

Rise 142

Chapter 142: Misunderstanding

When the setting sun meets the new moon, the night curtain quietly falls.

Due to feeling unwell today, Zhu Ping'an left the words "Quit Drinking" on his desk before returning to bed to sleep. His current state truly couldn't support practicing calligraphy or reading, as his mind was already unclear.

As the night deepens and all falls silent, everyone drifts into dreams.

The next day, Zhu Ping'an was woken by the sound of knocking and banging. Rubbing his eyes, his slightly tipsy head from yesterday finally cleared up, and he experienced the long-lost clarity. He resolved never to drink like that again, at least not before the official ceremony.

The Ming Dynasty is a dynasty that values rituals above all. Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang personally issued an imperial edict that established the official ceremony, and the emperor's scholars worked hard to establish detailed regulations for it. The official ceremony that was abolished in the Yuan Dynasty surged in the Ming Dynasty, spreading from the capital to the countryside. In the Ming Dynasty, especially among scholars, everyone must undergo the ceremony, after which elders would grant a courtesy name to declare adulthood.

Zhu Ping'an didn't understand why there was such banging outside. He got out of bed, dressed, and scooped a ladle of clean water from the bucket to pour into the basin, preparing to wash up. Just as his hand touched the water, he heard the sound of knocking at the door mixed with the noisy banging.

Who would be so inconsiderate to cause such a disturbance so early in the morning and disrupt people's dreams?

Zhu Ping'an flicked the water off his hand, walked to the door, and opened it. He saw the innkeeper smiling amiably at him, with two attendants behind him. One held a red paper, and the other a small copper gong, both smiling widely.

"These two are the attendants. This is Zhu Ping'an, the young master," the innkeeper nodded and introduced him to the attendants. Then, with his hands cupped in salute, he smiled and congratulated Zhu Ping'an, "Congratulations, young master, congratulations!"

After passing three levels of rigorous exams, a student who passes becomes a scholar. Becoming a scholar is not easy, so after passing the exams, a special person—called a "reporting official"—is sent to deliver the good news.

Zhu Ping'an looked at the attendants with surprise. He knew the news was coming, but weren't these people supposed to report the news to his home? Why were they at the inn?

"Young master, do not be surprised. The reporting official left for your house from Yingtian yesterday. We brothers are just here as a formality to congratulate you on passing the Anqing case. You, young master, are a promising talent with an unlimited future ahead," one of the attendants holding the red paper said eloquently, cupping his hands.

"Thank you both for your kind words, and thank you for making this trip. This small token is my humble gesture. Please, have a cup of tea to refresh yourselves," Zhu Ping'an replied with a sincere smile, then took two small pieces of silver from his sleeve and discreetly placed them in the attendants' hands.

The two attendants politely declined a few times before accepting, and as they felt the silver in their hands, their smiles grew even brighter. This young master was indeed generous, as evidenced by his offering.

"Then we shall not stand on ceremony. Oh, I almost forgot the formalities! Young master, at noon today, you need to go to the Jiangnan Examination Hall to write your personal statement, which includes your age, place of origin, and three generations of ancestry. You will also need to note your appearance—whether you are fat or thin, broad or narrow, and if you have a beard. This is a customary procedure every year. After you finish the statement, the examiner will review and seal it, and then it must be submitted to the school official. Of course, young master, you only need to finish writing the statement," the attendant holding the red paper said as he tucked the silver into his sleeve and tapped his head, continuing to explain.

"As you are already a scholar, you may wish to wear scholar's robes when heading to the Jiangnan Examination Hall this afternoon. This way, no one will question your status," the other attendant, who held the small copper gong, added, being more attentive.

"Thank you for the reminder," Zhu Ping'an said with a polite bow.

The scholar's robes mentioned by the attendant were not simple clothing. The fabric, style, size, color, and workmanship were all strictly regulated by official standards: "The scholar's robe is made of jade-colored silk, with wide sleeves, black edges, and soft black ties hanging from the waist. The attire for the successful candidates remains unchanged."

Actually, according to the regulations, scholars could only wear the scholar's attire after passing the imperial examination and receiving the status of a "monitor," a position granted to successful candidates. Wearing the

scholar's attire without having this status would result in punishment. However, since the passing of Emperor Hongwu, this regulation has become less strictly enforced.

Although the long robe made for him by his mother, Madam Chen, was something scholars would wear, it was not the standard scholar's attire. Therefore, after seeing off the shopkeeper and the two attendants who brought him good news, Zhu Ping'an decided to go downstairs and look for a ready-made clothing store to buy a set of scholar's attire, as he didn't want to leave a bad impression on his first day as a scholar.

Previously, Zhu Ping'an had always focused on restaurants, but he had never paid attention to ready-made clothing stores.

Zhu Ping'an left the inn and casually chose a direction to find a clothing store. The street was lined with many shops, but ready-made clothing stores were quite rare.

After walking quite a distance, he found a fabric store with poor business, almost empty with no customers.

Zhu Ping'an entered, and the shop assistant, lacking energy, greeted him, "Young master, what do you need? Our store has all kinds of fabrics, silks, and satin."

"I'd like to buy a set of ready-made clothes," Zhu Ping'an replied.

"Ready-made clothes, we have those as well," the shop assistant led him deeper into the store. "Please have a look, and let me know if any of these are to your liking."

"I'd like to buy a set of scholar's attire," Zhu Ping'an said, glancing at the clothes the shop assistant had recommended, but shaking his head slightly. None of them were scholar's attire.

