

Rise 265

Chapter 265: This Matter Is Easy

“The sun rises a zhang above Fusang;

All things in the world are fine as hair.”

“The rustic rages at injustice,

Sharpening the ancient blade in his chest.”

— “Casual Writings” by Liu Cha

The morning sun rises in the east, red clouds fill the sky, warmth descends from above, and leisurely strolls through the bustling capital’s main street. In front of a restaurant on the street, a crowd had gathered, forming a circle. At the center of the crowd were four people: two officers of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, and between them, a well-dressed man and a poorly dressed youth locked in a heated argument.

“You still say you didn’t steal my money? That medicine isn’t cheap, where did you get the money? Caught with the goods and you still won’t admit it!”

The well-dressed man pointed angrily at the medicinal herbs in the poorly dressed youth's hand, questioning him furiously.

"You're talking nonsense! I brought money from home to buy this medicine."

The poorly dressed youth retorted indignantly, his face flushed under the barrage of accusations.

The argument grew more heated, with both sides adamantly sticking to their version of the story, spittle flying as they argued under the gaze of the two guards.

"Enough noise! Right and wrong will be judged by this officer!"

The Embroidered Uniform Guard in flying fish robes clapped his folded fan hard into his palm with a loud snap, instantly silencing the two.

"Listen to Officer Shen. Try shouting again and we'll see if your mouth is harder than prison food!" said the other guard in blue-black uniform, shaking the embroidered Spring Blade at his waist.

"You first," said the guard in flying fish robes, pointing at the well-dressed man.

Hearing this, the well-dressed man knelt down, hands to the ground in gratitude, and then pointed at the poorly dressed youth, speaking with confidence:

“Thank you, Officer. Here’s what happened. I...”

While the officer in flying fish robes interrogated both parties, Zhu Ping’an, standing on the edge of the crowd, glanced over and decided to act like a rustic. He shifted his gaze to the surroundings. The street was lined with shops, and not far away, an old man was selling candied hawthorn skewers. So Zhu Ping’an stepped out of the crowd and walked toward the old man.

“Old man, how much for the candied hawthorn?” Zhu Ping’an asked as he approached.

“Six wen per skewer,” the old man answered, holding up six fingers.

Hearing the reply, Zhu Ping’an looked down, counted out six wen from his pocket, and handed them to the old man in exchange for a skewer.

“How long have you been out selling today, sir? Has business been good?” Zhu Ping’an asked with a smile as he accepted the skewer.

Having just made a sale, the old man was in a good mood. He had been frustrated at being stuck watching his stall, unable to join the commotion. Now, someone was chatting with him, and he was more than happy to talk.

“I came out early this morning. I saw everything clearly just now,” the old man said after a bit of small talk, pointing at the crowd.

“That boy came from that direction with a few bags of herbs. He passed right in front of me. Not long after, I saw him glance at the base of a wall, then crouch down and pick up a money pouch—made of blue cloth. Lucky kid. But he was honest too. After picking up the pouch, he just stayed there waiting for the owner. He waited a good while.”

“Then, after a while, that man came from the other direction, looking around like he was searching for something.”

“So the kid asked him what he was looking for. The man said he lost a money pouch. Then the kid handed it over. The man counted the money inside, went from worried to happy, didn’t even say thank you, and just walked away.”

“But before long, that man came back, and then they started arguing.”

The old man selling candied hawthorn slowly recounted the entire story. After listening, Zhu Ping’an nodded—he had mostly figured out the sequence of events. According to the old man, this is roughly what happened: a well-dressed man lost his money pouch, and a poorly dressed youth found it. When the well-

dressed man came looking for it, the youth returned it to him. The well-dressed man opened the pouch, counted the money, and his expression changed from anxious to pleased. That meant the pouch had been returned with nothing missing. But then he left and came back—clearly thinking, “This kid is really naïve. He picked up money and didn’t even want it. I might as well scam a few more coins out of him.”

However, to ensure the story’s accuracy, Zhu Ping’an didn’t stop there. After bidding farewell to the old man, he wandered over to another stall nearby—a stall selling baked flatbread. The vendor was a middle-aged man accompanied by a little boy sucking his thumb.

