

Rise 23

Chapter 23: Attending a Class Without Permission

Walking up the slope for more than ten meters to the middle, the terrain becomes slightly flatter, with a bamboo grove in front. Behind the bamboo grove is the school of Shanghe Village.

Zhu Ping'an tied the cow to a tree, letting it leisurely graze on the tender grass, while he continued walking forward with his short legs.

A small path appeared in the bamboo forest, winding through it and leading to the entrance of the school. Zhu Ping'an followed the winding path, surrounded by the light fragrance of bamboo leaves and fresh grass. This gave a feeling of being immersed in nature, naturally calming his mood.

As the saying goes, "At eight years old, a child enters school, sits upright, and recites aloud." Just like in the poem, as soon as Zhu Ping'an emerged from the bamboo grove, he heard the sound of children reading aloud.

"Heaven and earth are mysterious and vast, the universe ancient and boundless, the sun and moon wax and wane, the stars are arranged in their constellations, the cold comes and the heat goes, autumn harvests and winter stores..."

This was a private school primarily made of wood with some brick and stone elements. The school exuded a traditional and ancient charm. Surrounding the school were half-height windows, with bamboo blinds rolled up to let the sunlight in, making the whole room bright. The bamboo blinds could be lowered when necessary. Inside the room, there were about twenty children reading aloud, their heads bobbing up and

down. They were all around seven or eight years old. Two children shared a table, with stools, and the tables were equipped with brushes, ink, paper, and inkstones.

On the eastern wall hung a portrait of Confucius. Below it was a large table, with a chair behind it. On the table, besides the brushes, ink, paper, and inkstones, there were also poetry books and textbooks, along with a pot of strong tea.

Sitting on the chair was an energetic old scholar in his fifties, who should be the Old Scholar Sun that Zhu Ping'an's aunt had mentioned.

Zhu Ping'an avoided the doorway and sat on the ground, listening for a while.

Old Scholar Sun was teaching from the "Thousand Character Classic," which is one of the most excellent ancient textbooks in China. The whole text is coherent, with a rhythmic and harmonious flow, making it pleasant to read aloud.

Old Scholar Sun's teaching style wasn't rigid, unlike the common stereotype of ancient education. He didn't just lead the children to recite the text over and over again; he also provided explanations, which was quite rare in ancient times.

"Heaven and earth are mysterious and vast—this phrase comes from the 'Book of Changes,' and its meaning is profound. 'Mysterious and vast' does not simply refer to colors; it describes the deep and unfathomable nature of heaven and earth. The ways of heaven are high and distant, while the ways of earth are deep and profound..."

Although Old Scholar Sun explained the text, he used ancient language and references to the 'Book of Changes,' which was truly incomprehensible for children just starting their education.

Look, some children had already fallen asleep on their desks.

Wait a minute.

Isn't that Brother Jun?

Zhu Ping'an noticed that some children in the school were asleep, and not just one. Coincidentally, they were sitting at the same desk, and one of them was his cousin, Zhu Pingjun.

Zhu Ping'an could see that Old Scholar Sun could also notice the situation.

Old Scholar Sun was a person who wouldn't tolerate any nonsense. He walked over to where Brother Jun and another child were sleeping, holding a ruler in his hand. He tapped the ruler on the desk, startling both children awake.

The other child was a little chubby. Like Brother Jun, he looked startled at the sight of the teacher and shrank back timidly.

"Extend your hands," Old Scholar Sun said with a stern expression.

The two of them timidly extended their hands.

Slap! Slap! Slap! "Pay attention and don't fall asleep again."

Old Scholar Sun lightly struck the palms of both children three times as a form of punishment.

"Who is Zhou Gong? I didn't meet him!" Zhu Pingjun scratched his head, confused like a monk who couldn't understand the scriptures, mumbling.

The surrounding children burst into laughter upon hearing this. These kids had arrived a few days earlier than Zhu Pingjun and had already been reprimanded by the teacher. Although they didn't understand the meaning of Zhou Gong, they knew it referred to sleeping, so they all laughed at Zhu Pingjun's confusion.

Old Scholar Sun heard the laughter but didn't get angry, blowing his beard and scolding the children. Instead, he helplessly stopped their laughter and began to explain.

"Zhou Gong refers to a wise man from the Western Zhou Dynasty. He assisted King Cheng in governing, making significant contributions to the Zhou Dynasty, and was revered as a sage in later generations. Confucius greatly admired Zhou Gong, so much so that he often dreamed of him. At some point in history, sleeping has also come to be referred to as meeting Zhou Gong. Do you understand? If you want to become wise, you must keep your books close and not waste your youth. Especially you two, if I catch you sleeping again, a good beating is inevitable."

After Old Scholar Sun finished speaking, he began teaching the children to recognize characters, as learning to read was their first step. Only by recognizing characters could they begin to write.

"Today, we'll learn eight characters: 'Heaven and earth are mysterious and vast, the universe ancient and boundless.' After class, I will check each of you individually, so remember not to slack off. We'll start with the first character, 'Heaven.' Heaven is the top of humanity..."

Having gotten used to simplified characters in modern times, although Zhu Ping'an had learned Classical Chinese and could recognize traditional characters, he still faced some difficulties when it came to writing. He would unconsciously write in simplified characters. This was something that would take time to correct, as he needed to develop the habit of writing in traditional characters.

Zhu Ping'an sat on the ground outside the school, using a small stick to draw and write in the dirt, then erasing it with his foot.

Old Scholar Sun also noticed Zhu Ping'an, but he thought he was just a mischievous child from some family playing on the hillside. Seeing Zhu Ping'an scribbling on the ground with a stick and then stepping on it, he assumed the boy was playing with ants and didn't pay him much attention.

Recognizing characters was simple. The real challenge would come later when they read and recited the Four Books and Five Classics and composed essays. Learning just eight characters a day was incredibly easy for Zhu Ping'an. After listening for a while and finding nothing new, he turned to go tend to the cow.

Speaking of which, he needed to make a simple brush. Hmm, and also bring back a black lacquer wooden board. He should practice brush calligraphy properly.

After passing through the bamboo forest, he arrived at the old yellow cow, who was leisurely swishing its tail while grazing, completely unaware that its tail had caught someone's attention.

The brush was an ancient wisdom, simple to make. The brush tip could be made from sheep wool, cow hair, or weasel hair; in fact, any long animal hair would do. As for the brush handle, bamboo would suffice. Making a quality brush required hundreds of steps, but a simpler version could be made by crafting the brush tip and handle and then securing the tip into the handle. He planned to keep it simple; making the brush tip involved soaking the hair in a basin of water and fitting it into the handle. He could take his time with that later; he didn't need it to be perfect, just sturdy and functional.

He wondered how that scheming little loli at the bottom of the slope was doing. She wouldn't really go and call her brother to come beat him up, would she? Generally, after being provoked, children wouldn't follow through with their threats.

The cow had been grazing for quite some time and should go drink some water. After all, there was a clear stream at the bottom of the slope. He could lead the old yellow cow to drink and let it munch on some salt-rich water plants, all while checking to see if that scheming little girl was still around.

By the way, in this era, people usually had only two meals a day, which was quite an adjustment for him. He felt hungry after noon, and if possible, it would be nice to catch one or two small fish by the river and grill them for a meal.

He untied the rope, leisurely leading the old yellow cow down the slope.