

Rise 127

Chapter 127: Prosperity and Prostitution

When the fat man, Xue Chi, sat down, he immediately reached for a large meat dumpling from Zhu Pingan's bowl with his chopsticks, took a loud bite, and his mouth was full of oil, causing him to grimace from the burn.

Slurping his mouth, the fat man loudly praised the food.

"This is great, a true delicacy! Brother Zhu really knows how to eat! Shopkeeper, bring me three orders. No, make it four! And also bring me the soup like his. Mm, it tastes pretty good. I'll pay for both of ours, just charge it to my account."

Xue Chi seemed to have no concept of money; perhaps his family had enough wealth that he didn't need to worry about numbers.

"This can't be, yesterday you treated me to a big meal. Today, let me pay for these snacks," Zhu Ping'an said as he reached into his chest pocket for his purse, calling the shopkeeper over to pay.

"No need for that, Brother Zhu. You've even given me the house with good luck. What's a little money? We agreed, right? Shopkeeper, come over here and collect the payment from me, and make it double," Xue Chi said, shaking his head and pulling out a piece of broken silver to wave at the shopkeeper.

Merchants pursue profit, so when they heard that someone wanted to pay double, they naturally didn't refuse. The shopkeeper immediately turned around and walked toward Xue Chi upon hearing that he was willing to pay double.

"Don't worry about it, just make sure to bring us some of your best food. Your little shop really does have delicious flavors," Xue Chi said, handing the shopkeeper a broken piece of silver and complimenting the taste of the food.

"Got it, just wait a moment, gentlemen," the shopkeeper replied as he took the money and went off to prepare.

Thanks to the fat man, what was supposed to be a breakfast ended up feeling more like lunch.

Xue Chi was only about seventeen or eighteen, not much older than Zhu Ping'an. Among the scholars preparing for the imperial exams, he was still considered young, and he found it difficult to connect with older people. Moreover, many scholars looked down on Xue Chi's nouveau riche demeanor. It was rare for him to find someone he could connect with, and since Zhu Ping'an was someone who seemed to share his views, Xue Chi felt a deep sense of camaraderie and had already considered Zhu Ping'an a close confidant in his heart.

On their way back to the inn from the breakfast place, they inevitably passed by the Qinhuai River. Looking at the prosperous golden and jade buildings on the opposite bank, Xue Chi seemed a bit distracted.

"Brother Zhu, do you know why the opposite bank is so prosperous?" Xue Chi asked, his face showing a lecherous expression.

"Because of the peaceful and prosperous era," Zhu Ping'an glanced at the lecherous fat man and said with a goofy smile.

"Heh, Brother Zhu, you're still too young. Let me explain..." Xue Chi said with a lecherous laugh, taking on a more elder-like demeanor, eager to play the role of a guide to Zhu Ping'an, wanting to continue imparting knowledge about the world of romance. After all, it wasn't every day he met someone he could talk to. He didn't want to let Zhu Ping'an turn into a bookworm without understanding the pleasures of life. He needed to be a good confidant.

At this moment, Xue Chi heard Zhu Ping'an, who he thought was a bit of a bookworm, repeat his previous words with a teasing tone:

"Flourishing prostitution, flourishing places, where there's prosperity, there's also prostitution."

At first, Xue Chi didn't think much of it, but upon hearing the teasing tone in Zhu Ping'an's voice, he suddenly realized.

"Flourishing prostitution, flourishing... Ah, that makes sense, hehe, Brother Zhu, you are indeed someone who understands this world," Xue Chi said, playfully hooking his arm around Zhu Ping'an's shoulder, his eyebrows wiggling and a lecherous grin on his face.

"This world? What are you talking about, you pervert!" Zhu Ping'an thought with a face full of speechless frustration.

"Come on, Brother Zhu, let me show you something," Fatty Xue Chi poked Zhu Ping'an with his chubby hand, his expression so lecherous it was indescribable. Even Marshal Tian Peng looked more dignified than him when he saw the Spider Demon bathing.

At this moment, there was a strong urge to stomp his fat face into the ground.

"I am still young this year, so I can't accompany Brother Xue," Zhu Ping'an politely declined.

