

## Rise 136

### Chapter 136: That Year I Was Thirteen

After a day's torment from the trumpet sounds, it was rare to see a smile. In the end, Zhu Ping'an couldn't bring himself to tell the fatty the truth about the chrysanthemums.

In fact, it wasn't just the fatty Xue Chi. Zhu Ping'an glanced around briefly, and saw several people standing in groups of two or three at the entrance of Jiangnan Park, exchanging poems they wrote about chrysanthemums and autumn. Many of them were very confident about the second-round exam today, most believing it would be much easier than the official exam.

The fatty stood about two meters away from Zhu Ping'an, chanting his extraordinary chrysanthemums poem with rising and falling tones.

At this moment, a person emerged from the Jiangnan Imperial Examination Hall, with an imposing demeanor. Hearing the surrounding discussions about chrysanthemums and autumn, he showed a hint of disdain. When his gaze fell on Zhu Ping'an, it lingered for two seconds longer than usual.

This must be the Zhu Ping'an that Luo Ming has mentioned several times, right? His honest expression was very much like the one in the portrait. The person's gaze lingered on Zhu Ping'an for a few seconds before hearing the fatty Xue Chi reciting his chrysanthemums poem to him. After hearing it, Zhu Ping'an gave a constipated look and muttered, "Hmm, good."

Upon hearing this, the person's disdain deepened, and he muttered to himself, "This year's top candidate is nothing special! Chrysanthemums... hehe..."

After murmuring to himself, the person walked away, leaving behind a lonely back, as if everyone else was intoxicated while he alone was sober.

"Hey, Brother Zhu, what's wrong with you?" Fatty Xue Chi asked when he saw Zhu Ping'an's constipated expression after the critique.

"Oh, your poem is excellent..." Zhu Ping'an answered with a constipated look. "It's just that the scent on you is too overpowering!"

"Oh, so that's it. I thought my poem didn't catch your eye," Fatty Xue Chi suddenly realized, then reached out to touch a cotton ball on his body and asked, "I have a cotton ball here, do you need it?"

"Keep it for yourself," Zhu Ping'an said, keeping his distance. The cotton ball had also endured the day's torment from the trumpet sounds, who would dare use it?

When they returned to the inn, many scholars were discussing chrysanthemums in the lobby. If the fatty hadn't known that he smelled bad, he would have surely rushed over to share his chrysanthemums poem with everyone.

The fatty went upstairs to wash up, while Zhu Ping'an also changed clothes at the inn. The dormitory was damp and humid, and the autumn heat made the clothes smell of sweat. After taking off the dirty clothes, Zhu Ping'an soaked them in a basin of water and sat on a low stool, scrubbing with soap provided by the inn. The inn also provided wood ash along with the soap, and mixing the two made washing clothes more effective. However, Zhu Ping'an just couldn't accept the wood ash.

Just as Zhu Ping'an finished washing and hanging up the clothes to dry, the fatty came downstairs looking refreshed.

"Brother Zhu, it's rare to feel so relaxed after the exam. Today, we're going to drink and not stop until we're drunk. You promised me!" Fatty Xue Chi had put on his signature gold lock and jade ring, and was holding a folding fan in a show of elegance.

"Can you still eat?" Zhu Ping'an asked indifferently.

"I couldn't, but who told us today that our chrysanthemums poems were so extraordinary? I'm not bragging, but no one can write a better chrysanthemums poem than mine. When one is happy, the spirit is refreshed. Today, I could eat a whole pig," Fatty Xue Chi waved his chubby hands, his confidence through the roof.

I really hope you're still this happy when the results are announced!

"Just so you know, I'm not going across the Qinhuai River," Zhu Ping'an emphasized.

"Why not? I'll treat you, and we can open your eyes. Besides, I've finally written a good poem today. Who knows, maybe I'll catch the eye of some female scholar and be invited to become a guest," Fatty Xue Chi pounded his chest, the gold lock around his neck jangling with a loud noise, his excitement evident.

"Then you go by yourself. I'm not interested," Zhu Ping'an remained unmoved.

"Not interested? You... You don't have some peculiar hobby, do you?" Fatty Xue Chi sized up Zhu Ping'an, then shivered all over. He took several steps back.

Are you shivering, you idiot? Haven't you looked in the mirror?

"Go to hell!" Zhu Ping'an couldn't take it anymore. "My orientation is perfectly normal. I'm only thirteen, I haven't even fully grown yet! I don't want to cripple myself!"

If you're thinking about that at such a young age, you're going to regret it when you grow up. You haven't even developed properly! Once it's ruined, there's no fixing it! When you grow up, you'll be the one crying on the battlefield.

"What's wrong with thirteen..." The chubby guy smirked, then suddenly got serious, his face full of wistfulness...

"When I was thirteen, my old man always forced me to study. Every day, he'd make me read for four hours. If I didn't, he'd scold me like a dog, so later on, when he got busy with work and didn't have time to manage me, he'd lock me in the study and have two maids, seven or eight years older than me, supervise me with big wooden sticks. They'd leave me harsh words, ordering me to study for four hours a day. If I didn't pass my homework check when he came back, he'd beat me to death... Every day, he'd come back from outside,

unlock the study door, and drag me out after I'd been locked up for a whole day... After that, I just started liking women..."

You're really a freak! And your father is a freak too! Why let those two young maids supervise your studies? No wonder your father had to drag you out every day! You're only thirteen! Two women, four hours, it's a miracle you're still alive!

Zhu Ping'an was speechless and at his wit's end with the chubby guy!

"Hey, Brother Zhu, Brother Zhu, don't go..." The chubby guy, Xue Chi, snapped out of his memories and noticed Zhu Ping'an was already heading out the door, quickly chasing after him.

As a foodie, after finishing an exam, it was essential to reward himself with some good food. He usually ate snacks, but today he decided to go for a feast. His pockets were full, so he wouldn't deny himself.

Thus, Zhu Ping'an left the inn and walked toward the Confucius Temple. He had heard some scholars talking about the Lion Head meatballs at the top of the Scholar's Building at the Confucius Temple, which were a delicacy.

"Brother Zhu, slow down." Xue Chi, panting behind him, said, "A promise is as good as gold, you did say before the exam that you'd only return when drunk."

"Yeah, that's right." Zhu Ping'an responded casually and continued walking.

"Then let's go to the other side of the river. Let me tell you, the 'Top Scholar's Red' at Lan Yue Lou is amazing..." The chubby guy, Xue Chi, couldn't forget the Qinhuai River.

"I did say I wouldn't return until drunk, but I never said we had to go to the other side." Zhu Ping'an kept walking. "Do you want to go to Scholar's Building in front of the Confucius Temple?"

"Let's go, let's go!" Xue Chi gritted his teeth.

Although the chubby guy compromised and followed Zhu Ping'an to Scholar's Building, along the way, he kept trying to convince him with talks of the pleasures of the fish and water, trying to coax Zhu Ping'an into changing his mind and going across the Qinhuai River instead.

On this point, it seems that modern and ancient understandings of close friends are quite similar. They've shared drinks, studied together, carried guns together, and slept by the Qinhuai River together...

The Confucius Temple wasn't far from the inn, and they arrived in about a quarter of an hour. However, Scholar's Building was a bit hard to find. There were many restaurants around the Confucius Temple, and Zhu Ping'an and Xue Chi spent some time before finally finding Scholar's Building.