

Rise 105

Chapter 105: The East Hall Rankings Have Been Announced

The noisy carriages and horses are heading towards the sky, and people are checking the list that has already been hung on the eastern hall.

A golden-winged eagle soars across thousands of miles, while the Three Platforms still borrow jade coins.

The conversation floats like the shadow of wine, and the red sunset is dazzling. The sun shines on the robes, and the auspicious colors are fresh.

On the towers before the twelve streets, who wouldn't look upon the immortals as they roll up the curtains?

—Xu Yin's Announcement Day

Time flies, and the day of the provincial exam's first official announcement has arrived. This is the main exam, and those who are not on the list will not be allowed to participate in the next round. Zhu Ping'an is once again pushed by his uncle Zhu Shouren and others to the place where the provincial exam results are announced, which is in front of the examination hall, "Anqing Provincial Examination Court." At this time, the list has been hung, and it still shows seat numbers, like the previous county exams, and is divided into two lists: A and B. The area in front of the list is crowded, with people jostling each other, and the sound of voices fills the air. Both examinees and onlookers are constantly coming and going.

Among those looking at the list are several familiar faces, such as the elegant and smiling Xiatong City's Xia Luoming and others. Listening to the compliments and congratulations from those around them, their faces are beaming with smiles, as if making the list was expected.

Of course, there are also some familiar faces whom Zhu Ping'an met at the Immortal Poets' Gathering, many of whom look pale and dejected. The sharp, energetic air of their previous selves is gone, replaced with a sense of loss. It seems they did not make the list.

Uncle Zhu and others are still like before, asking for Zhu Ping'an's seat number, then standing on tiptoe to look at the list, much more eager than Zhu Ping'an himself.

"Uh, why did I fail... Ah, An Ge'er is on the A-list again, strange..."

A fellow from their hometown was the first to finish reading the entire list and couldn't find his seat number. He was shocked and disappointed. When he saw Zhu Ping'an's number once again on the A-list, his surprise grew even more.

From the county exam to the provincial exam, every time Zhu Ping'an has been on the A-list, to the point that when Uncle Zhu Shouren found Zhu Ping'an's seat on the A-list, the emotions of disappointment and surprise had almost become routine, although this time, he had come with high expectations.

In Anqing Prefecture, there were about 900 scholars who passed the county exam and came to participate in the provincial exam. The main exam list had 80 on the A-list and over 200 on the B-list, totaling about 300 people. This meant that more than 600 scholars from the county exam had failed. Besides Zhu Ping'an, only one other fellow townsman made the list. The other two hometown fellows did not make it. At this moment, the two hometown fellows who failed were deeply heartbroken. To comfort them, Uncle Zhu Shouren and the fellow townsman on the list surrounded them and went to a tavern, probably planning to drink heavily to drown their sorrows.

"Oh, looks like Zhu Xian-di has made the gold list again," Feng Shanshui from Susong and others joked as they walked over.

Zhu Ping'an cupped his hands and smiled faintly, saying, "It's just luck."

"There's no such thing as luck, it's all about strength. Zhu Xian-di is being too modest," Feng Shanshui laughed and rebutted, then congratulated him a few more times before being pulled away by his companions to drink.

When Xia Luoming from Tongcheng passed by Zhu Ping'an, he nodded slightly, his face still full of pride.

Not long after Xia Luoming and the others left, Zhu Ping'an was about to leave as well, but he was stopped by a commotion. Turning to look at the source of the noise, he saw an older candidate with graying hair, his beard and hair disheveled, pointing at the list and shouting:

"The harm of the eight-legged essay is even worse than Qin's burning of books and resistance to Confucianism!"

Someone nearby immediately sneered and said, "Your words are too much, just because you failed and are angry. Just study hard for another year, why make a fuss!"

"His hair is already white, it seems it's too late..."

Amid the laughter, the older candidate, enraged, threw the Four Books and Five Classics on the ground, shouting, "The eight-legged essay will destroy the country..."

Before the old candidate could finish speaking, a fellow from the same village who was also taking the exam rushed over and stopped him, apologizing to the surrounding people, saying, "I'm sorry, my friend has had too much to drink and is talking nonsense. Please don't mind him."

The people around could understand the frustration of failing and did not pursue the matter further. Those who were happy celebrated, while those who were sad mourned, and once again, the area in front of the list was filled with noise.

Zhu Ping'an sighed, shook his head, and then left. If he couldn't change this era, then he would adapt to it, doing his best to run to the front and influence this era.

After the main exam list was posted, the second round of exams began the next day. The process was the same as the first round, except that there were fewer people, so the speed was much faster.

This round of the exam was about composition, specifically practical writing. There was one very interesting question based on a case from the Yongle period, which later became a famous piece in Kunqu opera, Fifteen

Coins. Zhu Ping'an had seen a TV drama in his past life about this case, so writing about it wasn't difficult for him.

By dusk, the candidates who had finished their exams began handing in their papers and leaving with their exit passes. As usual, Zhu Ping'an carefully checked his answers twice, and by the time he handed in his paper and left, he was almost one of the last to submit.

Upon exiting the exam hall, he noticed many candidates whispering and discussing the Fifteen Coins case. Many said the question was quite difficult, but fortunately, it was just one of the questions. If it had been the entire exam, they feared they would have collapsed.

Not encountering any acquaintances outside, Zhu Ping'an left on his own, buying some food on the way back to the inn.

As soon as he opened the door, the seductive woman inside immediately leapt up, snatching the food from his hands with a loud cry. Without a word, she sat at the table, eating quickly in small bites.

"Look at you, being so stingy. You bought alcohol again. It must mean the exam went well..."

"Hehehe... I won't fail... hehehe... sour scholar..."

When she had eaten about eighty percent of the food, the young woman took a sip of wine, pursed her lips, and smiled as she spoke.

Looking at her delicate hands holding the wine jar, her fair skin exposed as she smiled mischievously, Zhu Ping'an merely smiled and shook his head before sitting down to eat his own dinner.

"Little benefactor, little young master... hehehe, which one do you like to hear?" After eating and drinking her fill, the seductive woman rested her delicate chin on her hand, watching Zhu Ping'an eat with great interest.

With his mouth full, Zhu Ping'an couldn't respond immediately.

The seductive woman didn't wait for him to speak, instead giggling and saying, "Although you're not much older, you're full of bad ideas. Don't think I don't know, the first time I called you little benefactor, you had no reaction; but when I called you little young master, your mouth even twitched..."

Zhu Ping'an was speechless. That was due to shock, not anything else!

"Hehehe, look at that silly expression on your face. Stop daydreaming. All those things in the books are nonsense. Little brother, wake up..."

The seductive woman rolled her eyes and mocked.

"You scholars are all as evil as wolves and as cruel as dogs. You wear a human skin during the day, but once you're out in the world, your true nature shows—teeth bared, hideous beyond measure..."

As she propped her chin, watching Zhu Ping'an eat, the seductive woman continued her teasing.

Zhu Ping'an swallowed a bite of food, glanced at her, and said coolly, "You eat my food, drink my wine, sleep in my bed, and yet you mock me. Tell me, who exactly has the wolf's heart and the dog's lungs between us?"

The seductive woman, propping her chin, rolled her eyes again, played with her hair, and replied with a smile, "You scholars are the most cunning and deceptive. Who knows if you're just pretending to catch a big fish with a long line, thinking about all sorts of nonsense in your mind..."

Zhu Ping'an sneered at her words and no longer paid attention to the neurotic vixen.