

Rise 130

Chapter 130: The Godlike Scholar

"These bastards are too ruthless... They must be jealous of my handsome looks... Hiss..."

Inside the inn, the fat man Xue Chi sat on a chair, his chubby face twitching.

Zhu Ping'an, who was applying medicine to the fat man, couldn't help but twitch the corners of his mouth upon hearing this. He really didn't know where the fat man got his confidence from! Handsome looks, huh? If it weren't for the fact that the fat man's family had some money, Zhu Ping'an would even doubt whether this guy could find a partner!

"Alright, take this medicine back. Apply it once a day, and it should be better in about three days," Zhu Ping'an said as he finished applying the medicine. He tossed the cotton-wrapped bamboo stick into the bamboo basket trash can, corked the bottle, and threw it into the fat man's lap.

"Thank you, Brother Zhu," the fat man said as he stood up from the chair to express his thanks.

"No need for thanks," Zhu Ping'an waved his hand indifferently and then added, "The exam is just around the corner, so you better be careful."

"The exam's coming so soon..." Fat man Xue Chi exclaimed in surprise, then his chubby face looked as if he were constipated.

After sending off the stumbling, drunken fat man, it was already well past dusk, with the moon hanging above the willow treetops. Due to the curfew system, the night in the Ming Dynasty was much quieter. At this moment, everything was silent, and the entire street was still and deserted, with people either out or sound asleep at home.

To succeed, one must endure loneliness; there are no shortcuts to success. Zhu Ping'an sat by the window, lit an oil lamp, and reflected on the imperial exam essay he had once seen from the Qing Dynasty's top scholar. He chose one of the essays and began to carefully write it down on paper.

The essay Zhu Ping'an copied was titled "To the People of the World, Gathering the World's Goods, Trading and Departing, Each Obtains What They Need," which was from the Book of Changes, Xi Ci. It describes how noon is the time for the market, drawing people from all over the world to gather goods, trade, and then return home with what they need. This was likely inspired by the hexagram of "Shike."

This was the answer sheet of the last Qing Dynasty top scholar Liu Chunlin, with impressive insights and a deep mastery of the eight-legged essay style. After copying it, Zhu Ping'an repeatedly studied it, then tried writing his own version for comparison, looking for areas to improve. He only extinguished the oil lamp and went to sleep after midnight.

In the quiet of the night, everything was immersed in dreams, and the ink-dark sky silently nurtured the coming dawn.

In the morning, Zhu Ping'an got up, washed up briefly, and, as usual, slung his schoolbag over his shoulder and walked out the door with a black wooden board. The scholars who were reading by the window in the inn had long since grown accustomed to Zhu Pingan's appearance. Being fellow early risers working hard,

they naturally didn't mind each other. Some scholars nodded slightly to Zhu Ping'an, and he responded to each of them.

Zhu Ping'an passed through the hall with the black wooden board and walked along the Qinhuai River to the grove where he usually practiced calligraphy.

When passing the bridge that connected the opposite side of the river to the golden and jade towers, he saw several men returning from the opposite side, their faces full of satisfaction and fatigue, clearly having worked tirelessly the previous night.

After taking a drink from a bamboo tube filled with Qinhuai River water, he turned and left the riverbank, heading toward the grove.

"Hey, that half-grown scholar, are you going to secretly drink our foot-washing water from that bamboo tube?" The two young girls on the other side of the river, who were washing by the river, noticed Zhu Ping'an and couldn't help but tease him.

These women, unbound by feudal morality, should not be underestimated. But the same teasing, repeated over and over, had grown tiresome.

"Next time, remember to add some sugar."

Zhu Ping'an didn't turn back, merely shaking the bamboo tube casually and leaving a light remark.

"Hee hee... I thought you were a block of wood, but turns out you've got a sharp tongue," the younger girl on the other side of the river giggled, covering her cherry lips.

"Little brother, they don't put sugar in foot-washing water, but they do like to add sugar to bath water. You can come play with me, and after I bathe, we'll drink together. Hee hee..."

The older girl was also amused by Zhu Ping'an's words, laughing softly. He was ambitious yet not stiff, virtuous yet not narrow-minded—such an interesting scholar hadn't been seen in a long time, she couldn't help but laugh.

Hearing the girl's laughter behind him, Zhu Ping'an almost doubted if he was still in the Great Ming. Really, these women of the brothel had more battle power than the older sisters of modern times who liked younger men.

Not paying attention any longer, Zhu Ping'an walked alone toward the secluded forest, reaching the stone where he often practiced calligraphy. He placed the black wooden board on it, pulled out a brush, and began practicing writing.

Since his last encounter with the old fisherman by the lake, Zhu Ping'an's calligraphy had been improving steadily, slowly developing its own style.

Although the forest he chose was secluded, it was full of mosquitoes, especially the vicious black-striped mosquitoes that, when they bit, would leave large, swollen lumps. During this short period of writing, Zhu Ping'an had been bitten by mosquitoes on his hands and neck, which were both painful and itchy, extremely annoying, and making his calligraphy practice less effective than usual.

Burning mugwort could drive away the mosquitoes, but it wasn't very safe in the forest. Zhu Ping'an thought that after breakfast, he would go to the apothecary to buy some herbs like Huoxiang, mint, perilla, calamus, lemongrass, star anise, dried tangerine peel, and orange peel, to place in the sachets his mother made for him. Carrying them around would be just as effective at repelling mosquitoes.

After practicing calligraphy, Zhu Ping'an stood up, walking and silently reciting the Four Books and Five Classics to avoid getting bitten by mosquitoes again.

As he was quietly reciting, a scholar also appeared in the forest, holding a book. Zhu Ping'an greeted him from a distance and continued reading his own book.

Then Zhu Ping'an heard a loud, clear voice echoing through the entire forest.

"Xue er shi xi zhi... xue er shi xi zhi... bu yi shui hu... bu yi shui hu..." The same phrase repeated dozens of times, the first five words repeated over and over, then the last four words repeated many times as well.

Damn, this sounds a bit like someone howling at night and being scolded as a wolf, thought Zhu Ping'an, startled. He looked up at the scholar and saw him swaying his head, reading with great emotion.

After repeating this phrase dozens or even hundreds of times, the scholar finally changed to another sentence.

"You peng zi yuan fang lai... you peng zi yuan fang lai... bu yi shui hu... bu yi shui hu..." This sentence also looped, just like the previous one. The first five words were repeated a hundred times, then the last four words a hundred times, without reading the sentence as a whole.

Zhu Ping'an was struck dumb. This method of memorization... truly a scholar of divine caliber.

The entire morning, Zhu Ping'an was accompanied by the scholar's single-phrase loop, revising the Four Books and Five Classics. And in that whole time, the scholar only read five sentences.

The imperial exams, the civil service exams... Zhu Ping'an thought, not knowing what would happen if such a person had passed the exams.

This forest might not be a good place to come again tomorrow. After finishing his morning reading and packing his things to leave, Zhu Ping'an thought to himself.