## RISE OF THE POOR

Chapter 11: Who teased whom?

"An Ge'er, you little tiger, what are you looking at?" The great-aunt led several brightly dressed cousins to the doorway. Since women could not enter the ancestral hall, they were only peeking in from the entrance. Just then, they happened to see Zhu Ping'an gazing intently at something above the hall. There was no denying that the cute, chubby little boy with a round face was quite eye-catching.

At first, Zhu Ping'an didn't react when the great-aunt called him. He had been listening to everyone referring to him as "little Zhu" since he arrived, and hearing someone call him "An Ge'er" caught him off guard.

"An Ge'er?" the great-aunt called out again.

Only then did Zhu Ping'an realize she was calling him. "An Ge'er" sounded much nicer than "little Zhu." In the Ming Dynasty, such terms as "Ge'er" and "Jie'er" were quite common in towns, but they were relatively rare in villages. It

was, in a way, a fashionable way of addressing someone. He remembered seeing such titles when reading "Dream of the Red Chamber".

"I was wondering if our ancestors would wave at us from the clouds," Zhu Ping'an turned his head and said earnestly.

In their position, as a child, he could only play his role well.

"Pfft." The 8-year-old cousin from the little aunt's side couldn't help but laugh, her delicate pink hand covering her mouth with a handkerchief. "Is little cousin a fool?"

The little cousin wore a pink pleated skirt, which swayed slightly with her laughter, looking quite pretty, like an innocent little girl just beginning to blossom.

The 12-year-old cousin from the eldest uncle's family waved her hand lightly and playfully flicked the little cousin's forehead, laughing, "Nonsense! How could little cousin be a fool?"

"Children speak without filter; let the wind blow it away." The great-aunt quickly interjected, saying, "Don't say that! An Ge'er is very smart; he's going

to be a top scholar in the future, right, An Ge'er?"

As she spoke, the great-aunt began to tease Zhu Ping'an.

The village children were all dirty, and the city kids didn't have anyone as chubby and cute as him. Such a chubby, fair-skinned little boy was indeed rare.

"Mm, yes," Zhu Ping'an thought for a moment and replied seriously.

Giggling, the cousins laughed even harder, and even the great-aunt was amused by Zhu Ping'an's earnestness.

To them, teasing a chubby little kid was the most fun thing.

They all energetically began to tease Zhu Ping'an, especially the great-aunt, who was particularly enthusiastic. In the city, she couldn't easily tease other people's kids, and the eldest cousin was too serious, much like Da Chuan, making it less fun to mess with him.

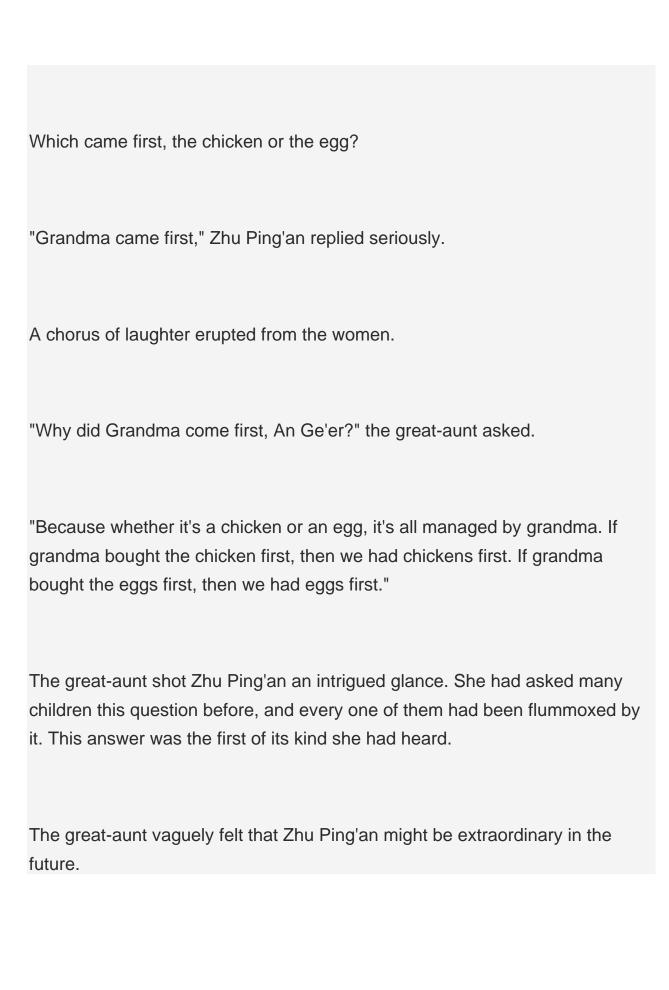
"An Ge'er, the great-aunt wants to ask you: which came first, the chicken or the egg?" The great-aunt squatted at the doorway, asking Zhu Ping'an with great interest.

