

## Rise 137

Chapter 137: This is the only skill in the case

There are many restaurants in front of the Confucius Temple, much like in modern times, where students' money is easy to earn. Among these many restaurants, the Zhuangyuan Building is not particularly prominent. Its architecture lacks any unique style, but it exudes a sense of historical depth.

Zhu Ping'an stood under the Zhuangyuan Building, gazing at the three large characters "Zhuangyuan Lou" written in a flourishing script above. A wave of cultural atmosphere swept over him, and he immediately felt it was extraordinary.

Although the Zhuangyuan Building was not eye-catching, it had a relatively high flow of customers. During the short time Zhu Ping'an stood there, several groups of people came in and out.

"Let's go, today, Xue Chi is determined to eat you poor!" The fat man, still harboring resentment for not being able to cross to the other side of the Qinhuai River, gritted his teeth and stepped in first.

Zhu Ping'an smiled slightly and followed him upstairs.

The outside of the Zhuangyuan Building wasn't much, but once inside, there was an elegant atmosphere. Redwood furniture, wooden floors, and walls adorned with calligraphy and paintings. In the center, a particularly striking painting displayed four bold characters in a flying dragon and dancing phoenix style: "Zhuangyuan is here."

"Such arrogance, I wonder how the taste is." The fat man, Xue Chi, walked ahead and glanced at the painting in the center, curling his lips.

"If the guests aren't satisfied with the food here, we won't charge you." A cleanly dressed waiter bowed slightly, smiling broadly.

"That's what you said, huh?" The fat man, Xue Chi, waved his chubby hand, pointing at the waiter.

"Of course, it's what I said." The waiter smiled and then extended his hand. "Please, gentlemen, this way."

Zhu Ping'an patted the fat man on the shoulder from behind and walked toward the table the waiter had directed them to.

The Zhuangyuan Building had both private rooms and a main hall, but at that moment, all the private rooms were full, and only a few tables remained in the main hall. The waiter led them to a table by the window, which pleased Zhu Ping'an greatly.

On the wall, there were long wooden boards listing the restaurant's dishes, clearly visible at a glance.

"Let's have a plate of your lion's head." Zhu Ping'an casually scanned the wooden board, as there were so many dishes listed on the wall that it was hard to take in all at once. However, he still remembered hearing someone mention lion's head earlier, so he decided to order it.

"Got it, Table 3, Jiazi, a special serving." The waiter immediately called out to the kitchen.

The Zhuangyuan Building truly lived up to its name. Even braised lion's head was called a special serving.

As soon as the waiter finished calling, the fat man suddenly slapped the table, causing the flesh on his face to shake. "Good, a good omen."

"Give us a portion of the cold pigs' ears. And bring us a jar of your best wine." The fat man seemed excited by the waiter's mention of the special serving and began ordering more dishes with a bulldog-like expression on his chubby face.

"A portion of the cold pigs' ears, and a jar of Zhuangyuan Red." The waiter was a smooth talker. After hearing the fat man's order, he shouted toward the kitchen.

Everything the waiter said was to the fat man's liking, which made him so happy that his face couldn't stop grinning.

The roasted goose that was a shock to everyone, the fish head tofu soup that was crowned number one in bravery, and the Four Happiness Meatballs, all filled the table.

It seemed the fat man particularly liked these auspicious dishes. Looking at the full table of food and hearing the waiter's respectful speech, his chubby face bloomed in satisfaction.

"Zhi'er, truly a coincidence."

Just as the last of the dishes was being served, Zhu Ping'an had not yet picked up his chopsticks when he heard a familiar call. Looking up, he saw his uncle Zhu Shouren and several villagers entering one after another, all laughing with joy, but his uncle's fat friend was missing.

"Uncle, Uncle!" Zhu Ping'an stood up and performed a distant bow.

"An ge'er," several villagers cupped their hands slightly, their faces full of smiles.

"Meeting like this is a coincidence. Now that the exams are over, why don't we celebrate together?" Uncle Zhu Shouren, stroking his beard, laughed heartily.

Fatty Xue Chi had also met them before. Moreover, he couldn't wait for more people to join, so he could show off his chrysanthemum poem. He enthusiastically cupped his hands and invited them to sit, then waved his chubby hand and instructed the waiter to bring six more of the restaurant's signature dishes.

