

Rise 124

Chapter 124: The rise and fall of the world is the responsibility of every man

Standing outside the inn, looking at the bustling Yingtian city, the streets were crowded with carriages and horses, and even in the pouring rain, there was no sign of this massive city becoming desolate for a moment.

Who could believe that this prosperous city would face inhuman slaughter in a few hundred years?

The rise and fall of the world, every man has a responsibility.

Zhu Ping'an steadied his gaze, slinging his bag over his shoulder, and turned towards the inn in front of him. Inside the inn, there were many guests, and the staff were constantly running around, busy beyond measure. Even the innkeeper had to lend a hand. On a rainy day, some people must be too lazy to go out.

Seeing Zhu Ping'an enter with his bag, the inn staff quickly ran over and greeted him, "Guest, are you here for a meal or a room?"

"A room," Zhu Ping'an answered while taking off his bag.

Hearing this, the inn staff showed an apologetic expression and said sheepishly, "I'm sorry, guest, but all the rooms in the inn are full these days."

Uh, is this the rhythm of making me stay in the firewood room again?

Zhu Ping'an stopped unpacking his bag, feeling a bit frustrated, and looked at the inn staff's apologetic face. He then put the bag back on his back and grinned, "It's fine, it's fine. I'll try another inn."

Hearing this, the inn staff seemed to hesitate, as if he had something to say.

"Is there something you need to say?" Zhu Ping'an asked, noticing the staff's discomfort.

"Recently, many students have come to stay, and with the continuous rainy days, many merchants have also stayed in the city. It seems that the inns around here are all full. If you're looking for a place to stay, you might have to head to the southern city and try your luck."

Uh, it really seems like I'm going to end up in the firewood room.

Zhu Ping'an opened an oiled umbrella and walked, step by step, in the direction of the southern city as directed by the staff, following the stone-paved road.

The umbrella Zhu Ping'an was holding was bought a few days ago. It had twenty-one ribs, and the canopy was made of tung oil cloth. It wasn't as sturdy as modern umbrellas; if the wind blew any harder, this umbrella might not hold up.

Yingtian city was too large. Zhu Ping'an walked for a long time and asked a passerby, only to find that he was still in the western city. Looking at his completely soaked shoes and the large patch of wet blue robe, he couldn't help but miss the modern buses. He also thought that if he expanded his father's ox-cart business to the big cities in this Ming Dynasty, he would certainly make a lot of money.

After hitching a ride on an ox-cart with a kind old man who was delivering wine to the southern city, Zhu Ping'an finally arrived in the southern city before nightfall.

Bidding farewell to the kind old man, Zhu Ping'an walked into the southern city.

The southern city was more prosperous than the western city, but there was a stronger scent of alcohol and perfume in the air. There was a river nearby, filled with pleasure boats, and the water carried the scent of women's perfume. On the opposite bank, faint laughter of women could be heard, and now and then, men with lecherous expressions could be seen holding oiled umbrellas, crossing the bridge towards the other side. After walking for a while, Zhu Ping'an suddenly realized.

Damn, this is the famous Qinhuai River!

Among the men heading across the river, there were also students and scholars, and perhaps many of them were well-versed in knowledge.

However, Zhu Ping'an stood by the bridge with no intention of crossing. On the stone bridge connecting the two banks of the Qinhuai River, there was an unclear couplet: "A gentleman does not cross the bridge, crossing the bridge is not a gentleman."

This sentence left Zhu Ping'an deep in thought.

The narrow Qinhuai River had grand ambitions on the left bank and beauty and charm on the right.

In the wind and rain, Zhu Ping'an suddenly turned around, holding his umbrella, and began looking for an inn to rest on this side of the river. People were constantly coming and going, and there were plenty of wine houses and shops, but inns were rare. Perhaps most of them had lost business to the riverside brothels on the opposite bank. Not only could they sleep there, but there were also warm beds and beautiful girls—how could the inns compete?

After asking two inns, both were fully booked. It seemed that the availability of rooms was even tighter than in the western city.

On the way to find an inn, Zhu Ping'an saw a towering Confucius Temple, which stood in stark contrast to the romantic and picturesque spots across the Qinhuai River, making him feel somewhat amused.

As he walked further, he came across a vast architectural complex along the river, with the four characters "Jiangnan Gongyuan" inscribed on it.

This was the exam hall he was about to enter for the imperial examination.

The Jiangnan Gongyuan was here, no wonder there were many scholars crossing the river earlier.

It must be the presence of the Gongyuan and Confucius Temple that had brought prosperity to the Qinhuai River area.

Zhu Ping'an asked about three more inns before finally finding a place to stay. It wasn't a storage room, but it wasn't much better either. It was an attic at the top of the inn. However, it wasn't the kind of grand attic like those in Tengwang Pavilion, Yellow Crane Tower, or Yueyang Tower. This was an attic formed by an arched structure above the inn.

Despite this, Zhu Ping'an was still quite satisfied. This attic was one tael of silver cheaper per month than the regular rooms. In addition, the attic had a large window. Although there were places where he couldn't stand fully upright, the central area had decent space. With the large window, it was bright and offered a good view, through which he could see the lights across the Huai River.

After putting his things in the attic, Zhu Ping'an changed into clean clothes and shoes and went downstairs. He walked to the counter to call the innkeeper and paid for a month's rent.

This inn was near the Gongyuan, so most of the guests were scholars here to take the imperial examination. In the dining hall, the majority of those eating dinner were scholars, chatting and laughing, creating a cheerful atmosphere.

The attic upstairs was cramped, and anyone staying there could easily bump their head. Therefore, no one had ever stayed there.

Now, the scholars heard that Zhu Ping'an was staying in the attic and secretly laughed at him. Some kindly reminded him that the attic was cramped and inconvenient.

"Though the room is cramped, it's high, which is considered a good omen," Zhu Ping'an explained vaguely. It was already dark, and after trying so many inns, all were full. The curfew was approaching, and where else could he find a place? Besides, he was somewhat satisfied with the room.

Just as Zhu Ping'an finished speaking, a fat man suddenly slammed the table and stood up.

"What the hell?" Zhu Ping'an looked over and saw the fat man, around seventeen or eighteen years old, wearing a brocade robe, with a golden lock around his neck, a gold and jade ring on his fingers, and a face full of excitement and regret.

"Why didn't I think of this? High places, high success," the fat man said with a face full of regret, then turned to Zhu Ping'an and shouted.

"Hey, brother, how about we switch rooms? You can stay in my room, it's very spacious, and I'll take your attic. I won't take advantage of you, I'll even give you an extra one or two silver. How about it?"

And that wasn't all.

To persuade Zhu Ping'an to switch rooms, the fat man even ordered a table full of food and drinks, showing genuine sincerity.

Unable to refuse such kindness, Zhu Ping'an had no choice but to agree.

The fat man was so grateful that he hurriedly ran upstairs to pack his things, seemingly afraid Zhu Ping'an would change his mind.

What the hell, is this even happening?!

The surrounding scholars were stunned.