

Rise 262

Chapter 262: The City Knows How to Have Fun

At dusk, to avoid violating the curfew, Wang Shizhen and Zhang Siwei left together, planning to soon accompany Zhu Ping'an on a sightseeing trip around the capital.

By this time, there were fewer people in the inn. Those who remained, like Zhu Ping'an, were staying the night.

Just as Zhu Ping'an was about to get up and head upstairs, the innkeeper came over with the shop assistant. The innkeeper was an elderly man with a deft hand, around fifty years old, and spoke with refinement. He cupped his hands and apologized to Zhu Ping'an:

"Young Master, it is due to my poor management that this has happened, and I apologize for the offense. On behalf of the owner, I offer my sincere apologies. This impolite assistant will be removed from the inn to uphold the rules. I hope you can be generous and overlook this matter."

As soon as the innkeeper finished speaking, the assistant hurriedly began to apologize to Zhu Ping'an, his expression resembling that of the end of the world. "Young Master, I failed to recognize your importance! I was disrespectful, and I wronged you! Please, show mercy and forgive me this time!"

Seeing the bowing innkeeper and the assistant acting like it was the end of the world, Zhu Ping'an was momentarily stunned but then smiled and shook his head.

The matter was already in the past, and besides, he hadn't lost anything. Furthermore, he had a free month of food and lodging. Why would he fuss over such a small issue? Seeing the assistant's dramatic expression, it seemed like he would remember this lesson, so there was no need to be overly harsh.

Zhu Ping'an then returned the innkeeper's bow, shaking his head with a smile, casually letting the assistant off the hook for his earlier disrespect.

"I owe my stay here to your establishment, and I am grateful, so there is no offense to speak of. As for this assistant, a small punishment will suffice. If he makes the same mistake again, he can be expelled later."

Upon hearing Zhu Ping'an's words, the assistant, looking as though the world had just been saved, sighed in relief. He looked up at Zhu Ping'an, full of gratitude and shame.

"Young Master, your kindness is rare in the world."

The innkeeper, gazing at Zhu Ping'an with admiration, sincerely expressed his thoughts. If Zhu Ping'an had stunned the innkeeper with his literary talent earlier during the couplet exchange, now it was his character that had truly shocked the innkeeper.

"Quickly thank the Young Master. If not for his intercession, I would have thrown you out of the inn," the innkeeper admonished the assistant sternly.

"Thank you, Young Master, for your generosity! I will certainly mend my ways. Your great kindness, I will never forget," the assistant said, his face bright red, full of shame and deep gratitude.

“The customer is like the Jade Emperor; do not repeat this mistake,” Zhu Ping’an said casually, patting the assistant’s shoulder.

“The customer is like the Jade Emperor?” Upon hearing this, the innkeeper’s eyes brightened, clearly moved. His gaze toward Zhu Ping’an was now full of respect.

Zhu Ping’an had only spoken up for the assistant because he saw genuine remorse. His generosity was not an unprincipled indulgence, nor was it a blend of good and evil. He believed in balancing tolerance for others with criticism of their mistakes. If someone was stubborn and unrepentant, he would not tolerate it.

After this incident, the assistant seemed like a changed person. He immediately led Zhu Ping’an to his room and then eagerly rushed downstairs to fetch a bucket of hot water, bringing it back to Zhu Ping’an’s room.

As soon as Zhu Ping’an entered the room, he couldn’t help but admire the inn’s grandeur.

The room had intricate wooden carvings and was divided into three parts: the bedroom, the living room, and the balcony. Upon entering, the faint scent of sandalwood filled the air, and the decorations were luxurious, with golden floral carvings amidst white stone, blooming in a majestic display. The living room featured a small artificial mountain landscape, likely a scene of flowing water with cups floating on it, and various other elegant arrangements.

What was most impressive, however, was that the room was not only luxurious but also comfortable. The hallways and doors spread in a north-south direction, and the arrangement of the furniture created a sense of ease. The room was equipped with all the necessary amenities.

