

Rise 259

Chapter 259: This boy is not simple

The setting sun sank in the west, and the entire capital city shimmered with golden brilliance. The streets were bustling with people, the crowd flowing like the sea, but no one seemed to notice the magnificent scene.

A lavishly decorated inn was now silent, and no one noticed the beautiful view either.

Inside the inn, a young boy dressed in simple clothes innocently looked at the shop assistant across from him, whose mouth twitched in shock, and who seemed utterly confused. The boy's dark eyes rolled like beads, and with a smirk, he softly asked:

"What's wrong? Is it not allowed? How about this: On Jingquan Mountain, the mountain spring is still; the sky touches the water, and the water touches the sky. Or, on Jingquan Mountain, the mountain spring is still; the mist locks the mountain, and the mountain locks the mist."

The shop assistant, utterly bewildered by what he heard, felt his eyes welling up with tears, almost about to cry!

It wasn't fair! Others would struggle for ages, unable to come up with a single couplet, and when they finally did, they'd be overjoyed for half a day. But this boy—this one boy—came up with three right away!

And not just that. He would change one word, and that's another couplet; change two words, another one; change three words, yet another. Before long, he had revised the couplets twice and now threw out two new ones! In the blink of an eye, he had created one after another, seven in total—all in the time it takes to drink a cup of water!

Even drinking water isn't that quick!

The shop assistant looked at Zhu Ping'an again, whose face was as innocent as ever. He felt as though he was staring at some kind of monster.

Zhu Ping'an, after speaking, turned his gaze back to the shop assistant, still with an innocent expression, his mouth slightly open.

It seemed like Zhu Ping'an was about to say something again, and the shop assistant hurriedly nodded, repeatedly agreeing, lest the boy casually throw out even more couplets. His little heart simply couldn't take it anymore.

The entire inn, where people had been focusing deeply, thinking hard, and struggling to no avail, now looked at the humble country boy before them, their eyes wide in shock, as if they had seen a ghost.

The entire inn was silent.

But soon, a voice broke the stillness.

“Um, so if I come up with two couplets, my food and lodging are free for the day, right?” Zhu Ping’an asked, after the shop assistant nodded. He paused for a moment and then asked again.

The shop assistant, eyes vacant, mechanically nodded.

And then, the shop assistant trembled all over, his eyes widened in shock as he looked at Zhu Ping’an.

You... what... what are you going to do?

The look in his eyes seemed like a little girl walking alone on a lonely path, suddenly cornered by a malicious strongman!

“So, free food and lodging means I can eat whatever I want, and it won’t cost me anything, right?”

The boy, dressed simply, broke into a joyful expression. His dark eyes instantly became as clear as a summer sky, full of warmth, honest and straightforward.

The shop assistant nodded again, still stunned, his hands shaking.

Then, all the people in the hall focused their attention on Zhu Ping'an once again.

After receiving the shop assistant's confirmation, Zhu Ping'an slightly curved his lips and turned his gaze to the couplet hanging from the railing on the third floor, moving from the first couplet to the second.

The crowd was even more shocked because when people in the inn were competing with couplets, they all picked the ones they thought were easier, not necessarily in order. If they did follow the order, the difficulty would increase. Perhaps the later ones would be easier than the earlier ones. Now, seeing Zhu Ping'an follow the order and look at the second couplet, they were even more astonished.

This boy can't possibly be faking it, can he?

Regardless of what the others thought, Zhu Ping'an's eyes were already on the second couplet. This one was much longer than the first one. It was so much longer that the difficulty increased significantly. The second couplet contained a total of 28 characters and went as follows:

On White Tower Street, the blacksmith. Red furnace, burning black coal, emitting blue smoke, flashing blue light, tempering purple iron, sitting north, facing south, forging things.

Judging by the content alone, this couplet seems to be one that the innkeeper copied from some blacksmith shop tucked away in a remote corner that he admires. The couplet includes seven colors—white, yellow, red, black, green, blue, and purple—each embedded in nouns and verbs. Following the couplet are the four cardinal directions—east, west, south, and north. The most crucial part is that this couplet weaves all these elements together under the theme of a blacksmith forging iron, which makes it quite a challenging couplet.

“Has anyone matched this couplet before?” After reading it, Zhu Ping’an pointed at the couplet and asked the inn attendant beside him.

“There... there’s one version,” the shop assistant said, his voice trembling.

“Oh? Then read it out, so I don’t accidentally repeat it. Don’t worry, I won’t change any characters this time,” Zhu Ping’an said with a faint smile.

“White Pagoda Street, Yellow Blacksmith, ignites Red Furnace, burns Black Charcoal, emits Green Smoke, flashes Blue Light, tempers Purple Iron, sitting North facing South forging East and West;

Ancient sages, later learners, read Zuo Zhuan, practice calligraphy of Right General, worship High Minister, sit in the main hall, command subordinates, ascend as generals and prime ministers, enfeoffed as dukes and marquises.”

The shop assistant, trembling, opened a thin booklet, turned to the second page, and read out the couplet. His tone no longer carried the former arrogance and disdain—only shock and unease remained.

“Lofty ambitions, admirable style,” Zhu Ping’an praised with a slight smile upon hearing it.

In the hall, a well-dressed youth nudged his friend named Wensheng beside him and said with a smile, "That guy just praised you for your lofty ambition and admirable style."

The youth named Wensheng looked at Zhu Ping'an and smiled indifferently. "I'm more curious to see what kind of matching line he'll come up with."

"You're that confident he can produce a matching line?" the well-dressed youth asked his friend Wensheng.

"Don't you believe he can?" Wensheng turned and replied with a rhetorical question.

"Hahaha, I believe it," the well-dressed youth said with a grin.

As the two finished speaking, Zhu Ping'an in the center of the hall had already begun softly reciting his matching couplet:

"White Pagoda Street, Yellow Blacksmith, ignites Red Furnace, burns Black Charcoal, emits Green Smoke,
flashes Blue Light, tempers Purple Iron, sitting North facing South forging East and West;

Zhoukoudian, Qin Scholar, recites Han prose, chants Tang poems, composes Song lyrics, sings Yuan songs, studies Ming history, through winter and summer reads the Spring and Autumn Annals.”

As soon as Zhu Ping’an finished speaking, a wave of applause erupted in the hall. Many people also slapped their foreheads in sudden realization, regretting that they hadn’t thought of it themselves.

This youth had creatively connected the well-known dynasties—Zhou, Qin, Han, Tang, Song, Yuan, and Ming—with literary forms such as Han prose, Tang poetry, Song lyrics, Yuan songs, and so on. Spring, summer, autumn, and winter represented the four seasons, while “reads the Spring and Autumn Annals” matched “forging East and West.” Most importantly, if the upper line evoked the imagery of blacksmithing, the lower line elevated it to the realm of “All trades are inferior, only study is supreme.” It was simply astonishing.

This young man was truly something special.

For the first time, everyone in the hall turned to look at Zhu Ping’an with eyes of genuine respect.