

Rise 187

Chapter 187: Congratulations, You Can Pass the Imperial Examination

Inside the inn, Zhu Ping'an bent over his writing, unknowingly immersing himself in it, forgetting both himself and his surroundings. His brush moved swiftly, forming a magnificent essay.

Fully engrossed, his mind was calm—it felt wonderful.

By the time Zhu Ping'an finished writing a piece of eight-legged essay, it was already noon. Feeling a bit hungry, he put away his brush, ink, paper, and inkstone, washed his hands, and headed downstairs.

Reaching the first floor, Zhu Ping'an habitually greeted the innkeeper and politely asked the waiter to prepare his usual meal—one meat dish, one vegetable dish, two steamed buns, and a bowl of soup. Then, he took a seat at an empty table near the entrance. However, for some reason, he felt that the scholars in the hall were looking at him strangely, as if they were subtly trying to distance themselves from him.

The inn's service was quick. Not long after Zhu Ping'an sat down, the food he ordered was brought over.

He had only taken two bites when a familiar, pig-slaughtering-like scream came from the entrance. Looking up, he saw the familiar figure of the fat man, charging toward the inn while wailing.

"Help! Stop them! Stop them...!" The fat man, running in panic, shouted desperately.

Behind him, three fierce dogs were barking madly as they chased him.

Zhu Ping'an was speechless. How did this guy provoke dogs again? Just like last time when he went to Xiahe Village.

The panicked fat man suddenly spotted Zhu Ping'an sitting inside the inn, as if he had found his savior. His mouth opened wide, and tears nearly streamed down his face. "Brother Zhu! Why are you still sitting there? Hurry up...!"

The fat man dashed into the inn hall in a sorry state, screaming as he ran toward Zhu Ping'an. But in his haste, he slipped and fell.

The three dogs, initially a short distance away, closed in instantly, barking fiercely, about to have a beautiful encounter with the fat man's plump flesh.

The fat man watched the three vicious dogs charging toward him, his eyes nearly popping out of fear. Only one thought filled his mind: I'm done for.

At this critical moment, a chicken drumstick flew over his head in a graceful arc and smacked right onto one of the dogs' faces.

In an instant, the three dogs abandoned the fat man and started a fierce battle over the drumstick, completely forgetting about him.

The fat man turned his head and saw Zhu Ping'an making the throwing motion. Instantly, he was deeply moved—Brother Zhu was reliable as always.

"Don't forget to compensate me for a drumstick," Zhu Ping'an said calmly.

"Not just one, I'll get you a hundred if you want! Brother Zhu, your trick really works!" The fat man got up from the ground, clapped his hands, and, under the watchful eyes of everyone, straightened his clothes and walked over to sit at Zhu Ping'an's table, looking as dignified as ever, as if he hadn't just fallen miserably.

"Boss, bring four dishes and a soup! Your best ones!" The fat man called out as soon as he sat down.

"How did you manage to provoke dogs again?" Zhu Ping'an glanced at him and asked indifferently.

"You know I've been afraid of dogs since I was a kid. Last time at your house, I got chased by one. But come on, I'm the great Fat Lord! I can't be defeated by such a minor issue! So, I sought wisdom from various sources and finally learned a trick to deal with vicious dogs. These dogs, you see, bully the weak and fear the strong. If you just walk past them, they bark and try to bite you. The more afraid you are, the more aggressive they get. But if you bend down and pretend to pick up a stone, they'll run away for sure! So, I wanted to test it out..."

The fat man spoke eloquently, making his trivial dog-repelling strategy sound like a grand mission to save the universe.

The method was actually decent, but why couldn't he test it on just one dog? Why did he have to provoke three at once? No wonder he got chased for three whole streets!

Zhu Ping'an was utterly speechless at the fat man's thoughtless and reckless actions.

Once the food arrived, the fat man invited Zhu Ping'an to eat with him while grumbling about his misfortune.

"You don't know, huh? Before I went home, my godmother said my parents must have missed me. But when I got back, I realized I was wrong. My father didn't miss me—he missed scolding me! At home, he tells me to get out. When I'm outside, he tells me to get back home. If I don't study, he scolds me for poor grades. If I study, he says I'm wasting money. If I eat, he scolds me for being greedy. If I don't eat, he scolds me for being picky. If I stay silent, he scolds me for being so dull that I can't even fart out a warm breeze. If I talk, he scolds me for talking nonsense...What does he want from me?! I'm starting to doubt if I'm even his biological son..."

After sitting down, the chubby man didn't stop complaining.

To this, Zhu Ping'an could only chuckle.

During this lunch, Zhu Ping'an ate a lot, but the chubby man ate very little, seemingly preoccupied with something.

"What's wrong? If you have something on your mind, say it out loud and feel better." Zhu Ping'an drank the last mouthful of porridge and smiled as he asked.

"Brother Zhu, you really are..." The chubby man shook his round face, laughing so much that he started choking.

In modern times, Zhu Ping'an's words wouldn't be anything special—everyone has heard them before. But in ancient times, it was a first, and the effect was remarkable.

However, after laughing, the chubby man still hesitated to speak.

Zhu Ping'an glanced at him, thought for a moment, and asked, "Brother Xue, are you worried about the upcoming imperial exam?"

Hearing this, the chubby man looked up at Zhu Ping'an in shock. He was astonished, unsure of how Zhu Ping'an had guessed.

"Obviously. You can joke about your father scolding you, so the only thing that could trouble you right now must be the exam." Zhu Ping'an curled his lips.

"Hahaha, Brother Zhu, you truly deserve to be the top scholar—so meticulous in thought. Sigh... When I left your house, I was still full of confidence. But after getting home and getting scolded by my old man, I realized that the imperial exam is even harder than the academy exam. The academy exam is just a contest for scholars, and there are still dozens of slots available. But the imperial exam? That's a battle among scholars, with even fewer spots available! I haven't even passed the academy exam yet..."

The chubby man looked miserable, his once proud and lively round face now clouded with worry.

"It wouldn't have been so bad originally. My father went through hell and high water, pulling every possible connection, and finally managed to get in touch with the relatives of the provincial education officer. But then... the education officer was transferred to Sichuan! Now, Master Zhao from the capital has taken over the position. All our previous efforts have gone to waste..."

The chubby man's round face was so troubled it looked like a wrinkled chrysanthemum.

"Master Zhao?" Zhu Ping'an paused, recalling the unreasonable fat man he had encountered on the road that morning. It seemed like he was from Master Zhao's household.

"Yes! Zhao Wenhua, Master Zhao. You didn't know the education officer was replaced?" The chubby man rolled his small eyes.

Zhao Wenhua?!

Upon hearing this, Zhu Ping'an suddenly laughed. He patted the chubby man's shoulder with great confidence and said, "Congratulations, you're going to pass the exam."

After speaking, Zhu Ping'an shook his head with a smile and walked upstairs, murmuring to himself, "Zhao Wenhua, hehe..."

"Hey, hey, what do you mean by that?"

The chubby man scratched his head, hurriedly following Zhu Ping'an upstairs.