

Rise 245

Chapter 245: The Bookworm

The outside was filled with endless shouting and cursing. Yang Dacheng stood in the courtyard, holding a shovel, confronting the intruders. Inside the house, the mistress was anxiously holding her child, nervously glancing out, her face pale with fear.

The child in the mistress's arms struggled to break free, trying to grab a broom from inside the room to help his father, which caused the mistress to pull him back onto her lap, slap him, and then hold him tightly in her arms, fearing he would run outside and be bullied.

"Stay quietly inside, I'll go out and take a look." Zhu Ping'an put down his bowl and chopsticks, patted the mischievous child on the head in an attempt to comfort him, then stood up and walked towards the door. Out of compassion and reasoning, he felt he had to help this family.

"Young man, don't go out. Be careful they might involve you in this. These people have no sense of reason," the mistress said, seeing Zhu Ping'an about to leave, trying to stop him, not wanting him to get involved for no reason.

"It's alright. Even if they don't have reason, they still have to follow the law," Zhu Ping'an replied with a slight shake of his head and walked out of the house.

"Ah..." The mistress called after him, seeing Zhu Ping'an leaving. She thought he was just an innocent scholar, unaware of the dangers of the world, and worried about him.

The mischievous child in the mistress's arms stretched his neck to watch Zhu Ping'an leave, wanting to go with him, but was firmly held down by the mistress and couldn't move.

Zhu Ping'an stepped outside the door and saw Yang Dacheng confronting five lazy-looking officers in the yard. Behind them was a middle-aged man with a mustache, dressed in a satin long robe, looking rather sleazy. Despite the cold winter, he was holding a folding fan in his hand, seemingly trying to flaunt his status.

"Hey, who's this kid?" One of the officers asked, tilting his head and staring at Zhu Ping'an as he came out.

The other officers looked at Zhu Ping'an in a similarly lazy manner, gradually forming a slight encirclement.

"This is just a passing scholar, don't make things difficult for him," Yang Dacheng said, holding the shovel, addressing the officers, then turned to Zhu Ping'an and said, "Young man, you've eaten, so better be on your way."

Seeing how much Yang Dacheng cared about Zhu Ping'an and was trying to protect him, the officers began to distrust his words.

"Tsk, tsk, Yang the cripple is quite righteous, huh? Is this your relative? I've never seen him before. Oh, I remember now. Didn't your wife have a useless younger brother studying? Hahaha, I heard he studied for ten years, but still couldn't even pass the first county exam for the childhood scholar's test, hahahaha. This must be him, right?"

One of the officers seemed to recall something, laughing uncontrollably, and his gaze toward Zhu Ping'an turned filled with contempt.

Think about it, he studied for ten years and still couldn't pass the first round of the childhood scholar's test. Isn't that useless? The childhood scholar's test has three rounds. He couldn't even pass the county exam after ten years of study. Let alone the higher-level exams like the provincial and imperial exams. This person was clearly not cut out for studying! This type of scholar is truly useless, how could anyone not look down on him?

"Hahaha, I say, you might as well stop studying. You're clearly not cut out for it," another officer mocked, shaking his head.

"Well, it's not entirely hopeless. Do you see our Huang Zan here? Huang Zan is a scholar official, and a favorite of our county magistrate. If you become his disciple and have his guidance, you can still have a great future," the first officer said, trying to persuade Zhu Ping'an with a false sense of encouragement.

"Of course, our Huang Zan is very busy, and he doesn't help just anyone. But, if you become his relative, that's a different story. Hehe, if Huang Zan were your brother-in-law, it would only be natural for a brother-in-law to teach his younger brother," the officer continued, winking at Zhu Ping'an, giving off a vibe that made one want to punch his face.

"What nonsense are you talking about? This young man is just a passing scholar," Yang Dacheng said, his face turning blue with anger.

"Tsk, tsk, Yang the cripple is still as stubborn as ever," the officers mocked, clearly not believing Yang Dacheng, and firmly believing that Zhu Ping'an was his brother-in-law.

