

Rise 203

Chapter 203: Uh, I was caught as a son-in-law

Since the beginning of the "Nine-Nine Winter," the northern wind has been bitterly cold, and the chill is piercing—this is another exceptionally cold winter.

The Qinhuai River is frozen, and the biting cold wind howls from north to south. Fallen leaves rustle down with the wind, while a crow perches on a branch, shrinking its head and shivering. It looks across the Qinhuai River at the bustling humans with confusion. Even with its thick feathers, it still feels the cold—so how can these hairless creatures still be so lively?

"Not bad luck at all. Even though you ranked at the bottom, at least you made it, right? When you get back, be sure to light a few more incense sticks for your ancestors of the Zhu family."

Guo Ziyu approached with a mocking tone, his face full of sarcasm. Even his gaze toward Zhu Ping'an was condescending.

"What, you're not going to pay respects to your ancestors when you go back? Forgetting your roots is unacceptable."

Zhu Ping'an remained calm, but the plump man beside him couldn't hold back. He had long found these arrogant snobs insufferable. They acted like they were so noble, looking at others as if they were beggars!

"And you are...? Oh, I remember now. Your poem about chrysanthemums was quite something."

Guo Ziyu glanced up and down at the plump man before sneering and bringing up his most humiliating moment from the academy exams.

The moment the "chrysanthemum poem" was mentioned, the plump man's round face turned completely red, leaving him with no room to fight back.

"Your luck this time is truly enviable," Guo Ziyu continued after dealing with the plump man. He stood beside Zhu Ping'an, his eyes filled with arrogance.

Finally, the moment he had been waiting for had arrived. During the academy exams, this foolish boy had overshadowed him, leaving him depressed for a long time. He could never understand how someone as well-read as himself could lose to such a simple-minded youth. He had been certain of securing the top spot, yet it had been snatched away by this boy. But now, at last, things were back on the right track—he could finally hold his head high!

The only unfortunate thing was that this boy's luck had been ridiculously good—so good that he had somehow secured the very last slot.

Guo Ziyu looked at Zhu Ping'an, still feeling a sense of frustration.

"Indeed, I think so too," Zhu Ping'an replied with a slight smile, cupping his hands lightly in acknowledgment.

Guo Ziyu was stunned at Zhu Ping'an's calm and composed smile.

It felt like punching a cotton pillow—his words had no impact. Seeing Zhu Ping'an's indifferent smile, Guo Ziyu inexplicably felt a bitter taste in his mouth and extreme frustration. Shouldn't he be arguing back, claiming how well he had answered? Then, Guo Ziyu could bring out his own article, which had ranked 79th, and slap this 135th-ranked boy in the face! But why was he just smiling so nonchalantly? Where was his shame?! How was he supposed to continue this?!

"Zhu brother's luck is indeed enviable, but I must say, Guo brother and Liu brother's abilities are what truly make me jealous—ranking 63rd and 79th, a true talent worthy of the title of 'recommended scholar'!"

Even in the dead of winter, Feng Shanshui elegantly waved his folding fan, offering his compliments with scholarly grace.

Feng Shanshui's words instantly brightened Guo Ziyu's expression. Looking at Zhu Ping'an, a sense of superiority in both ranking and ability filled his chest.

At that moment, an abrupt and inappropriate interruption shattered the atmosphere.

"Excuse me, which one of you is Master Zhu Ping'an?"

Everyone turned their heads toward the source of the voice. A man with a goatee, dressed in luxurious attire, stood before them, accompanied by more than ten uniformed attendants. His tone was somewhat arrogant as he inquired.

"I am Zhu Ping'an. May I ask what business you have with me?" Zhu Ping'an cupped his hands in greeting, puzzled.

The goateed man stepped forward, scrutinized Zhu Ping'an from head to toe, and—though his attitude became slightly more respectful—he still carried an air of arrogance. He raised his fist slightly in a half-hearted salute, his eyes nearly rolling to the sky as he spoke in a condescending tone:

"I am the steward of Lord Zhao Wenhua, the Minister of the Directorate of Government Affairs, concurrently serving as the Right Vice Minister of the Ministry of Works, and currently also the Acting Imperial Education Officer for Southern Zhili."

The moment he said this, a gasp swept through the crowd.

Just a moment ago, they had thought that the presence of a mere fifth-rank official was impressive—but now, this man represented a third-rank official! Not just any third-rank official, but the Imperial Education Officer, who had direct jurisdiction over all the scholars present—someone who controlled their futures!