Isn't it true that adults have always used this question to tease children throughout the ages?

The question of whether the chicken or the egg came first is a playful one, similar to the classic philosophical problem of whether a white horse is still a horse. A chicken is a type of poultry, and a chicken egg is the egg laid by that poultry. From a definitional perspective, the chicken is defined first, and then the egg follows. However, if we argue that the chicken came first, we must ask where the chicken came from—it hatched from an egg. This leads us into a circular reasoning loop: which came first? It's a lighthearted game that adults play to tease children.

Being teased can be boring, but pretending to be a little rascal and teasing others is quite another matter. In reality, isn't it similar? In the morning, as you walk your shiny pet dog, do you ever think about your pet's thoughts? "Oh, good morning, Golden Retriever brother and Husky sister! Here I am, taking out the poop-scooping servant again!"

Pretending to be a fool has become a habitual source of amusement for Zhu Ping'an.



The little cousins were once again amused by Zhu Ping'an's response. They thought it was funny how he connected the chicken-and-egg question to his grandmother, as if the plump little cousin was adorably silly. They began to tease him back, asking questions like why people have two legs or why ducks have two wings but can't fly.

Zhu Ping'an played along, throwing out silly responses, while internally he felt like a herd of wild horses was galloping through his mind.

"Little cousin, why don't you ask us a question?" the little cousin suggested with a bright idea to tease Zhu Ping'an.

"Big sister, can I not ask?" Zhu Ping'an asked seriously, shaking his head.

"No way! You have to ask!" the little cousin giggled, nodding earnestly.

"Alright then," Zhu Ping'an furrowed his brows, pretending to think hard.

As soon as Zhu Ping'an indicated he was going to ask a question, not only were the little cousins interested, but even the great-aunt leaned in to listen.

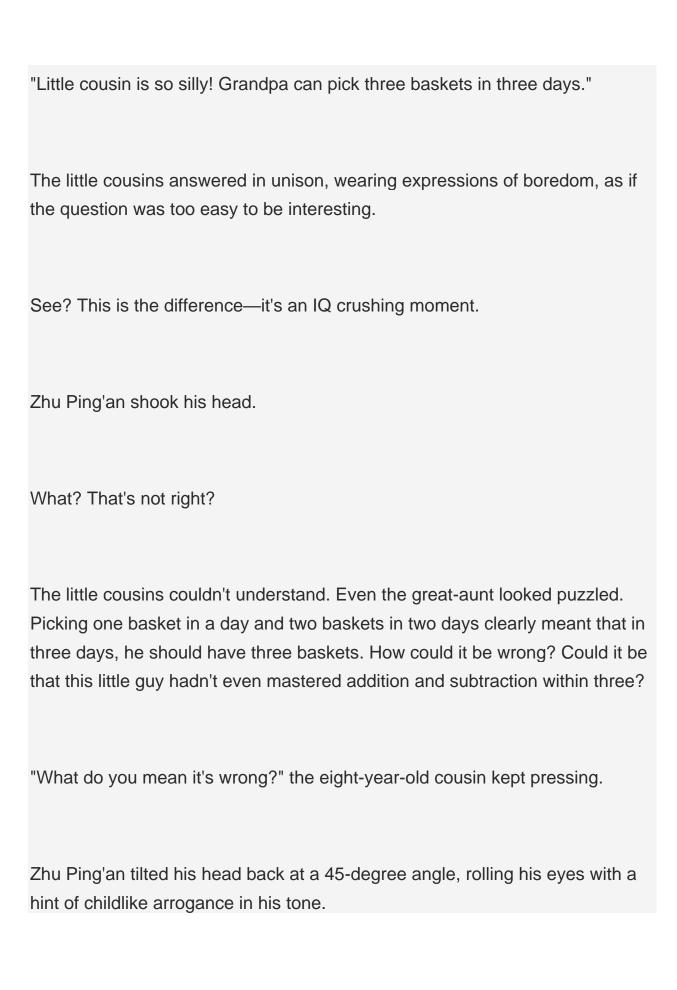
What kind of question could a little rascal just out of his toddler years possibly ask? Zhu Ping'an's past adventures with the trouble of not wearing underpants had become a funny story that the Chen family shared, making everyone laugh heartily at the memory.

