

Rise 140

Chapter 140: A Father Comes from Afar

The uncles and others were feeling both frustrated and melancholic, unable to express their bitterness. However, when they heard a loud cry coming from afar, they felt a slight sense of balance. Look, that chubby guy is crying too—our misery is not solitary after all.

The chubby man, Xue Chi, with his loud voice and plump body, pushed his way through the crowd like a tidal wave, crying in a heartbroken manner.

The uncles and others made room in the crowd for the chubby man who was suffering a similarly miserable fate as theirs.

"Waah! My top scorer position was snatched away by someone named Zhang Jing from who knows where! Waaah!"

As soon as the chubby man arrived, he let out a loud wail, crying in utter despair.

But upon hearing this, the uncles felt even more annoyed. Damn it, he's just upset about losing the top scorer position? What's the big deal? We didn't even make the list and we're not crying.

"It's just the top scorer position. Is it worth all this fuss? So, what rank are you?" Uncle Zhu Shouren asked sourly.

The chubby man's cry became even louder at this question. "I don't know what rank I am! I'm not even on the list!"

Not on the list! Why didn't you say so earlier? The uncles' expressions of frustration finally relaxed a little. They quickly pulled the chubby man into their circle to chat—after all, they were all fellow outcasts from the ranking list.

Zhu Ping'an was speechless. Earlier, when the chubby man said the top scorer position in Fengyang Prefecture was taken by someone named Zhang Jing, he thought the chubby man must be second place. He was puzzled at first, but when he heard the chubby man say he wasn't even on the list, Zhu Ping'an couldn't help but feel exasperated. Could you not be so misleading with your words?

The uncles struggled to accept the reality of the exam results, standing silently before the list for a long time. Only when the crowd had mostly dispersed did they turn away, full of sorrow, ready to leave this painful place.

At that moment, an unexpected event occurred. Two voices called out from a distance:

"Xiao Chi!"

"Who calls him Xiao Chi? Call him 'Xue Chi' instead!"

Hearing the voices, the chubby man, who had just calmed down, shuddered violently. He turned and tried to flee but was stopped by the callers.

"You rascal, stop right there!" A man's commanding voice rang out, shattering the chubby man's escape plan.

Zhu Ping'an and the others looked up to see a middle-aged couple in their forties approaching, surrounded by several maids and servants.

The man, dressed in a round-collared, wide-sleeved robe made of fine jade-colored silk, bore a seven-to-eight resemblance to the chubby man but was much slimmer. The woman wore a moonlight-colored skirt with gold embroidery and was adorned with accessories of gold and jade. She looked well-maintained.

It seemed this was Xue Chi's father and mother. His father looked stern, while his mother appeared to be doting and indulgent.

"You brat, how did you do in the exam this time?" Xue Chi's father asked, pulling him in front of him.

Though phrased as a question, the stormy expression on his face made it clear he had already seen the results.

Faced with his father, Xue Chi looked as frightened as a mouse before a cat. He lowered his head in fear, his chubby body trembling.

"Dad, Mom, this time... this time..." Xue Chi stammered.

"Hmm, failed, didn't you?" his father asked in an unusually calm tone.

"Yeah..." Xue Chi hung his head even lower, his body trembling even more.

His father patted Xue Chi's head and, in a particularly calm tone, said, "Son, you've grown up. I'll never scold you again for making mistakes or failing to accomplish something."

Hearing this, Xue Chi's head shot up in surprise, tears of gratitude almost welling up in his eyes. My father has finally come around! He's so understanding and reasonable now. It's so moving—I'll definitely turn over a new leaf and work hard in the future...

Before Xue Chi could finish being moved, his father continued slowly and calmly:

"You've grown up. It's time you got used to the feeling of being beaten more often!"

The fat man had a face full of emotion, and before he could wither away, he was so frightened that his soul nearly left his body. He let out a loud cry and turned to run.

As soon as his father finished speaking, he snatched a thick stick from a servant behind him, and it looked like it was about to fall on the fat man.

"Hey, Master, what are you doing? My little Chi is already working hard. Look, he's even lost weight!" The fat man's mother quickly stepped in to stop him.

"Too much indulgence from a kind mother spoils the child. This time, it's my turn to discipline him." The fat man's father, holding the large stick, ignored his wife's objections and insisted on teaching his unfilial son a lesson.

"Old man, the servants don't let you do this, the maidservants don't let you either. We are doing this to make him focus on his studies, but look at what you've done with this unworthy son!" The fat man's father was furious, tucked the corner of his robe into his belt, and chased after the fat man with the stick.

"Master, what are you doing? Don't hurt my little Chi!" The fat man's mother chased after them, trying to stop the beating.

Thus, in front of the Confucius Temple's announcement area, a farce unfolded.

A fat man was shouting and running in all directions, while behind him, a middle-aged man in a scholar's robe tucked the corner of his robe into his belt and chased after him, holding a stick. Behind him, a noblewoman shouted and tried to intervene, and a group of maidservants and servants followed suit.

Zhu Ping'an, watching the chaotic scene with the fat man's family, felt a bit annoyed.

Uncle Zhu Shouren and others were clearly disheartened. After standing for a while, they seemed ready to leave. From their conversation, it seemed they were heading to the opposite bank of the Qinhuai River. It was probably only certain women who could soothe their hurt feelings, or perhaps they hoped to regain confidence and satisfaction there.

This behavior was no different from an ostrich burying its head in the sand. They failed to reflect on the reasons for their failure, avoided taking responsibility, and didn't strive to improve. How could there be any success under such circumstances?

"Uncle, and all the other uncles, when will we return?" Zhu Ping'an, though disappointed in his uncles, still had to maintain the appearance of respect.

"Return? Three days from now. An'ger, you should rest for a few days, and we'll call you then." Before his uncle could speak, one of the villagers answered on his behalf, speaking in a tone that seemed more familiar than before.

"Then I'll trouble you all, uncles." Zhu Ping'an cupped his hands in thanks.

"Not at all, Ping'an Lang, you are being too polite," the villager shook his head, sighing deeply.

Uncle Zhu Shouren seemed still caught up in the loss and hadn't recovered yet. He simply nodded, not saying a word, and followed the other villagers toward the opposite bank of the Qinhuai River.

After the departure of his uncle and the others, the conflict within the fat man's family finally died down. The fat man, holding his backside, limped over to Zhu Ping'an.

"Father, Mother, let me introduce you. This is my good buddy, Zhu Ping'an from Xiahe Village, Anqing Prefecture, whom I met during the imperial examination." The fat man introduced Zhu Ping'an to his parents.

"Hello, Uncle. Hello, Aunt." Zhu Ping'an clasped his hands together, bowing deeply.

"Good boy." The fat man's mother was very polite.

"I can't accept such praise. As for you, don't introduce your bad friends to me and your mother again. Gambling, drinking, and carousing—what kind of people are those!"

However, the fat man's father wasn't as kind. He stepped aside, avoiding Zhu Ping'an's bow and adjusting his beard, his face full of displeasure.

"Father, Brother Zhu is not that kind of person. He's the top candidate in this year's Anqing Prefecture exam." The fat man protested unhappily.

Hearing this, the fat man's father, while still stroking his beard, involuntarily pulled out several strands. He glanced at the Anqing Prefecture list and completely changed his attitude toward Zhu Ping'an, doing a complete 180-degree turn.

"Ah, good, it looks like my son has finally made a good friend. Good, good, good." The fat man's father, greatly relieved, kept repeating "good" while looking at Zhu Ping'an.