

Rise 247

Chapter 247: I Want to Meet the County Magistrate

The thick white snow showed no sign of stopping, gently falling and covering the world in a blanket of white. Everything around them was draped in a pure white coat.

In the midst of the heavy snow, a group of people trudged forward through the storm. Leading the group was a horse-drawn carriage, followed by several individuals. Inside the carriage sat Huang Zandian and the rotating duty officers, while behind them were the yamen officers and the detained Yang Dacheng and Zhu Ping'an. At the very end of the procession were the lady and the children she was leading.

"I'm sorry, little brother. Once things are clarified, you'll be free to leave. It's just that my wife and children are the ones I pity," Yang Dacheng said, limping through the snow and speaking apologetically to Zhu Ping'an.

Yang Dacheng's hands were tied with ropes by the yamen officers, and he looked with some sorrow at his wife and children walking beside him. He sighed deeply.

Yang Dacheng and Zhu Ping'an had been taken away on the orders of Huang Zandian. Yang Dacheng's wife had insisted on following him, unwilling to leave him alone, and had come to the county yamen to help testify for her husband. As for the troublesome child, he had also insisted on coming along, and the lady had agreed, seeing it as an opportunity to care for him.

"Fortune and misfortune are often intertwined. Brother Yang, don't be too upset," Zhu Ping'an advised.

"Sigh." Yang Dacheng simply sighed.

Yang Dacheng appreciated Zhu Ping'an's words of comfort but didn't take them to heart. In his judgment, things didn't look good this time. Huang Zandian was ruthless and cruel. He regretted not being able to take him down with him. He felt sorry for his wife and children. If something were to happen to him, what would they do?

They trudged through the snow.

Yang Dacheng's village was not too far from the county, and after walking in the snow for about an hour, they finally arrived at the county.

"Tongcheng County"

The county's name, "Tongcheng County," was engraved on the city wall. Tongcheng County and Huaining County both belonged to the Anqing Prefecture, with Tongcheng located slightly to the north. Tongcheng had a long history and was known for its cultural achievements. Since the Ming Dynasty, the number of jinshi and scholars from this region had surpassed the combined total of jinshi and scholars from other counties in Anqing Prefecture, such as Huaining, Qianshan, Taihu, Susong, and Wangjiang.

Thus, people like Xia Luoming from Tongcheng would be so arrogant.

After entering the county, Zhu Ping'an and Yang Dacheng were immediately led by Huang Zandian and the officers toward the county yamen.

The county yamen was located on the northern side of the county, and as they approached, the aura around Huang Zandian and the officers became even more imposing, as though they were tigers returning to their own territory.

The county yamen was quite large, with a tall and impressive "Xuanhua" archway in front of it. The archway was very eye-catching, with the words "Tongcheng Ancient Governance" engraved on it, emphasizing the county's long history and good governance. "Xuanhua" meant to spread the teachings and educate the people. Traditionally, the Xuanhua archway functioned much like a government press conference. Every year, the magistrate would give a speech here at a fixed time, conveying the imperial will, educating the people, and generally talking about what had been accomplished that year, what the priorities for the next year were, what the emperor had said, and what instructions had come from higher authorities, telling the common people how they should behave, and so on.

There was another noticeable feature in front of the county yamen—a large drum, known as the "Drum of Grievance." If the people had any grievances, they could strike this drum to make their complaints known to the magistrate.

As they reached the front, Yang Dacheng suddenly gathered strength and, despite his hands being bound, tried to rush toward the Drum of Grievance to strike it and plead his case.

"Damn it, Yang, don't be asking for trouble," one of the officers grabbed Yang Dacheng's arm and angrily scolded him.

"I want to strike the drum and plead my case! I want the magistrate to uphold justice!" Yang Dacheng shouted loudly.

"You think the magistrate is someone you can just meet whenever you want? He's busy with official matters all day long—he doesn't have time for you. Take them straight to the prison," Huang Zandian said, stroking his mustache and instructing the officers.

"Understood," one officer responded, thinking for a moment before pulling out a dirty, torn cloth from his pocket and stuffing it into Yang Dacheng's mouth. Then they dragged him inside the yamen.

In ancient times, prisons were often located within the yamen, usually in the southwestern part, which is why the prison was also known as the "Southern Prison." The prison was guarded by officers.

"Dacheng..."

