled to help the grateful girl up, each displaying a righteous demeanor. When their hands brushed against the girl's delicate hands, they couldn't help but squeeze a little, their eyes narrowing in delight.

The girl continued to express her gratitude, seemingly unaware of the benefactors' little actions.

To soothe the girl's frightened emotions and to prevent the rogues from returning, the group enthusiastically invited her to rest in front of the feast they had just enjoyed, promising to escort her back home afterward.

As the delicate girl was surrounded by the students, she cast a fleeting glance at Zhu Ping'an, who was sitting in the corner, eating melon and pancakes obliviously, before being ushered to the food.

A wealthy student offered his cushion, eagerly inviting the girl to sit.

Just as the girl was about to take her seat, a black-and-white spider crawled past her feet, causing her to scream and almost fall.

The quick-witted wealthy student hurried to support her, while the others, deprived of their chance to shine, vented their frustration by stepping on the spider, reducing it to nothing.

"Thank you all, benefactors, for extending your helping hands. My father is the owner of Zhang's Tea Shop in the county town. Today, my family and I went to Da Jue Temple to offer incense, but we encountered rogues along the way. I panicked and got separated from my family. If it weren't for all of you, I would have had to end my life to preserve my innocence..." she sobbed, tears flowing freely.

Under the comfort of the crowd, the girl steadied her frightened emotions and gradually recounted her ordeal, breaking down in tears as she remembered the terrifying moments.

The girl's sorrow shattered everyone's hearts, prompting them to offer comforting words.

Rescuing a distressed lady on the way to the capital for the exam and bringing home both fame and beauty is the ultimate dream of every scholar.

At that moment, it seemed about to be realized. The more than ten students each displayed their skills, hoping to leave a good impression on the girl to win her heart. Naturally, Uncle Zhu Shouren was not to be outdone, acting as enthusiastic as an eighteen-year-old handsome youth.

Zhu Ping'an merely sat in the corner, smirking quietly while munching on his pancakes.

"The young lady has nothing to offer but a cup of water wine to express my gratitude to all of you benefactors. Once we reach the county town, my father will host a banquet for you all and prepare generous gifts to welcome you," the girl said.

In order to show her gratitude, the girl intended to toast the crowd with a drink, planning to have her father, who runs a tea shop, properly thank everyone once they arrived in the county town.

The group of students eagerly insisted that punishing evil and promoting good was their duty and that no thanks were necessary.

However, when the charming girl with bright eyes and a lovely smile, her cheeks flushed and eyes sparkling with affection and shyness, began to serve wine to each of them, the students fell silent, captivated. One by one, they accepted their cups and drank heartily while gazing at the bashful girl.

After serving wine to each student, the girl lifted the wine pot and moved toward the corner of the mountain god temple.

"Who are these?" she asked, holding the wine pot and pointing at a few young scholars sitting together in the corner.

The owners of the young scholars quickly replied that those were their attendants.

"Oh, so they are the benefactors' attendants! I'm truly grateful for your help today, and I'd like to pour a cup of wine for you as well. I hope you will serve your benefactor well; when he succeeds in the exams, you will surely benefit from it," the girl said, pouring a cup of wine for each attendant.

However, she only poured wine for them without toasting, treating them differently from the more than ten students. This distinction made the students feel a sense of superiority, especially the attendants' owners, who were very pleased to hear the girl encouraging the attendants to serve them well and mentioning the exams.

Each attendant drank the wine, and the girl then approached the last person in the mountain god temple, Zhu Ping'an.

"And who might this young master be?" the girl asked playfully, her eyes shimmering as she stood in front of Zhu Ping'an.

When she addressed Zhu Ping'an, the other students exchanged disdainful glances, eagerly chiming in to mock him:

What? He's just here to make up the numbers for the youth exam! One student even recited a poem Zhu Ping'an had written at the Long Pavilion ten miles away, commenting as he read: "Once bitten by a snake,

one fears every rustle. Outside the long pavilion, beside the ancient path, a line of white egrets flies up to the blue sky." What is this nonsense? It's all cobbled together, and he can't tell a poem from a song. He's completely clueless... and a barrage of negative remarks followed.

Of course, the students also didn't forget to mention that when the rogues attacked earlier, Zhu Ping'an sat in the corner too afraid to move. They called him lacking manliness, cowardly, timid, and weak... launching another round of negative insults.

"That's quite interesting." The girl's eyes flickered slightly, her voice soft and barely audible.

After the crowd finished their chatter, the girl appeared dignified and gentle, showing no sign of disdain. She gracefully walked up to Zhu Ping'an, poured a glass of wine, and handed it to him, lightly parting her lips as she spoke:

"This young master is still quite young and naturally lacks the courage of all of you esteemed benefactors. However, I believe that under your guidance, this young master will surely grow into a great hero like all of you."

Her words not only satisfied the students but also spoke well for Zhu Ping'an, leaving no room for error. The more than ten students, buoyed by the girl's praise of "esteemed benefactors" and "great heroes like the benefactors," felt as if they were significant figures.

Zhu Ping'an stared at the charming girl standing before him, seemingly mesmerized. His silly face wore an awkward smile as he fumbled to put down the egg pancake in his hands.

"Young master, do not be shy. For now, drink this glass of wine. I believe that in the future, you will surely become a great hero who stands tall and firm."

The girl, with her delicate hands as pale as jade, presented the wine glass to Zhu Ping'an. Her eyes sparkled like stars, her lips curled slightly upward, full of encouragement.

It felt as if he had never seen such a lovely girl before, as if no one had ever spoken to him like this, or come so close to him. Zhu Ping'an awkwardly smiled, his face flushed red. His hands trembled as he reached for the wine glass she offered, but a clump of dirt underfoot caused him to stumble, almost falling to the ground and bumping into the girl.

Zhu Ping'an's embarrassing display drew laughter from the crowd around them. He was utterly pathetic, unworthy of the stage, a disgrace to decorum—a shame for their generation...

The girl was jostled slightly, her body tilting, but the wine glass in her delicate hand did not spill a drop.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry..."

Amidst the crowd's laughter, Zhu Ping'an steadied himself, his face flushed, and awkwardly accepted the wine glass from the girl with one hand, gulping it down in one go.

The girl watched him drink, a smile on her lips, then turned and walked back to sit among the ten or so students.

In the instant she turned, Zhu Ping'an subtly extended his sleeve to wipe his lips.

His sleeve was damp.