The Directorate of Government Affairs, also known as the Silver Terrace, was led by the Minister, a third-rank official. Under him were Left and Right Vice Ministers and several other officials assisting in governance. Their responsibilities included transmitting imperial decrees, communicating reports from various regions,

reviewing official documents, submitting petitions and grievances from officials and commoners, and presenting confidential matters directly to the Emperor. This was an official who worked closely with the Emperor!

What was going on here?

Everyone held their breath, staring at the goateed steward and Zhu Ping'an, their anticipation palpable.

Zhu Ping'an glanced at the steward standing before him, feeling slightly uneasy. Was he destined to clash with Zhao Wenhua, that notoriously wretched figure in history?

First, he had nearly been hit by Zhao Wenhua's carriage upon arriving in Ying Tian. Then, during the imperial examination, he had been deliberately made things difficult by Zhao Wenhua. And now, another encounter with his steward...

However, it was unexpected that Zhao Wenhua had already become the Tongzheng Minister of the Tongzheng Department and concurrently the Right Vice Minister of Works at this time. In modern terms, this would be equivalent to a deputy ministerial-level official.

Amidst the crowd's gaze, the goatee-bearded steward looked down at Zhu Ping'an and continued, "My master has read your provincial exam essay and greatly admires you. Coincidentally, my master's third daughter is of marriageable age, and he is willing to betroth her to you as your wife. What do you think?"

After the steward finished speaking, he gave a look, and the dozen or so servants behind him immediately spread out, surrounding Zhu Ping'an.

This is...

This is a high-ranking official personally coming to capture a son-in-law?!

This action completely blinded the onlookers. My god, what am I witnessing? A third-rank official seeking a son-in-law at the provincial exam! Isn't this level of official usually found recruiting sons-in-law after the palace examination for the top scholars? Why are you interfering in the provincial exam?!

It was already unprecedented for a third-rank official to seek a son-in-law at the provincial exam, but what was even more unbelievable was that the chosen groom was the last name on the list of successful candidates!

The last place! Are you kidding me?!

How could it be a mistake? A third-rank official, someone who has served at the emperor's side for years like walking on thin ice, wouldn't make such an error!

But precisely because of that, it was even harder to understand!

On the side, Guo Ziyu and the other originally arrogant and self-assured candidates were now utterly dumbfounded, staring at the scene in disbelief, their eyes almost popping out of their sockets!

So strange... Why do my cheeks feel so hot?

In the distance, a young girl with a falling-horse bun silently lowered her head, her slender fingers clutching the hem of her sleeve, sorrow written all over her face.

"See? A young man like that is not someone we can ever dream of," another slightly older girl placed a comforting hand on her shoulder and sighed.

Everyone present was filled with extreme envy, jealousy, and hatred toward Zhu Ping'an. Even more than the previous top scorer... Wait, who was the top scorer again? At this moment, they only knew Zhu Ping'an and envied him a hundred times over.

This was a third-rank official! The highest-ranking officer of the Tongzheng Department! A close confidant of the emperor! And most importantly, he had close ties with the Grand Chancellor Yan Song!

Becoming his son-in-law meant that future official examinations and career paths would be smooth sailing. Moreover, it was well-known that Lord Zhao's third daughter was said to be stunningly beautiful...

The gazes fixated on Zhu Ping'an were so intense that they could have burned him even in the freezing cold.

Everyone wished they were the young man at the center of it all!

The young man moved!

Under the envious and jealous stares of the crowd, Zhu Ping'an looked at the goatee-bearded steward with a delighted expression and bowed deeply.

The steward smiled. Everything was under his master's control. No one would refuse such an offer.

At this moment, the crowd's envy and jealousy reached their peak.

After bowing deeply, Zhu Ping'an straightened up, the corners of his lips slightly curling as he cheerfully said:

"I come from a humble background. To marry into such a prestigious family would truly be an honor. However, how about you let me go home and discuss it with my wife first?"

The onlookers were stunned for a full ten seconds, then their expressions turned incredulous, followed by bursts of laughter.

But beneath the laughter, there was an overwhelming, roaring sense of "What the hell?!"

It was already shocking enough that a third-rank official was personally capturing a son-in-law at the provincial exam. It was even more unbelievable that the chosen candidate was the last place on the list. But the most mind-blowing thing was—That very last-ranked candidate, as if his head had been slammed by a door or sat on by a donkey—Actually refused!!!

He actually dared to refuse!!!