The lady was heartbroken. She wanted to follow them inside but was blocked by the officers.

"You can't go in there. Heh, if you want your husband and brother to be released sooner, go beg our Lord Huang. He'll surely help you."

The officer's words made the lady spit in disgust. She then led her children to the Drum of Grievance, picked up the mallet, and was about to strike it.

"Hey, hey, hey! Stay away from that! You can't touch it!"

A clerk on duty who had been watching the yamen gate saw her, quickly stepped forward, and rudely pushed her away, not allowing her to strike the Drum of Grievance.

The officers escorting Yang Dacheng burst into laughter. "Ha ha, just look at this country bumpkin, thinking they can just walk into the yamen."

"Alright, take them to the prison for now. When the magistrate has time, we'll report to him," Huang Zandian said dismissively, waving his hand and instructing the officers to take Yang Dacheng and Zhu Ping'an to the prison. He then turned to the lady and said, "Sister-in-law, if you need anything, just come find me. They all know where to find me. Just ask anyone. I know it's hard for you. If there's anything I can help with, I will."

"Go!"

The officers shoved Yang Dacheng toward the county office, while another officer tried to push Zhu Ping'an. However, Zhu Ping'an took the initiative to step forward and walked right up to the entrance of the county office.

"Well, well, this bookworm is quite obedient," one of the constables said, laughing when he saw Zhu Ping'an's action. The other officers also mocked him. They figured this bookworm probably had no idea how harsh the prison was. Once he got in there, he'd have something to cry about.

Under the gaze of the others, Zhu Ping'an reached the entrance and addressed the clerk on duty at the gate.

Upon hearing this, the crowd burst into laughter. This bookworm still hadn't understood what had just happened. The drum to declare his grievance wouldn't be beaten just because he said so, and claiming to want to meet the county magistrate? Clearly, reading too many books had turned his brain to mush.

Yang Dacheng looked at Zhu Ping'an helplessly. "I tried with my wife earlier, it won't work." The mistress, holding a child in her arms, watched from a distance. She was also skeptical of Zhu Ping'an's actions and even a little worried. This young man had studied too much; he had no idea how dark the world could be.

"You think the county magistrate will see you just because you ask? Just go quietly to your cell!" the clerk on duty said, laughing with the officers who were familiar with him.

"Sorry, Liu Tou, for the trouble," Huang Zandian said with a grin. "Once we lock these troublesome villagers up, I'll treat you to a drink as a gesture."

"Haha, you said it," the clerk laughed.

The atmosphere at the entrance was light and jovial, with just a few words labeling Zhu Ping'an and the others as troublesome villagers.

But then, someone broke the mood by repeating what had just been said.

"Are you an idiot? Didn't we just say, you think the county magistrate will see you just because you ask?" the clerk on duty glared at Zhu Ping'an.

Huang Zandian's face darkened. This idiot scholar must have read so many books his brain had turned to mush. How could he not understand the situation?

The officer assigned to Zhu Ping'an quickly stepped forward, ready to deal with him. He had a dirty sock prepared and planned to stuff it into Zhu Ping'an's mouth, followed by a few kicks to teach him what it meant when the county office opened to the south. This bookworm needed to be beaten, no doubt.

Zhu Ping'an repeated his words.

"You son of a..." the clerk on duty began to curse, but his words faltered halfway, like he had swallowed something nasty.

This was because Zhu Ping'an, holding a certificate sealed with official stamps and the grand seal of the county magistrate, stood right in front of the clerk, smiling at him.

"What's wrong with me?" Zhu Ping'an smiled warmly, his teeth white as snow.

The clerk's face contorted in surprise. The sudden change caught him completely off guard, and his face twitched as he forced a smile despite his anger.

"Are you an idiot?"

The shift was so quick that the officer assigned to Zhu Ping'an didn't even notice. Just as Zhu Ping'an finished speaking, the officer took the cue to curse, thinking this was a good moment to get close to Liu Tou. He thought, "Haha, I've done it."

With that, the officer stepped forward, holding the dirty sock, ready to shove it into Zhu Ping'an's mouth.

"You're the idiot," the clerk on duty suddenly darted toward the officer, cursing loudly, then slapped him across the face with a resounding crack.

What's going on?

The officer holding the dirty sock was stunned by the slap and the scolding. Huang Zandian and the other officers were just as stunned, but the most shocked were Yang Dacheng's family.