

Rise 43

Chapter 43: The Cocky Boy

In our country, both in ancient and modern times, respecting teachers and valuing education have always been fundamental moral traditions. The official apprenticeship system existed during the Zhou Dynasty, and this system was further refined during the Ming Dynasty.

Zhu Ping'an's apprenticeship ceremony took place in a private school. Zhu Shouyi, Chen, and the aunt who brought Jun Ge to school observed the entire process, watching Zhu Ping'an kneel, bow, serve tea, and respond under the guidance of old scholar Sun.

"Studying is valuable when approached with diligence; once you enter this door, never forget hard work. The lamps are lit at midnight, and the roosters crow at dawn; this is the time for a young man to study. If you dare to be negligent, the ruler in the hands of the master will not let you off lightly."

After the ceremony, the Old Scholar Sun admonished.

"I will diligently obey the teacher's orders," Zhu Ping'an respectfully replied, bending at the waist.

Old Scholar Sun stroked his beard in satisfaction, then took a nearly new set of stationery from his desk and gifted it to Zhu Ping'an. "This set of stationery was used by me in my early years. Today, I give it to you; do not let me down."

It was already quite generous not to charge for tuition, and receiving a set of stationery made Zhu Ping'an feel a bit embarrassed.

"Gifted by the elder," Old Scholar Sun said with a long face.

Being gifted by the elder, one cannot refuse.

Zhu Ping'an had no choice but to accept it and once again bent over to thank Old Scholar Sun. The scholar waved his hand dismissively, encouraging Zhu Ping'an to make good use of this set of stationery, study diligently, and not disappoint himself.

After the ceremony, Zhu Shouyi and Chen approached Old scholar Sun to express their gratitude. Chen's eyes were red with appreciation, while Zhu Shouyi, who was not good at expressing thanks, pushed forward a basket of goods he had brought.

Upon seeing the items brought by Zhu Shouyi, Old Scholar Sun asked Zhu Ping'an, "Did I not tell you yesterday to inform your family that I do not accept gifts?"

Zhu Ping'an shook his head repeatedly.

Chen interjected, "Master is kindly teaching our Zhu'er for free, and our family is very grateful. This is our small token of appreciation; it's not worth much, all picked by his father from the mountains."

Old Scholar Sun declined, but Chen and Zhu Shouyi insisted. Eventually, Old Scholar Sun had no choice but to accept. Of course, Zhu Shouyi and Chen would deliver it to Old Scholar Sun's house; otherwise, it would be inconvenient for him to carry such a heavy basket home at his age.

It wasn't until now that the aunt confirmed it was indeed Old Scholar Sun who was teaching Zhu Ping'an for free, which made her very envious. After returning home, the First Aunt shared this bad news with Fourth Aunt, who was taken aback for a moment before commenting on Zhu'er having bad luck, which provided the aunt with some psychological balance.

After the apprenticeship ceremony, Zhu Shouyi, Chen, and the First Aunt all went down the mountain, not wanting to disturb Old Scholar Sun's teaching.

Successfully joining the private school marked the first real step Zhu Ping'an took in this era. Though it was a small step, it was a crucial one. Without entering the school, how could he navigate through this era dominated by the imperial examination system? With the master's teachings, even if he performed a bit smarter and distinguished himself from others, no one would criticize him, for he was a scholar. "There is beauty within the books, and there are mansions of gold within them." A scholar can know the affairs of the world without leaving his door; any extraordinary difference will be attributed to one's studies.

"I am Li Xiaobao; what is your name?"

Zhu Ping'an's deskmate was a very cute chubby kid, much plumper than him. This chubby kid was very friendly and took the initiative to greet him, possibly feeling a kinship because he saw Zhu Ping'an as a fellow chubby kid.

"I am Zhu Ping'an," Zhu Ping'an replied while arranging his belongings on the desk.

The chubby kid took the initiative to help grind the ink, his small hands making a squeaking sound as they moved.

"Zhu'er, you're here to keep me company! Let me tell you, the master can be quite fierce," Zhu Pingjun, who happened to be right in front of Zhu Ping'an, turned around to complain. As he turned, two streams of mucus emerged from his nostrils, which he forcefully sucked back in.

In class, the teacher recited the Three Character Classic and then the Thousand Character Classic. Most of the children were basically confused and said they couldn't remember all that they learned. But for Zhu Ping'an, this was not a problem at all. He recognized most of the traditional characters; it was just a matter of writing habits and practicing with a brush.

After finishing the lesson, the teacher led the children in a recitation, and following the local customs, Zhu Ping'an also joined in, swaying his head along with the other children. The only feeling he had was dizziness; he really didn't know how these kids managed to do it.

Master Sun showed particular concern for Zhu Ping'an, the lagging student. After a moment of recitation, he called on Zhu Ping'an to read aloud. Although it was reading, not reciting, Zhu Ping'an didn't have a textbook, and the teacher was strict in class. Zhu Pingjun and the chubby kid, Li Xiaobao, didn't dare lend Zhu Ping'an their textbooks, so most of the kids thought Zhu Ping'an would get punished.

However, to their disappointment, when Zhu Ping'an stood up, he clearly enunciated each word and smoothly recited the Three Character Classic and the Thousand Character Classic from the beginning up to the point covered in the lesson.

Only after calling on Zhu Ping'an did Old Scholar Sun realize he didn't have a textbook. He was about to ask Zhu Ping'an's deskmate to lend him one when Zhu Ping'an had already started reciting. This surprised Old Scholar Sun greatly, and he vaguely felt that this boy would be extraordinary in the future, prompting him to pay more attention to Zhu Ping'an's education.

The private school was like a small society. After the teacher went to rest in the cottage behind the school, the classroom immediately turned into a chaotic mess, with the children forming small groups based on familiarity and playfully chasing each other around.

Everyone has their urgent needs. After class, Zhu Ping'an felt a slight pain in his lower abdomen and went to the school's restroom. It was, in fact, just a secluded corner fenced off, containing only a single pit. Resources were scarce, and with a few more people, one had to wait in line. When Zhu Ping'an arrived, there was already someone waiting.

When it was Zhu Ping'an's turn, just as he was about to enter, a well-dressed boy about eight years old came up, acting all high and mighty.

"Let me go first; I'm in a hurry," the little boy said arrogantly, reaching out to tug at Zhu Ping'an's clothes.

Zhu Ping'an turned his head and calmly replied, "You're not my poop, how do you know it's not in a hurry?"

"You, just wait!" The arrogant little boy seemed unaccustomed to being treated this way; his face flushed red as he left angrily after throwing out those words.

Zhu Ping'an didn't take the bratty boy's words seriously at all. He opened the wooden door to the restroom, walked in, and comfortably took care of his business.

Afterward, he thought about washing his hands by the river and checking to see if that scheming little girl, Li Shu, had come. He had promised her yesterday that he would tell her a story. The break between classes was a bit long, almost an hour. Since there were only two classes from around nine in the morning to four in the afternoon, the break was longer, allowing students to eat a bit and play or rest. This way, they wouldn't be too tired for the second class.