"This young brother is too polite," Zhu Shouren said with a smile after sitting down.

"Not at all. You're all Brother Zhu's friends, so naturally, you're also my friends," Fatty Xue Chi casually waved his hand.

After the pleasantries, Zhu Ping'an stood up and introduced them to each other so they could get acquainted. The first two times, they were in a rush due to the exams, but this time, they had the time, so he introduced them properly.

Once the food and drinks were served, everyone began to pour wine and serve dishes, enjoying the meal and each other's company.

"Ahem, about that re-examination..."

"That poem about the yellow chrysanthemums, like scattered gold..."

After having a drink, Fatty Xue Chi was about to bring up his chrysanthemum poem, looking for an opportunity. However, just then, Zhu Ping'an's uncle, Zhu Shouren, spoke in unison with him. The two exchanged a look and couldn't help but laugh.

After that, Zhu Ping'an sat there, feeling slightly pained, as he listened to them boast about each other's chrysanthemum poems. Even a few other villagers recited their own versions of the chrysanthemum poems, all looking quite pleased with themselves.

The more they were pleased, the more painful it was for Zhu Ping'an.

As wine flowed and the mood lifted, Zhu Shouren and a few others had drunk a few cups and were feeling tipsy. Slapping the table, they boasted to Zhu Ping'an, "Zhi'er, ah (An ge'er), it's really a pity you didn't meet my friend's mentor; really, what a pity."

"Oh, why do you say it's a pity, Brother Zhu?" Fatty Xue Chi's fat face leaned in.

"You don't know, that day when we drank with my friend's mentor, he pointed to the chrysanthemums outside the window and had us compose poetry. Tsk, tsk, Zhi'er, don't you think that's a pity?" Zhu Shouren sighed while drinking, looking at Zhu Ping'an.

Hearing this, Fatty Xue Chi looked at Zhu Ping'an with a sympathetic expression and shook his head. "Brother Zhu, it's really too unfortunate. If you had gone with your uncle, your poem wouldn't have been inferior to mine on chrysanthemums."

Upon hearing this, Zhu Ping'an felt even more exasperated.

"Alright, Zhi'er, don't worry. Although your uncle and the others no longer need to take the imperial exams, there's no need to fret. In the future, I'll introduce you to my friend's mentor."

"Yes, don't regret it, An ge'er."

Zhu Shouren and the others, misunderstanding Zhu Ping'an's pained expression as regretful, comforted him.

Thus, Zhu Ping'an felt even more exasperated and could only lower his head and focus entirely on the delicious food and wine at the table.

On the third floor, in a private room, sat people like Tongcheng Xia Luoming and Susong Feng Shanshui. Aside from the usual group, there were a few unfamiliar faces. Among them was a distinguished young man, who had shown disdain for the scholars reciting chrysanthemum poems in front of the Jiangnan imperial examination building that day.

From the private room, the scene in the main hall was clearly visible, and the sounds were faintly audible.

"Chrysanthemum poems, heh, this year's top scholar is nothing more than this. You've all exaggerated about him," a scholarly-looking young man, who had a strong presence, turned away from the window and returned to his seat, smiling at Xia Luoming and the others.

"Yesterday, I heard his comments on the chrysanthemum poems. I didn't expect it to be the same today," the distinguished young man said, casually playing with the wine cup in his hand.

"That's our fault. We didn't expect him to be so unremarkable. Liu brother, Guo brother, please forgive us. It seems the real top scholar this year is one of you two," Susong Feng Shanshui raised his cup and stood up, appearing quite respectful of the two.

"If it weren't for Liu brother's filial duty and Guo brother's study abroad, we wouldn't have had the honor to take the exam with you," even the usually proud Xia Luoming stood up and raised his cup.

The others at the table also raised their cups, many with embarrassed expressions, probably because they had written their own chrysanthemum autumn poems.

Upstairs and downstairs, cups were raised and exchanged, and everyone enjoyed themselves.

Zhu Ping'an, who couldn't handle his liquor, took the opportunity to slip away to the counter to pay the bill in advance, but was told that Fatty had already paid. He could only smile wryly and shake his head.