The room was probably heated by an underground system, as it felt as warm as spring. Zhu Ping'an casually walked to the balcony and indeed saw a small chimney made of glazed tiles on the outer wall, cleverly hidden. It was a geothermally heated system, a testament to the innkeeper's willingness to invest in comfort. The "dragon wall" system was an ancient Chinese invention, where the walls were hollowed out to act as a fire wall, with a fire path beneath the walls. Coal was burned outside, and the heat traveled through the wall to warm the entire room. The heat circulated with vents to release the smoke.

Of course, this system was expensive, and only the wealthy could afford it.

The city sure knows how to live well!

But Zhu Ping'an was very satisfied.

Zhu Ping'an was satisfied after finishing his tour of the room. He took a hot bath to wash off the dust from his journey. After the bath, he changed into a clean, lighter set of clothes, then took out the books, ink, and other items he had brought from his bag, placing them neatly on the desk.

Next, he lit the oil lamp and sat down at the desk by the window. He prepared the ink and paper, and began recording his recent observations in a thin notebook.

After finishing the notes, Zhu Ping'an casually opened the Analects and picked a sentence. He tried to break the topic and compose a eight-legged essay (a traditional form of writing). Having been in the Ming Dynasty for a long time, he was already very familiar with the structure of the eight-legged essay—the more you do it, the better you get at it. He picked up his brush and worked through the essay, focusing on the time and completing one draft. Then, he carefully studied the completed essay by the light of the oil lamp, making serious revisions where it was lacking.

By the time he finished refining the eight-legged essay, the entire capital was enveloped in deep silence and darkness.

He blew out the lamp and went to bed, having a night of pleasant dreams.

The next morning, before dawn, around six in the morning, Zhu Ping'an had already woken up, freshened up, slung his bag over his shoulder, and tucked a black wooden board under his arm. He went downstairs, exited the inn, and walked along the street. At this time, the night curfew had ended. According to the Ming Dynasty curfew regulations, the evening drum sounded at three o'clock in the evening, signaling the start of the curfew, and the morning drum rang at five o'clock in the morning, marking the end of it. The morning drum sounded around 5:10 AM Beijing time.

Although the sky was still dark, the street outside was already bustling with people. Zhu Ping'an, carrying his cloth bag and black wooden board, wandered aimlessly forward.

He took a few turns, not sure how, but eventually found himself on West Chang'an Street, a street close to the Western Garden, where many high-ranking officials and nobles lived.

At this point, the eastern sky was tinged with a faint red light, gradually brightening, but visibility was still limited.

Ahead, on Chang'an Street, a hazy red light appeared, with five or six glowing points coming from the south, heading north. When the people nearby saw the lights, they instinctively moved to the sides of the street. A white-bearded old man grabbed Zhu Ping'an and pulled him to the side.

As the red light drew closer, it became clear that there were six large red lanterns.

These lanterns surrounded a palanquin, which was carried by eight men, with guards standing at attention on either side, carrying curved swords. Two maids, each holding a large red lantern, walked behind the palanquin.

Zhu Ping'an squinted slightly, watching as the extravagant procession slowly approached.

As it came closer, Zhu Ping'an heard a coughing sound from within the palanquin. After the cough, one of the maids holding a lantern naturally reached out to pull back the side curtain of the palanquin. She then gracefully knelt, her delicate face turning slightly upward at a 45-degree angle.

At almost the same moment, the side curtain of the palanquin opened slightly to reveal half of the old man's face, which looked kind and benevolent.

Then, there was the sound of spitting.

It was as though they had rehearsed it a thousand times. The maid outside, with her face raised at a 45-degree angle, gently parted her rosy lips, and with a smooth motion, she caught the spit from the old man and swallowed it in one gulp.

Then the curtain closed, and the palanquin continued on its way.

This scene appeared so suddenly and without warning that it left Zhu Ping'an feeling nauseous, causing him to dry heave.

A guard standing next to the palanquin, carrying a curved sword, shot him a stern glare, his eyes full of warning, before continuing to follow the palanquin as it moved forward.

Damn, this city sure knows how to have fun!

Zhu Ping'an watched as the palanquin disappeared into the distance, his mind flooded with thousands of exasperated thoughts.