"What are you trying to do? How can you speak like this? This is a disgrace to culture!" Zhu Ping'an stood next to Yang Dacheng, pointing at the officers, his face flushed with anger, looking every bit the naïve scholar.

Zhu Ping'an's words, along with his scholarly appearance, made the officers laugh. This kid was clearly someone who had studied so much that he had become a fool. He was a useless waste of a scholar.

"Taking land from the people, then paying taxes to the ruler, that's the rule."

"Emperor Taizu once said, 'Those who serve the people must understand their role. The taxes and duties collected from the people are their part to provide for the ruler.'"

Huang Zandian, without minding the cold, opened his folding fan and waved it twice. Then, he opened his mouth and began speaking in a formal, classical bureaucratic tone, acting as if he were following proper procedure.

"Therefore, the corvée labor system was established by our founding emperor, and we are simply adhering to the regulations in the yellow book. Yang Dacheng, it's your turn to serve at the Great Wall. If you don't go, that would be a violation of national law, and the lightest punishment would be imprisonment, while the heaviest could be beheading."

Huang Zandian closed his folding fan, extended his right hand to stroke his mustache, and looked at Yang Dacheng, speaking with righteous indignation.

Seeing how skilled Huang Zandian was at quoting ancient texts, concocting fabricated charges, and then threatening with them so effortlessly, without even breaking a sweat or losing composure, Zhu Ping'an realized that this man had likely been doing this kind of thing for quite some time, and not just for one or two years.

Sometimes, a county official is less effective than a current administrator. In some cases, the negligence at the grassroots level is even worse! The harm is far greater!

Because their negligence and abuse of power directly affect the common people!

The corvée labor system must be reformed! The official system needs to be overhauled too!

Zhu Ping'an silently made a note of this in his mind as he observed the scene.

"Ridiculous, I only served for the river dredging corvée labor in the spring, and now in the winter, you want me to serve at the Great Wall? This is clearly abusing power for personal gain, this is too much! The spring service was your scheme to deliberately injure my leg! And now, you still want me to serve at the Great Wall? Is there no law at all!" Yang Dacheng glared angrily at Huang Zandian, nearly bursting with rage, wishing he

could rush up and tear Huang Zandian into pieces with his own hands. This scoundrel was only after his wife, wasn't he? If he gave in to this villain, he would no longer be a man!

"Law?" Huang Zandian stroked his mustache and let out a contemptuous laugh, "What I'm talking about is the law. Heh, your serving at the Great Wall as a corvée laborer is the law!"

What I'm talking about is the law!

The county office clerk is nothing to write home about, and Huang Zandian is even less than that, yet he dares to arrogantly claim "this is the law." It truly shows how remote the imperial authority is, how unchecked and oppressive the local power is!

"The founding emperor issued a policy for exemption from corvée labor for the elderly, sick, capable individuals, the noble, and the wise. These individuals, including those with disabilities, are exempted, and their status is recorded in the official records. Brother Yang, your leg injury qualifies you for exemption from corvée labor."

After hearing Huang Zandian finish, Zhu Ping'an curled his lips and spoke up.

As soon as Zhu Ping'an finished speaking, the courtyard fell silent for a few seconds. The several attendants exchanged glances, then burst into laughter.

"This kid really got too absorbed in his studies!"

"Yeah, he really thinks a few phrases can help him point out the problems in the world."

"Hahaha... what an idiot."

Huang Zandian, also dismissively stroking his mustache and laughing, snapped open his folding fan and waved it twice. Then, with a serious tone, he said, "The sick can be exempted, but which diseases are exempted and to what degree the sickness must be to qualify for exemption, all of that is decided by our household department. Now, the Tatars are invading the borders, and it is the time to use men for national service. Yang Dacheng, your leg injury is minor. You must prioritize the country's affairs and quickly head north to contribute to the repair of the Great Wall."

"Did you hear that? Our Huang Zandian is a scholar, a gentleman. He's not someone like you, a half-baked scholar, who can compare."

"Heh heh, exactly, this is like showing off a big sword in front of Guan Yu, truly laughable."

The attendants, after hearing Huang Zandian, openly mocked Zhu Ping'an without restraint.