

Rise 269

Chapter 269: Old Yan Is a Genuine Person

As soon as Elder Yan entered the palace where Emperor Jiajing practiced cultivation and alchemy, he was surrounded by the scent of sandalwood. Outside, the spring chill was still biting, but inside the palace it was unbearably hot.

However, Elder Yan had long since adapted to this fragrance and temperature, his face neither flushed nor breathless.

The entire main hall was brightly lit, with sandalwood burning everywhere and candles lit. In the very center of the hall stood an alchemy furnace over a person's height, entwined with two dragons playing with a pearl. Beneath the furnace burned seven-colored flames, and from the top of the furnace rose curling smoke. Next to the furnace was a Tai Chi Bagua mat, cast from gold, white jade, and various precious materials. This Tai Chi Bagua mat alone would allow an ordinary person to strive for thousands of years.

Sitting cross-legged on the Bagua mat was a middle-aged man wearing a blue cotton Bagua Daoist robe, warm shoes on his feet, and a Hun Yuan headband. He looked somewhat handsome, with a thin build and a dignified face. From time to time, this man would put all sorts of rare and precious fuels under the alchemy furnace.

This man in the blue Bagua Daoist robe was no ordinary person.

He was the greatest alchemist in the world, the most powerful alchemist, and also the ruler of the greatest empire in the world—the Ming Empire. He was the 11th emperor of the Ming Dynasty, Emperor Jiajing. His

Daoist title was Lingxiao Shangqing Tonglei Yuanyang Miaoyi Feiyuan Zhenjun. This Daoist title was only for true immortals in Taoism, but who could question the emperor?

Recently, Emperor Jiajing felt his cultivation had advanced, so he thought of giving himself a Daoist title: “Jiutian Hongjiao Pujishengling Zhangyinyang Gongguo Dadao Siri Ziji Xianweng Yiyang Zhenren Yuanxu Xuanying Kaihua Fumo Zhongxiao Dijun,” so that once he became an immortal, he could show off in the heavens. This was still in the planning stage.

Actually, the gentlemen of the entire Ming Dynasty all had distinctive personalities. Take the last two emperors, for example: Jiajing’s predecessor, his older brother Emperor Zhengde, was a travel enthusiast who loved freedom, especially armed travels. Jiajing, on the other hand, was the opposite. He liked staying home, spending days inside the palace cultivating pills, taking drugs, and fantasizing about immortality. Ever since coming to the Western Garden, he had barely left his spot.

“Your servant Song, pays respects to the Real Immortal.”

When Elder Yan entered the palace, he reverently and skillfully kowtowed to Emperor Jiajing. Normally, officials would simply kneel and shout, “Your humble servant pays respects to His Majesty, long live the Emperor!” But Elder Yan was different. What he shouted was “pay respects to the Real Immortal.”

Though Elder Yan was old, his voice was as loud and clear as ever.

Besides the difference in words, the way Elder Yan kowtowed was also unlike ordinary ministers. His kowtow followed the standard Taoist ritual.

Before kneeling, Elder Yan's feet formed an "eight" shape, spaced two to three inches apart, very proper. He bowed, clasping his hands in front of his abdomen from bottom to top, the right hand leaving the left, and the left hand covering his heart; then he calmly bent forward, placed his right hand on the ground, kneeled with both knees, then moved his left hand away from his chest to press on the back of his right hand, forming a "cross" shape, and prostrated with his head touching the back of his hands.

Elder Yan's head touched the back of his hands, his old face blooming with a smile, shouting, "Your servant Song pays respects to the Real Immortal."

"Rise, Wei Zhong." Emperor Jiajing, seated on the Tai Chi Bagua mat, heard Elder Yan's kowtow and could not help but smile. Elder Yan really understood His Majesty's heart. Just now, Xu Jie called him "Your Majesty" three times, but it didn't feel as comfortable as Elder Yan calling him "Real Immortal."

Hearing Emperor Jiajing call him Wei Zhong (his courtesy name), Elder Yan's face brightened with joy. The emperor didn't call his given name but used his courtesy name, showing the emperor still favored him and his grace remained.

