

## Rise 70

Chapter 70: Once bitten by a snake, birds will cry everywhere

The Ming Dynasty placed considerable importance on infrastructure, inheriting the traditions of the Qin and Han dynasties. Basically, in every region, a long pavilion was built every ten miles and a short pavilion every five miles, providing travelers with a place to rest. In ancient times, when setting out on a long journey, friends and family often came to see them off here.

With a long pavilion only every ten miles, those who traveled to the county town for the examination were gathered here to bid farewell. As more and more people gathered, the number of scholars in blue robes carrying their bundles also increased. First Uncle, Zhu Shouren, skilled in socializing, mingled with many of the scholars. Zhu Ping'an did not know anyone there, not even the other four students who were introduced by his mentor. Of course, this might also be related to Zhu Ping'an's age; those scholars were at least in their twenties, while he was just a thirteen-year-old kid, creating a gap of at least three years. Who would know him?

"Sending you off for a thousand miles, it's time to part ways." As neighbors and family members gradually departed, only a few scholars remained at the ten-mile pavilion, along with a couple of wealthy scholars' attendants.

"Brother Wang, I've long admired you! You will surely achieve a high rank this time," one scholar exclaimed.

"Brother Zhao, it's a pleasure to meet you! I wish you a successful examination in advance!" another chimed in.

"Brother Zhu, long time no see! After passing the exam, we must celebrate with wine!"

The scholars praised one another, each excitedly responding to the compliments about their success, as if they had already drunk a few cups of wine.

Only Zhu Ping'an remained on the sidelines, carrying his bundle, isolated as he watched them flatter each other.

"Hey, who is this little brother?" Finally, someone noticed Zhu Ping'an amidst the compliments. A boy around twelve or thirteen stood there; could he be an attendant for someone? However, he didn't look like one based on his clothing, so they curiously asked.

"Oh, this is my little nephew. He's here to fill in for one of the five students sponsored by the scholar Sun from Shanghe Village; he's here to gain some experience," Uncle Zhu Shouren replied lightly.

"Oh, haha, gaining experience, indeed," they responded.

Upon hearing this, the scholars laughed together and paid little attention to Zhu Ping'an. After all, he was just a kid brought along to make up the numbers, not a talented genius. If he were a prodigy, surely they would have heard of him, as they were all from the same vicinity. Therefore, he was just a little kid filling in; there was no need to pay him any mind.

The more than ten scholars decided to head to the county town together, as it would make good company along the way. A group of them chatted and laughed at the ten-mile pavilion, discussing topics in a lively manner, creating a festive atmosphere. Before leaving, someone suggested that each of them write a poem

at the ten-mile pavilion to leave behind a memorable story for the future when they had all achieved success in their exams.

The crowd was excited, eager to showcase their talents, and began to write with great enthusiasm.

The poems written were quite ordinary; in fact, Zhu Ping'an couldn't tell if anyone stood out. However, whenever someone finished, there would be pretentious critiques, drawing cheers from the crowd.

How boring, Zhu Ping'an thought as he stood aside, watching coldly.

Uncle Zhu Shouren also joined in, splashing ink to create a poem of his own. His skill was no higher than the others, but he certainly had the demeanor of a scholar. After finishing, people also commented on his work, and the applause around him was unending.

Perhaps it was a matter of similar tastes; everyone was at this level, and they could all appreciate it, which was why the cheers never ceased.

Everyone eagerly left behind their written works, feeling a swell of pride as they listened to the compliments around them. They couldn't help but feel that they would surely succeed in the examination today, filling them with immense satisfaction.

After a while, someone finally noticed Zhu Ping'an and joked, "Isn't there a genius over there? Don't hide in the corner; show us your skills!"

Only then did everyone see Zhu Ping'an standing off to the side. Seeing him standing so far away, everyone assumed he was too ashamed to write poetry due to his lack of knowledge and was hiding away, so they laughed and urged him to write a poem as well.

People have this kind of morbid curiosity: If you're not happy, then tell me about your unhappiness so I can enjoy myself a bit.

Everyone was convinced that Zhu Ping'an was simply there to make up the numbers, unable to produce anything of merit. However, the more they thought this, the more they wanted to see him embarrass himself.

Thus, everyone was quite enthusiastic, and even some of the taller ones grabbed Zhu Ping'an and brought him to the table with ink, brushes, paper, and an inkstone.

A circle of excited scholars surrounded him.

"I... I can't write poetry," Zhu Ping'an stammered.

Seeing everyone so excited, Zhu Ping'an decided to go along with it, his innocent face filled with an awkward smile.

When the crowd heard him say he couldn't write poetry, they became even more thrilled. Not being able to write poetry? That was wonderful! They urged him to quickly come up with something to entertain them.

"Young friend, don't be modest! Hurry and write something!"

The excitement in the air made it hard to refuse, so Zhu Ping'an could only put on a bitter face and picked up a brush.

What kind of grip was that on the brush? It looked just like he was holding chopsticks, and he was holding it too high. The onlookers whispered to each other and chuckled softly.

Under the laughter, Zhu Ping'an felt even more embarrassed and hurriedly corrected his grip on the brush.

Amidst the low snickers, Zhu Ping'an wrote his first line.

"Once bitten by a snake..."

Seeing this, everyone momentarily paused their laughter. What was this? Wasn't that a common saying? Why was he using it as a line of poetry? They waited to see what he would come up with next.

They didn't have to wait long, as Zhu Ping'an continued with the next line.

"Everywhere I hear the cries of birds."

At this, many couldn't hold back their laughter. What was this? It made no sense at all; it was a jumbled mess. Had this kid even gone to school? Was he just throwing out everything he knew to get by?

As everyone burst into laughter, Zhu Ping'an kept writing.

"Outside the long pavilion, by the ancient path, a line of white egrets ascends to the blue sky."

After finishing, Zhu Ping'an looked at his grand work and struck a pose as if waiting for everyone to comment and praise him, seemingly very pleased with the poem he had pieced together.

"Once bitten by a snake, everywhere I hear the cries of birds."

"Outside the long pavilion, by the ancient path, a line of white egrets ascends to the blue sky."

The crowd of onlookers glanced at Zhu Ping'an's jumbled poem and then back at his silly expression as he eagerly awaited compliments. They could no longer contain their laughter.

"Are you here to be funny?"

The poem did have a rhyming structure, but the first line was a five-character ancient poem, while the second line had turned into a verse from a different style. Furthermore, aside from the commonplace phrase "outside the long pavilion, by the ancient path," the rest was just a patchwork of lines borrowed from other poets. "Once bitten by a snake" is a common saying, "Everywhere I hear the cries of birds" is from Meng Haoran's Spring Dawn of the Tang Dynasty, and "A line of white egrets ascends to the blue sky" is a line from Du Fu's quatrains.

"How disgraceful this is..."

"While the characters may not be bad, the poem is a complete mess..."

"Truly, this shows a lack of learning and skill..."

The crowd was nearly doubled over with laughter. Whose foolish child was this? To come to the youth exam with such a level of ability was utterly embarrassing for them. Even if he was just making up the numbers, he was making a total fool of himself. Sun the old scholar must have been losing his eyesight to send this fool to make up the numbers. Uncle Zhu Shouren silently distanced himself from Zhu Ping'an, fearing that others might recall their relationship.

What made it even funnier for everyone was that the silly kid was still grinning and laughing along with them.

People are often oblivious to their own foolishness. At this moment, the crowd's thoughts mirrored Zhu Ping'an's own.