

Rise 260

Chapter 260: Astonishing Everyone

At first glance, the young man had slightly dark skin, and his clothes were so worn and washed out that they had turned whitish, with two holes in them. He looked just like a poor country boy.

But on closer inspection, one could spot the details that had been previously overlooked.

That youth, though simply dressed, remained calm and composed in the face of honor or disgrace; his face appeared honest and naive, but those dark eyes of his sparkled with intelligence; and especially the subtle curve at the corner of his mouth, always seeming to carry a smile even when faced with disdain or contempt.

This young man was definitely not simple.

“Like this, is it okay?” Zhu Ping’an looked at the shop assistant beside him, who stood dumbfounded, and asked softly with a slight curl of his lips.

The shop assistant swallowed hard and nodded repeatedly, his eyes somewhat dazed.

“Then that means I can eat and stay for free for a day?” Zhu Ping’an gave a sincere, bright smile.

The shop assistant nodded blankly.

“That’s really great, thank you so much. You folks in the capital are just so generous. First day in the capital, and you’re already showing me the hospitality of your people.”

“Well then, I won’t be shy. Bring out your signature dishes—the tasty ones—and make sure to pick the expensive ones. Let’s say five or six dishes.”

“Oh, and please, take my horse to the backyard. Be extra careful with the stuff on its back—that’s all I have in the world. If it’s possible, could you also move my belongings into the room you’ve set aside? Hmm, pick me a nice one—spacious and facing the sun.”

“Hehe, sorry for the trouble.”

After the shop assistant nodded, Zhu Ping’an curled his lips into a smile, revealing a few white teeth, and clasped his hands politely in a series of requests.

When he finished speaking, Zhu Ping’an looked for a table and sat down.

It was only then that the shop assistant finally understood what Zhu Ping’an had meant when he tied his horse to the flagpole and said, “I’ll have to untie it anyway.” So this is what he meant!

Looking again at the plainly dressed youth seated at the table, the shop assistant blushed deeply. He could feel his face burning.

Everyone in the main hall had already changed the way they looked at Zhu Ping'an after he matched the second line of the couplet. But when Zhu Ping'an, without a hint of restraint, ordered five or six expensive signature dishes and asked for a good room, their expressions changed once again.

Why did he seem so lacking in dignity?

As if he had never seen the world before.

What a pity.

The crowd began to look down on Zhu Ping'an again. They hadn't come to match couplets just for the free food and lodging. They came because of the couplets themselves and didn't take the free accommodations to heart. Even those who matched the couplets didn't act like Zhu Ping'an, picking the priciest dishes and best rooms. At most, they'd order a pot of fragrant tea—just to savor. As for food and lodging? Skip it. Don't degrade my sense of taste.

A gentleman's character is not swayed by profit!

Zhu Ping'an paid no attention to the crowd's gazes. Before the food even arrived, he picked up the teapot on the table and poured himself a cup of tea. He took a small sip to taste it.

Hmm? He's tasting the tea?

Maybe we misjudged him. After all, we had looked down on him just like that shop assistant did earlier. Maybe he only ordered the expensive dishes and room as a subtle way of punishing the shop assistant. Perhaps the food and room were not the real aim.

The crowd's opinion of Zhu Ping'an shifted subtly once more. Many of them started to move, thinking of going over to befriend him.

Just then, they heard a loud gulp.

Everyone was surprised to see that after taking a sip of tea, the young man tilted his head back and gulp—downed the whole cup like water. After finishing one cup, he poured another and—gulp—downed it again like a cow drinking.

Uh... so just now that wasn't tasting tea for flavor, it was to check if the tea was hot or not!!

Truly uncultured! What a pity, what a pity!

Everyone couldn't help but shake their heads and sigh. Those who had just started walking toward Zhu Ping'an to befriend him all stopped in their tracks.

"Hehehe, this young man is quite carefree," said the well-dressed young man, turning his head to the youth named Wensheng beside him, smiling as he spoke.

"He does resemble you a little," Wensheng replied with a faint smile.

While the people in the main hall whispered among themselves or gave sideways glances at Zhu Ping'an, the dishes he had ordered were already being served. The speed at which the dishes arrived really matched the inn's lavish decoration and high standards.

A plate of roast duck with a small bowl of sweet sauce and assorted vegetables, a portion of stir-fried beef tripe, a serving of stewed liver, a bowl of bird's nest soup, a plate of red-braised abalone, and even a portion of off-season stir-fried greens.

The most expensive dish here was perhaps the seemingly unremarkable stir-fried greens. In the Ming Dynasty, with improvements in vegetable cultivation techniques, the capital region had already begun using greenhouses to grow vegetables. According to historical records: "The best cucumbers come from Yanjing, grown in hot houses to force flower and leaf growth, and by early February, they already bear small fruits." However, the production cost of greenhouse-grown vegetables was extremely high, and the selling price exorbitant—only aristocrats and wealthy merchants could afford them. Ordinary people could hardly eat them in winter.

Zhu Ping'an hadn't eaten anything all day since morning. When he saw such a rich spread of food, full of color, aroma, and flavor, his eyes lit up.

So, as soon as the food was served, Zhu Ping'an picked up a pair of chopsticks and started eating heartily.

Such disgraceful table manners! In the main hall, people were still waiting for Zhu Ping'an to continue answering couplets. Although their impression of him wasn't great, they still acknowledged his skill. But seeing him start wolfing down food without a care, they thought—

So he could only handle those two couplets after all.

Watching Zhu Ping'an eat in such an uncultured way—clearing a whole plate in the blink of an eye—everyone shook their heads again.

He really has quite the appetite!

It wasn't long before everyone saw Zhu Ping'an nearly finish off all the dishes on the table. The young man didn't look particularly tall or fat, but his appetite was enormous!

After eating his fill, Zhu Ping'an drank a cup of tea, let out a satisfied burp, pulled a similarly worn and faded handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped his mouth.

"This food was really delicious. I really don't want to leave."

Then, everyone witnessed a scene they would never forget. The boy, now full and content, glanced up at the remaining couplets, pursed his lips, and casually matched all four in one breath:

"Lonely in the cold window, guarding solitude in vain;

Freely roaming down the roads far and near."

"An inch of land is a temple, beside the temple are poems,

The poem says: The bright moon sees the monk home to the ancient temple.

Two trees form a forest, beneath which hangs a ban,

The ban says: Axes may enter the forest only in season.”

“Sounds of wind, water, insects, birds, and chants—

All together, 360 days of bell tolls,

There is no sound that is not serene.

Colors of moonlight, mountains, grass, trees, clouds and rosy clouds—

Along with the peaks 48,000 feet tall,

There is no color that is not empty!”

“Water with insects is muddy,

Water with fish is for fishing,

Waters, waters, rivers, seas, and lakes abound.

The sun is bright due to its function,

The sun is bright due to the moon,

Days, days, sun, moon, and stars all sparkle.”

After finishing the couplets, Zhu Ping’an nodded, pursed his lips, and muttered to himself, “That should let me stay a few more days.”

Then he casually glanced around at the shocked crowd in the hall, and the corners of his mouth curled up. A bright smile flashed and then disappeared.

If I didn’t eat that much, how would I have the energy to come up with those?

Did these people really think I did it all in one breath? Heh.