"Hahaha, Brother Zhu, you're wrong here. When I was your age, I had already explored all the pleasure quarters in Bozhou!" Fatty laughed proudly.

I really don't understand where your sense of accomplishment comes from!

Zhu Ping'an firmly declined Fatty Xue Chi's invitation, slinging his backpack over his shoulder and intending to head back to the inn. As for Fatty Xue Chi, he could go wherever he wanted; Zhu had no interest in such things. What does age have to do with anything? If one succeeds, women will naturally come; there's no need to rush.

"Hey, hey, Brother Zhu, wait for me. I'm not going today either," Fatty Xue Chi panted as he jogged to catch up.

On the way back to the inn, Fatty Xue Chi occasionally chatted with Zhu Ping'an about his glorious deeds in Bozhou and on the other side of the Qinhuai River. His proud tone was like that of a victorious general boasting to his soldiers about chasing an enemy chieftain for eighteen miles, bare-chested with a machete.

Zhu Ping'an couldn't be bothered to respond, but Fatty Xue Chi got so carried away that he couldn't stop.

As they walked, the fat man who had been bragging suddenly fell silent. Zhu Ping'an was momentarily stunned and looked over. Fatty Xue Chi was staring intently at a spot on the street with his head tilted. Zhu Ping'an followed his gaze and saw a very brightly dressed woman sitting at the street corner, having breakfast with a scholarly-looking man. The woman exuded an air of the streets, mature yet alluring, probably quite attractive to someone like Fatty Xue Chi.

"Little husband, if you want to look, just look. Why do you have to do it from the corner of your eye?" The glamorous woman noticed Fatty Xue Chi staring at her and, feeling like he was being sneaky, laughed and scolded him.

"Oh my, Sister, you're so funny. I haven't even taken my pants off, how could I be looking at you through my bladder?" Fatty Xue Chi shook his chubby face and denied it.

Damn, what the hell. The so-called "avenging a father's death" or "resentment for taking a wife"—two of the greatest shames in life. Teasing someone right in front of their lover? That lover looks like a scholar, and scholars care most about face. Won't he go crazy?

Sure enough, the scholar sitting opposite the glamorous woman suddenly stood up with a loud shout and chased Fatty Xue Chi for two streets.

At this moment, Fatty Xue Chi was not fighting alone. He was like Liu Xiang or Usain Bolt—bouncing up and down, his body jiggling with fat, but still moving like a rabbit. He managed to avoid being caught by the scholar.

Zhu Ping'an watched the chase from behind and felt a bit pained. It seemed like this fat guy was often being chased, right? Damn it, could it be that he does this often in Bozhou? Watching the two disappear around the corner, Zhu Ping'an shook his head slightly and walked off on his own toward the inn.

Back in his room at the inn, Zhu Ping'an neatly arranged the items in his backpack and then took out his scrolls, returning to his desk. He set up the brush, ink, paper, and inkstone one by one and began preparing for his daily studies.

Having gone through the county exams and prefectural exams, Zhu Ping'an had become increasingly aware of the difficulty of the ancient imperial exams. Before, when reading time-travel novels, he would see modern people easily passing the imperial exams during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. But now, his thoughts were simply: nonsense.

The ancient imperial exams focused on the Four Books, the Five Classics, and the Eight-Legged Essay, completely different from modern education. No matter how impressive your degree—whether it's a bachelor's, master's, or doctorate—those have no bearing on the imperial exams. You could be great at math, literature, and the sciences, but it wouldn't help in the imperial exams.

They focused on the Four Books and the Five Classics, and you had to learn them piece by piece. The "ten years of cold windows" wasn't just about studying like we do now; writing the Eight-Legged Essay required years of practice, and without five or six years of accumulation, you couldn't write it well. Moreover, the imperial exam primarily assessed the Eight-Legged Essay, which was extremely difficult to write. Not everyone had a natural talent for writing, let alone for the Eight-Legged Essay. Also, when writing the Eight-Legged Essay, luck played a part.

Was your writing style in line with the examiner's tastes? What topics were given, how did you perform, how did others perform—all these factors were uncertain. All one could do now was prepare as much as possible, because preparation is key.