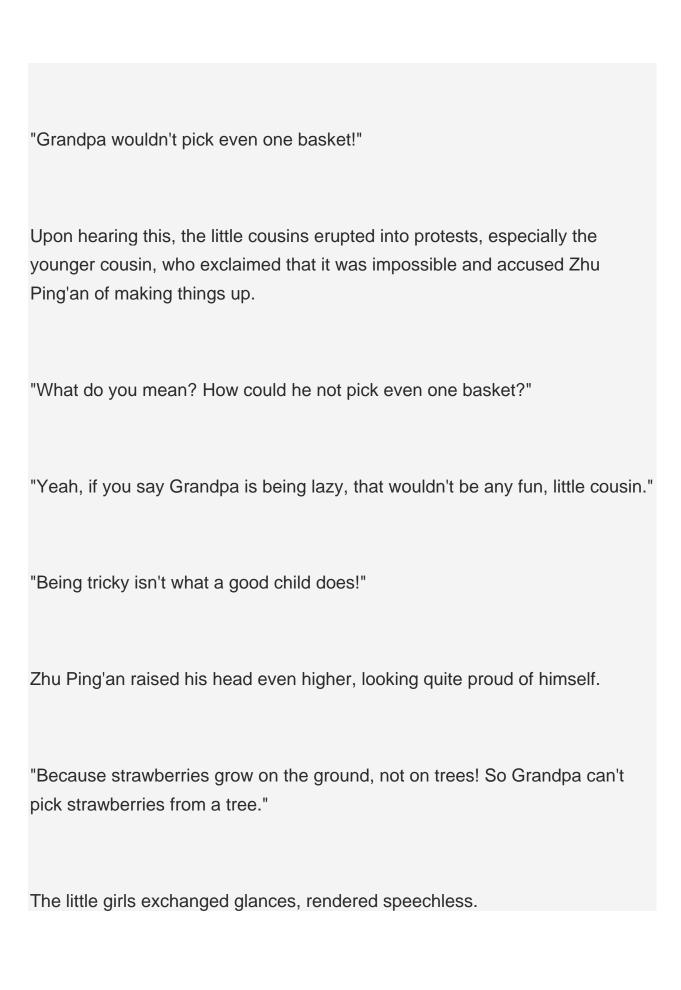
"Grandpa climbs a tree to pick strawberries. He can pick one basket in a day, two baskets in two days. How many baskets of strawberries can Grandpa pick in three days?"

Zhu Ping'an raised his head and said the question with a silly expression, as if he was racking his brain for a challenging problem.

The little cousins exchanged glances, thinking, 'Look at him, struggling so hard. He probably thinks this is a tough question, but it's so easy. Counting to three is already difficult for him, but for us, it's a piece of cake!'

"Oh, that's so simple! Three baskets of strawberries!"





Seizing the opportunity, Zhu Ping'an slipped away, wanting to hide his brilliance and avoid any further questioning.