Upon hearing this, the shop assistant's enthusiasm waned, and he waved his hand. "We've never made scholar's attire. To be honest, I doubt you'll find any around here. If you really need it, you might want to go across the Qinhuai River. Scholars often visit there, so perhaps you'll find the scholar's attire you need."

Zhu Ping'an left this store and tried another, receiving the same response.

Well, it seemed like he would have to make a trip across the Qinhuai River.

Zhu Ping'an gave a wry smile and began walking towards the Qinhuai River. There was only one bridge connecting this area to the other side of the river, the one with the inscription "A gentleman does not cross the bridge, crossing the bridge means you're no gentleman." This was Zhu Ping'an's first time crossing this bridge.

After crossing the bridge, Zhu Ping'an saw its name on the other side: "Wende Bridge." In Zhu Ping'an's opinion, this bridge would have been better named "Gentleman's Bridge" because to the north was the Confucius Temple, which honored teachers and the importance of education, while to the south was the entertainment district, full of brothels and pleasure houses. The direction one chose to go, north or south, to some extent reflected whether one was a gentleman or not.

As soon as Zhu Ping'an crossed the bridge, he heard a tinkling laugh.

"Hee hee hee. I thought you, a half-grown scholar, would be so high-minded, yet here you are sneaking across the bridge. I caught you, didn't I?"

Zhu Ping'an looked up and saw a girl of about fifteen or sixteen years old, her hair tied in a "falling horse" style, smiling mischievously at him.

The girl was quite beautiful, with large eyes and a pleasing face.

"What's wrong, don't you recognize me?" she teased. "I was actually thinking of inviting you to my room to play."

Zhu Ping'an felt a bit speechless and slightly cupped his hands. "Thank you for your kindness, miss. May I ask if there is a ready-made clothing store nearby?"

Hearing this, the girl covered her lips and blinked her big eyes, her teasing growing stronger. "A ready-made clothing store? Hee hee, you've crossed the bridge, so why be shy now? This is the worst excuse I've ever heard. Were you crossing the bridge to find me? Don't be shy, if you admit it, I'll gladly keep you company. We can play however you like."

Zhu Ping'an didn't want to engage with her further and cupped his hands again. "In that case, I won't disturb you."

With that, he bypassed the mischievous girl and continued on his way to find a ready-made clothing store.

"Hey, where are you going? Don't you have other admirers here?" the girl said, stomping her foot and chasing after him.

Other admirers? As if I'm thinking about you like that!

Zhu Ping'an ignored her and continued walking. Not far ahead, he spotted a ready-made clothing store. It was quite impressive, with many scholars in scholarly attire entering and exiting, far superior to the fabric stores he had just visited.

"Young master, are you buying fabric to give to this young lady?" the shop assistant looked at Zhu Ping'an and then at the girl chasing behind him. He assumed that the scholar was buying some floral fabric to please the girl, and so he asked enthusiastically.

Hearing this, the girl smiled smugly, thinking that this half-grown scholar was rather naive, thinking of buying fabric to flatter her.

Zhu Ping'an shook his head lightly and said calmly, "No, that's not it. This young lady and I are not related, so why would I buy cloth for her? I heard you have scholar robes here, so I specifically came to buy a set."

Upon hearing this, the young lady's face darkened, her teeth clenched, and she muttered something under her breath, likely cursing Zhu Ping'an, probably calling him something like a fool or a blockhead who didn't understand romance.

"Oh, I was mistaken. Please, come in, sir," the shop assistant apologized and gestured for Zhu Ping'an to enter the store.

Inside the shop, there were indeed many scholar robes, likely because scholars frequently visited this ready-made clothing store when heading to the golden halls of the elite.

"Hey, are you crazy? You can't wear this unless you're a scholar. If you wear it carelessly, the authorities will punish you," the young lady followed him inside, seeing that Zhu Ping'an was actually intending to buy a scholar's robe. She forgot her anger and hurriedly warned him.

"Thank you for the reminder, but I was fortunate enough to pass the academy exam this time," Zhu Ping'an replied nonchalantly without even turning his head, continuing to browse the clothes.

"Enough, stop daydreaming. How old are you?" the young lady, not believing him, sneered again.

Whether she believed it or not, it was none of his business. Zhu Ping'an didn't say much more.

Those who passed the scholar exam were mostly adults, and the shop never expected someone like Zhu Ping'an to be a scholar at such a young age. Therefore, the ready-made clothes in the shop were all much too large for him.

This was quite a problem.

"If you ask me, I'll tailor it for you," the young lady saw this and approached Zhu Ping'an, blinking as she spoke.

Right, she could tailor it, the young lady's words were a wake-up call to the daydreaming man.

"Thank you for the reminder, miss. Shopkeeper, please wrap up the smallest one," Zhu Ping'an thanked the young lady and then instructed the shop assistant to pack up the clothes.

After paying, Zhu Ping'an left with the clothes and walked straight toward the other side of Qinhuai River, where there were also fabric shops. Surely, they could tailor the robe, and if necessary, he could pay a little extra.

"Hey, do you look down on people like us?" The young lady, seeing that Zhu Ping'an didn't even glance at her and simply walked over the bridge, clenched her teeth. Her face turned pale, and after a moment, she called out to his retreating figure, her voice tinged with resentment.

Look down on her? How could he? If anyone was to be looked down upon, it would be those scholars who read sacred texts but lingered on pleasures and couldn't tear themselves away.

"No, it's just that our paths are different," Zhu Ping'an stopped, turned around, and cupped his hands toward the young lady. "Thank you for your reminder earlier."

With that, Zhu Ping'an turned and left.