

Rise 77

Chapter 77: I Have a Fierce Tiger in My Heart, Even the Wood Shed Can Smell Like Roses

"Alas, it's hard to explain. A few of us have been fortunate enough to receive help from Brother Qian and Brother Zhao, and your uncle also wants to assist you, but unfortunately, I'm short on funds,"

Uncle Zhu Shouren's expression changed several times before he finally sighed and said.

Zhu Ping'an revealed a look of disappointment, but inside, he remained calm and collected. He had long expected his uncle to refuse; it would have been surprising if he didn't. All of their money was with him. Seeing his uncle dressed in new clothes indicated that he indeed had friends supporting him. Asking this question was just to hear his uncle's refusal. This way, it would be awkward for his uncle to ask him for money.

He decided to save the money he had on him for later use, which could also relieve the burden at home since the expenses for the imperial examination were significant.

"Uncle, do you have a place to stay?" Zhu Ping'an asked again.

"Well, I do have a place to stay, but it's only because Brother Qian and Brother Zhao don't mind sharing a bedroom with me," his uncle replied, still looking helpless. "The place we are staying is also overcrowded."

After saying this, Uncle Zhu Shouren glanced at Zhu Ping'an, who was carrying a bag. With a tone that seemed to consider Zhu Ping'an's situation, he continued, "Zhi'er, how about this? You can stay with me for a day, and you can write a letter asking your family to prepare another twenty taels of silver. I will have a friend's servant take your letter home, and then the servant can bring the money back. How does that sound?"

Seeing his uncle's sympathetic demeanor, Zhu Ping'an couldn't help but feel amused. His uncle was really calculating; the standard amount for the scholar examination was about ten taels per person, and asking for twenty was just to make his parents cover his uncle's share as well. Moreover, having a friend's servant bring back the money—who knew if it would actually reach him? If the servant decided to take off with the money or lost it, what could be done? Such things were always possible with his uncle.

He certainly didn't lack money.

"Thank you for your kindness, Uncle. My mother left me with five taels in small denomination notes when she left, so I can manage on my own for now," Zhu Ping'an replied calmly, emphasizing the part about managing on his own to avoid giving his uncle any ideas.

With his uncle's plan thwarted, he looked quite disappointed and no longer brought up the idea of Zhu Ping'an staying with him for a day. He waved his hand and said, "Well, if that's the case, you should hurry and find a place to stay. It will be inconvenient if it gets too late."

At this time, one of the other students walking a little behind them spoke mockingly, "Cousin only has five taels, so he'll probably have to settle for a woodshed."

Another chimed in, "That's quite fortunate! The inn we're staying at actually has a woodshed available. The innkeeper was just tidying it up for rent, saying the monthly rent is only one tael of silver, which is more than half cheaper than a regular room."

Their teasing remarks did catch Zhu Ping'an's attention.

Generally speaking, woodsheds are sunny and spacious rooms. If it's cleaned up and a bed is added, it wouldn't necessarily be worse than a lower-tier guest room. Plus, it's significantly cheaper than a regular room. As for concerns about losing face by staying in a woodshed, Zhu Ping'an didn't mind at all. Face isn't determined by where you stay; haven't you heard about Goujian who endured hardship to seek revenge? As long as one has the ability, it doesn't matter where they stay.

I have a fierce tiger in my heart, yet I can still smell roses in the woodshed.

"Really? Where is the inn?"

These people had originally been mocking Zhu Ping'an, but unexpectedly, this foolish boy not only showed no shame but also asked them with a silly grin.

Well, it seems this foolish boy is beyond saving. A woodshed is just a place for making cannon fodder, how unlucky. He has indeed resigned himself to this.

Uncle Zhu Shouren and the others were just aimlessly strolling around, but upon seeing Zhu Ping'an so insistent on staying in a woodshed, they gathered around him as if watching a comedy, afraid he might change his mind, and headed toward their inn.

Zhu Ping'an felt no embarrassment at all; it was Uncle Zhu Shouren who blushed, as if he had lost a lot of dignity.

The inn where Uncle Zhu Shouren was staying was quite far away. It was evident that they were genuinely in a leisurely mood, as it took them about half an hour to arrive at the front of the inn.

This inn was much more luxurious than the one they had seen earlier; it could definitely be rated as a star inn in ancient times.

The innkeeper was a rather shrewd-looking plump man, who was worried about the woodshed. He had noticed that many scholars had come to stay and, being business-minded, ordered someone to tidy up the woodshed, thinking he could rent it out cheaply to earn some silver.

He never expected that when he recommended the woodshed to the scholars, these seemingly weak students would react as if he had a vendetta against their families. They looked as if they wished they could tear him apart, cursing and criticizing the very notion of staying in a woodshed. If he hadn't quickly put on a smile to defuse the situation, those scholars would have likely been ready to fight him.

It was just a woodshed, so why were they making such a fuss? The plump innkeeper simply couldn't understand the pride of these scholars.

Having taken quite a beating from the scholars, the innkeeper felt angry whenever he saw the woodshed. If someone came to rent it, he would be willing to cut the price in half, just to avoid the annoyance of looking at it.

Just then, a polite voice broke through his thoughts.

"Excuse me, innkeeper, do you have a woodshed available for rent?"

The plump innkeeper looked up and saw a boy around thirteen or fourteen years old, appearing somewhat foolish. Behind him were several scholars who had just rented rooms from him not long ago, all looking at the naive boy as if they were watching a comedy. The expressions and smiles on their faces were exactly like those of the other innkeepers looking at him.

"Yes, we do. If you're willing, I can rent it to you for half a tael of silver for a month."

We are all lost souls in this vast world; I'll give you a discount of half a tael for the room. At that moment, the plump innkeeper suddenly recalled this phrase.

The group following Zhu Ping'an, who had been enjoying the spectacle, were surprised by the innkeeper's sudden decision to cut the price in half. However, they did not envy Zhu Ping'an's good fortune; instead, they mocked him even more. A woodshed was already considered lowly, and now that the price was even cheaper, it seemed that living there would bring even more bad luck.

The boy coming to rent the room was none other than Zhu Ping'an. Hearing the innkeeper say it would only cost half a tael of silver for a month, his foolish face broke into an even broader smile as he cheerfully replied, "Great, could you please show me the woodshed?"

The plump innkeeper led Zhu Ping'an to the woodshed, while Uncle Zhu Shouren and the others stayed back, worried that entering might bring them misfortune and affect their exam fortunes.

The outside of the woodshed looked simple, but inside it was quite clean. The brick floor was spotless, and there was a table and chair by the window. The bed was just moved in. The room faced the sun, and the evening sunlight streamed through the window, ensuring it would be bright during the day. Overall, it felt much better than the lowest-quality room at the first inn they had visited.

"How is it?" the plump innkeeper asked nervously.

"I think it's pretty good; it's a great value," Zhu Ping'an replied with a silly grin, looking around and nodding in satisfaction.

It was as if he had encountered a kindred spirit in high mountains and flowing waters.

The more the plump innkeeper looked at Zhu Ping'an, the more he liked him. Not wanting to miss the opportunity, he further reduced the price by another coin of silver.

Zhu Ping'an found the plump innkeeper increasingly likable; four coins of silver for this kind of room was fantastic.