"Thank you, Real Immortal." Elder Yan smiled brightly and then stood respectfully to the side.

Emperor Jiajing added more fuel under the furnace, watching the flames burn brightly, satisfied, nodded, and clapped the ash from his hands, then rose from the Tai Chi Bagua mat.

Huang Jin, very perceptive, brought water for Emperor Jiajing to wash his hands, then directed a young eunuch to bring a chair embroidered with the Bagua and dragon patterns for the emperor to sit. After the

emperor sat, he graciously allowed a small eunuch to bring a chair for Elder Yan as well. Elder Yan knelt to thank the grace before sitting down.

Once Elder Yan sat, Emperor Jiajing began to chat casually. The conversation soon turned to the upcoming imperial exam.

“Wei Zhong, how is Xu Jie this time for the exam?” Emperor Jiajing asked casually.

From this sentence, Elder Yan immediately knew the emperor had already decided to appoint Xu Jie as the presiding official for the exam. No wonder Xu Jie was so arrogant just now—it was because of this. It was just overseeing the exam; a bunch of inexperienced youngsters wouldn’t be much trouble. But it was time to discipline this old man Xu Jie a bit.

“I think Minister Xu is the only choice to preside over the exam,” Elder Yan answered confidently.

“Oh? Why?” Emperor Jiajing squinted his eyes, interested.

“Minister Xu’s poetry and calligraphy are unparalleled. To this day, Minister Xu still diligently writes, producing many famous works. Supervising the exam is precisely where Minister Xu excels.”

“Minister Xu previously supervised the Imperial Academy and has considerable experience educating the students. He is skilled in monitoring the students, so presiding over the exam will be effortless.”

“Recently, I have observed Minister Xu’s diligence and dedication to affairs. He manages the Ministry of Rites meticulously. All official evaluations, promotions, honors, and transfers are handled with utmost responsibility, fairness, and integrity—truly a model official.”

“Minister Xu also has many excellent compositions for fasting rituals and prayers...”

“In short, Minister Xu is both talented and dedicated, making him the unequivocal choice to preside over this exam.”

In just a short while, Elder Yan praised Xu Jie all around: his poetry and calligraphy, management experience, diligence, fairness, ritual compositions, and talent—on and on. Elder Yan couldn’t stop praising Xu Jie’s merits. If time allowed, Elder Yan felt he could keep praising Xu Jie for a whole day and night.

If Xu Jie had been there, he would surely have blushed deeply, perhaps grasping Elder Yan’s hand, saying, “Ah, Elder Yan, I didn’t expect you to be such a straightforward man...”

Emperor Jiajing nodded repeatedly, appreciating Elder Yan’s evaluation of Xu Jie even more.

Had Elder Yan's head been kicked by a donkey? Just moments ago, outside, when meeting Xu Jie, he had been thinking about spanking that old man. How did he suddenly turn into such a shameless flatterer, kneeling and praising Xu Jie like this?

Seeing the emperor's admiring gaze, Elder Yan became even more enthusiastic in praising Xu Jie.

"Xu Jie can be the pillar of our dynasty."

After elevating Xu Jie to the status of a pillar, Elder Yan sighed and casually added:

"Only, recently, Minister Xu has been visiting Prince Yu's palace frequently. I fear he may be short of time."

At first glance, this sentence seemed casual, but upon closer inspection, it carried deeper meaning.

Emperor Jiajing's nod froze, then he nodded heavily again. Inside, the beautiful image he had of Xu Jie shattered completely.

Always running to the Third Prince, this boy Xu Jie had a second heart. A few months ago, Xu Jie had even submitted petitions to establish a crown prince. This boy had already submitted three or four such petitions. Always running to the Third Prince, no wonder.

This boy, I'm not dead yet, and he's already preparing to start a new regime!

Emperor Jiajing had already put a big cross on Xu Jie's name in his heart, banished him to the cold palace, and decided never to use this two-faced man again.

Elder Yan knew Emperor Jiajing very well. Seeing the emperor's expression, he silently laughed inside. Xu Jie, you still want to compete with me? You're not mature enough yet!

Praise you a hundred times? Just one sentence to knock you down!