

Rise 39

Chapter 39: Would you like to study with me?

Master Sun walked up to Zhu Ping'an, curious to see what this mischievous child was playing with. When his gaze fell on the child's hands, time seemed to stand still. Master Sun stroked his beard, unconsciously tugging at a few white hairs once again.

In his sight, the so-called mischievous child was holding a simple brush made of fine bamboo and animal hair, dipping it in water from a groove in the stone, and passionately writing on a black wooden board.

The ink made from clear water only stayed briefly on the black board, but it was evident that this mischievous child—no, this diligent kid—was already writing better than the best students in the school.

The brush was of poor quality, the stool was an uneven stone, the ink was merely clear water poured into the groove, and the paper was a black wooden board laid on the uneven stone. Yet, he wrote so earnestly that he didn't even wipe away the sweat running down his face. When the board became wet, he directly wrote on the soaked surface with his brush. The characters were somewhat immature, but very neat.

This formed a stark contrast to the mischievous child he had initially perceived, creating a significant visual shock.

This was a piece of uncut jade bestowed upon him by heaven, a gem worthy of being carved!

"You mischievous child, would you like to study under me?" Master Sun asked, stroking his beard, unable to resist.

Zhu Ping'an, who was focused on writing, nearly flung the brush away in surprise upon hearing this voice. It was too familiar; this was none other than Master Sun. His shock wasn't due to Master Sun's words—he had longed for such an opportunity—but rather because the sudden sound broke his concentration, a pure reflex.

However, in Master Sun's eyes, this was a display of extreme joy.

Of course, Zhu Ping'an did not disappoint Master Sun's expectations. After a moment of shock, his composure returned, for he housed a mature soul within him.

Zhu Ping'an stood up from the stone, his chubby face displaying excitement that quickly turned to disappointment. He was thrilled to be recognized after being caught sneaking into class, but then he remembered the chaos that had erupted at home over just two coins. If he proposed spending money to study, it would surely cause an uproar. So, he felt downcast again.

Master Sun found this little chubby boy quite amusing; his expression changed like flipping a switch.

"What's the matter? Don't you want to?" Master Sun asked, feigning seriousness.

Zhu Ping'an quickly shook his little chubby hands, looking disappointed, and said, "I want to, sir. It's just that my family is poor, and there's no money to support my studies."

At this, Zhu Ping'an's eyes lit up again. "One day while tending cattle, I heard the teacher lecturing in the classroom and suddenly felt enlightened. I also heard the teacher say that all professions are inferior; only reading is exalted. So, I boldly came here to listen to the teacher's lesson. The teacher speaks well, and naturally, I hope to study under the teacher, but my family is indeed poor. I hope the teacher can allow me to listen from outside."

This child was not only diligent but also articulate. Facing his feigned serious questioning, he remained calm and composed, showing good manners, unlike those children in the private school who turned pale and didn't know what to do when they saw him.

In Master Sun's eyes, Zhu Ping'an was an uncut jade waiting for him to carve.

"You're poor? That's alright! You can come to study, and I won't charge you any tuition; I'm not short on that little bit of money," said Master Sun. Unlike Zhu Ping'an's uncle, Master Sun was a scholar. Although he hadn't passed the provincial examination, he was still a scholar supported by the government every month. He owned several dozen acres of good farmland and was certainly not short on funds. Master Sun opened a school mainly because he had no hopes of the imperial examinations and wanted to contribute by nurturing some talent for the country and cultivate knowledgeable individuals for his clan and village. He hoped that, if possible, one of his disciples might achieve what he could not.

"It doesn't matter. The teacher won't charge you tuition. I will officially admit you to the school tomorrow," Master Sun said with a smile as he stroked his beard.

Sneaking into class, being appreciated, and getting to study without paying tuition—it was a series of surprises that felt like a pie falling from the sky, leaving Zhu Ping'an, who had never had a stroke of luck since crossing over, feeling somewhat unreal.

"Thank you, Teacher." Zhu Ping'an was very grateful to Master Sun; this was a truly respectable teacher, deserving of the title of a gentleman with profound virtue. He bent deeply in thanks, his head nearly touching his chest.

Master Sun thought Zhu Ping'an was about to kneel in gratitude, and he was even more satisfied with Zhu Ping'an's character, seeing him as a pure-hearted child. He quickly reached out to stop him.

"Don't rush. It won't be late to pay respects tomorrow," Master Sun said, patting Zhu Ping'an's head. "For today, let it be. After you pay your respects tomorrow, you can enter the school to study. Go back and tell your parents and elders that the teacher said not to charge you tuition; just come to study."

In ancient times, the process of starting school was quite formal. Generally, students would first bow to a statue of Master Sun and perform a formal apprenticeship before officially beginning their studies. Additionally, there was usually a chosen auspicious time for the apprenticeship, making it rather important. Master Sun didn't let Zhu Ping'an bow today, considering this aspect.

"Thank you, Teacher. I will go back and tell my parents right away," Zhu Ping'an sincerely expressed his gratitude, feeling lucky to have met such a teacher.

"Make sure you return early to inform your elders. After you begin studying tomorrow, you must work hard, or else the teacher's ruler will show no mercy."

After arranging for Zhu Ping'an, Master Sun went back to the classroom to continue teaching. Having accepted a promising student, he felt a renewed vigor in his body, and his steps felt much lighter.

Zhu Ping'an continued to listen to the class outside.

One was teaching earnestly, while the other was listening intently.

However, it was tough for the scheming little girl, Li Shu, who had been waiting outside the bamboo grove to hear the story of "The Eagle Shooting Heroes." She waited for Zhu Ping'an to come, but when he didn't arrive, the proud little girl couldn't hold back any longer and angrily walked towards the private school, brandishing her riding whip.

She thought to herself, I must teach that little poor boy a good lesson!

Just as the scheming little girl stepped out of the bamboo grove, Zhu Ping'an sensed her presence. After being startled by the teacher earlier, he had become more alert and naturally noticed the little girl approaching. Seeing her puffed-up cheeks and the small whip in her hand, he quickly understood that she was not coming with good intentions. He couldn't afford to make any mistakes at this moment; he had to placate this little lady.

Thus, Zhu Ping'an hurriedly got up and walked over, careful not to let the scheming little girl create a scene that would disrupt the classroom order. Just when the teacher had promised to admit him for free, it would

be inappropriate to get into trouble with the little girl. If the teacher had a change of heart about admitting him, it would be a loss.