When he reached the stall, Zhu Ping’an bought two flatbreads. He then crouched down to play with the little boy, praised him, and handed him the candied hawthorn stick he was holding.

Afterward, Zhu Ping’an inquired about the situation from the flatbread vendor. The man’s account was basically the same as the old man’s.

After bidding the vendor farewell, Zhu Ping’an gave the two flatbreads he had bought to a beggar sunbathing against the wall. He also asked the beggar about the incident. The beggar’s version was basically the same.

So, the conclusion was that the well-dressed man had returned evil for good and was attempting to extort money.

With that, Zhu Ping’an walked into the crowd.

Within the crowd, the Flying Fish uniformed Jinyiwei (imperial secret police) officer was still interrogating the two individuals. As he questioned them, he closely observed their eyes and expressions—checking to see if their gaze flickered or if they blushed and became flustered from being at a loss for words. His ears twitched slightly as he carefully listened to their breathing and responses.

These were interrogation techniques the Jinyiwei officer had accumulated from his experience as a county magistrate. They were as follows:

First, Speech Listening – listening to their words; if they're lying, their logic falters.

Second, Color Listening – observing their complexion; if they're lying, they blush.

Third, Breath Listening – paying attention to their breath; if they're lying, their breath is uneven.

Fourth, Ear Listening – judging by their hearing; if they're lying, their hearing is confused.

Fifth, Eye Listening – watching their eyes; if they're lying, their gaze flickers.

After the interrogation, the Jinyiwei officer had mostly made up his mind—he was 80% sure. He determined that the poorly dressed youth was honest. No matter how he questioned him, the youth's account remained consistent. But the well-dressed man was different. He claimed he withdrew money last night, but there was a curfew—what was he doing out? His statements were inconsistent and contradictory.

Thus, the Jinyiwei officer decided to punish the well-dressed man.

“You’re lying!” The officer pointed his folded fan at the man.

“Sir, I’m being wronged! I’m the victim here! You can’t be deceived by appearances, sir! The pitiful always have something hateful about them! This lad’s dressed poorly, and he’s buying medicine—he just got greedy when he found the money, sir!”

The well-dressed man immediately knelt with a thud, wailing and pleading his case.

This guy was proving troublesome—tenacious and manipulative. The Jinyiwei officer looked at the kneeling man, howling with dry tears, and couldn’t think of a good way to resolve the case.

He turned to look at his companion, only to see that the other Jinyiwei, dressed in dark blue and black, was also frowning.

If this had been an ordinary Jinyiwei, he could've just used his authority and settled the matter on the spot. But this officer wasn't just any Jinyiwei—he was also a well-educated jinshi (imperial scholar) who had served as a county magistrate multiple times. He had to persuade with reason.

So he was feeling a bit troubled.

Just then, as the officer was still fretting over what to do, he heard a youthful chuckle behind him. He turned to see a simple, honest-looking young man smiling and saying:

“This matter is simple. That young man found a pouch with three taels of silver, but this gentleman claims he lost a pouch with six taels. That means this isn't his pouch at all.”

The Jinyiwei officer was immediately inspired. He gave the honest-looking youth an approving glance, then turned back to the two involved parties and said, “That's right! This pouch shall temporarily remain with the boy who found it. We'll wait for the true owner to come forward. If no one does, I'll officially award it to you. Use it to buy medicine for your parents. As for you—since this isn't your pouch, go find your own six-tael money pouch. Don't try any more tricks, or I won't be so polite next time!”

With that, the Jinyiwei officer took the pouch from the well-dressed man and handed it to the poorly dressed youth.

“But sir, this is my money pouch! Mine is made of blue cloth!” the well-dressed man cried in desperation.

“Heh, blue cloth? I’ve got one of those too. Blue cloth pouches are common. Hurry up and go look for your own pouch with six taels in it.”

From within the crowd, the honest-looking youth pulled a blue cloth pouch from his sleeve, tossed it in the air, and smiled with a tilt of his lips.

Under the stares of the crowd, the well-dressed man opened his mouth but couldn’t say a word. He had no choice but to leave in defeat. He regretted it—he had gambled all night and finally won three taels of silver, but his greed had undone him. Sigh... Maybe he’d try his luck again tomorrow and hope last night’s good fortune was still with him.