

Rise 170

Chapter 170: A Great Opportunity

After the private money incident, Mother Chen, and Father seemed to be even more affectionate with each other. Even during dinner, it was rare for Chen to serve Father several times.

The days at home were warm and peaceful. Every morning, Zhu Ping'an would practice calligraphy, which had never been interrupted. After practicing, he would go to a nearby place to read for a while, then return to enjoy the loving breakfast prepared by his mother. After breakfast, Zhu Ping'an would read, review, and copy books, and the day would pass quietly yet fulfilling.

In this way, three days passed. Zhu Ping'an had finished copying all the books he borrowed from Master Li's family. After breakfast, Zhu Ping'an was about to return the books to Master Li's house when the doorbell rang.

Zhu Ping'an slung his bag over my shoulder and went to open the door. The moment Zhu Ping'an opened it, he could hardly believe his eyes.

"Master, you've returned."

After the initial surprise, Zhu Ping'an immediately bowed deeply, saying, "Master, when did you arrive home? I, Ping'an, am unworthy and failed to welcome you."

Standing outside the door was indeed my master, Old Master Sun. His face was glowing, his spirit vigorous, and he held a cloth bag, smiling as he stroked his beard. He looked as though he had become a dozen years younger.

"No need for that, no need. I'm used to coming and going quickly," Old Master Sun said, waving his hand, as he gently assisted me with my bow.

"Master, please come in." Zhu Ping'an insisted on bowing until he stood up with a hearty smile and opened the door wide.

Old Master Sun, holding his cloth bag, entered the house.

At this time, Father had already gone out with the ox cart for a while, and his older brother had gone into the mountains. Only Chen, was at home.

"Your Master has arrived! Please sit down. Zhi'er, please entertain our guest properly."

Chen, brewed a pot of hot tea and brought it to the living room, then returned to her room, leaving the living room for Zhu Ping'an and Old Master Sun.

"You're too kind," Old Master Sun politely replied.

"I'm quite pleased with your performance in this scholar's exam," said Old Master Sun, stroking his beard with a pleased expression. He was very satisfied with my performance in the recent exam.

"It's all thanks to your excellent guidance, Master. I was just fortunate to be in the right place at the right time," Zhu Ping'an replied with a humble grin.

"To win first place in the exam and remain modest and calm—that pleases me greatly. However, your performance in this scholar's exam truly deserves praise from me," Old Master Sun said, pleased that Zhu Ping'an had remained humble and calm after achieving success. He was especially satisfied with his student whom he had discovered.

Zhu Ping'an could only smile awkwardly.

"I've come today to tell you some great news," Old Master Sun said with a smile, stroking his beard.

Great news?

What could this good news be? Could it be something like in novels, where they see my youthful achievements and want to introduce me to a marriage candidate? But Old Master Sun's granddaughter and great-granddaughter are already married, and his great-great-granddaughter is probably just learning to walk, which would make it inappropriate.

For a moment, Zhu Ping'an wasn't sure what the good news Old Master Sun was referring to might be.

Master Sun looked at his proud disciple, who appeared confused, and felt greatly relieved. "This year coincides with the Emperor's 30th anniversary of his ascension to the throne, and there have been reports from the officials about the appearance of a qilin in the northwest, touring the mountains. The Emperor is delighted, and his mood is joyful. A special decree for an extra exam."

An extra exam?

The Emperor is going to hold an extra exam! The county exams are usually held once every three years, and the last one was held just last year. I had thought I would have to wait two more years to participate in the county exam, but now it seems the Emperor is holding an extra one. Does that mean I can take the county exam this year?

By the way, when is the extra exam? It wouldn't be in winter, would it? The county exam is not like the student exam, where you only stay in the examination hall for a short time; it lasts for several days. Just thinking about being stuck in the cramped exam rooms of the Jiangnan Imperial Examination Hall during winter for days without leaving is a bit terrifying.

Seeing Zhu Ping'an's reaction, Old Master Sun thought he would be overjoyed.

"Don't get too excited; you are still young. For this extra exam, just do your best," Old Master Sun said, picking up his teacup, lightly blowing on it, and taking a slow sip as he advised his disciple.

"Ah, thank you for the reminder, Master," Zhu Ping'an respectfully thanked.

"Yes, you are still young, but you are the one I trust the most," Old Master Sun nodded with satisfaction.

After a while, Old Master Sun put down his teacup and pushed a cloth bag on the table toward Zhu Ping'an.

What's this?

Zhu Ping'an was somewhat confused.

"Although you are young, you are the top candidate in the student exams this time, and I am quite pleased. Now, with the extra exam coming up, barring any unforeseen circumstances, you will definitely be able to take part. Therefore, I have decided to give you the ceremony of adding a crown ahead of time, as is customary. This bag contains the robe your teacher's wife has prepared for you. Tomorrow, wear it to my house, and I will perform the crowning ceremony for you."

Old Master Sun explained the main purpose of his visit after pushing the cloth bag toward Zhu Ping'an.

The crowning ceremony? So soon? Isn't that something for adults?

The crowning ceremony is a traditional ceremony of adulthood for Han Chinese males, marking their coming of age. During the Yuan Dynasty, the ceremony was nearly abolished, but the Ming Dynasty quickly restored the broken ceremonial system. The Ming Emperor Hongwu decreed the reinstatement of the crowning ceremony in the first year of his reign. This ceremony applied to everyone, from the emperor to the common people, and became widespread during the Ming Dynasty.

Of course, the crowning ceremony was mainly valued by the upper class, and people in the rural areas paid less attention to it. However, for scholars, the crowning ceremony was very important, and it was usually performed by elders or teachers. There weren't many who received this ceremony in Xiahe Village, and it wasn't highly valued, which is why Old Master Sun took it upon himself to perform the crowning ceremony for Zhu Ping'an.

"Thank you, Master, and thank you to your wife," Zhu Ping'an replied, taking the cloth bag, standing up, and bowing deeply.

After Old Master Sun finished speaking, he stayed a while longer, discussing the key points of the Four Books and Five Classics with Zhu Ping'an, before leaving. Zhu Ping'an saw Old Master Sun to the village entrance before returning home.

"Quickly tell me, what's this extra exam?"

As soon as Zhu Ping'an entered the house, his mother, Chen, grabbed him, curious and excited.

Eavesdropping is not good, Mother.

"Usually, the county exams are held every three years. The extra exam, how should I explain it... it's when the court has a great event, and the Emperor issues a special decree for an extra exam. It's like an additional round of exams, so I can take the county exam this year," Zhu Ping'an explained to his mother, Chen.

"What's the county exam?" Madam Chen's curiosity grew.

"The county exam is an exam that only scholars can take, and those who pass become 'juren' (graduates)."

"Are 'juren' high-ranking officials?" Chen was even more excited.

Zhu Ping'an had to explain further, but after hearing the explanation, Chen immediately started asking about the benefits of becoming a 'juren' and so on.

When she heard about the privileges that come with being a 'juren,' especially how close they are to becoming government officials, Chen's eyes lit up, and she eagerly urged Zhu Ping'an to study.

"Go study! Study well..."

Without waiting for an answer, Chen pushed Zhu Ping'an into his room to study. Zhu Ping'an could only smile wryly, thinking he had intended to return a book to the Li family, but now he would have to do it later in the afternoon.