

## Rise 82

### Chapter 82: The Results Are Posted

Under the mocking gazes of the crowd, Zhu Ping'an calmly finished every bit of the two dishes, steamed buns, and beef soup he had ordered. After patting his slightly full belly, he went back to his room to rest.

As they watched Zhu Ping'an's departing figure, the laughter in the hall continued unabated.

"This fool sure has a good appetite..."

"He ate two meals at the exam hall, and now he's devoured two full steamed buns, a large bowl of beef soup, and two dishes. Is he a pig...?"

"Glutton. It's shameful to be associated with him."

Amidst the mockery directed at Zhu Ping'an, the tense atmosphere that had gripped the people all day gradually dissipated, perhaps an unintended benefit for everyone.

After eating his fill and sleeping soundly, the next morning, Zhu Ping'an, as usual, slung his bag over his shoulder, tucked a black wooden board under his arm, and headed out.

Inside the inn, the sound of snoring filled the air. The students, after the previous day's tension, finally had a chance to relax and were all fast asleep.

Walking on the damp cobblestone streets, Zhu Ping'an made his way to the riverside again, set down the black wooden board, rubbed his hands together, and began his daily routine.

As the sunrise painted half the sky red and visibility improved, Zhu Ping'an put away the brush and black wooden board. He took out a book from his bag, which contained copies of the \*Ming Grand Pronouncements\*, the \*Ming Code\*, and the current legal statutes, and began reading with great interest.

The second exam was going to test judgment writing, consisting of five sections: five judgments, pronouncements, essays, memorials, and forms. Reviewing the \*Ming Code\* at this moment would leave a deeper impression for the exam. In fact, the \*Ming Grand Pronouncements\* were quite interesting. They were personally compiled by the founder of the Ming dynasty, Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang, with an emphasis on severe punishment. Zhu's promotion of this legal text was extreme—millions of copies were printed, ensuring that every official had a copy and every household among the common folk had one too. It was, without a doubt, the most widely distributed legal text. However, Zhu's theory of harsh punishment didn't quite fit the reality of the Ming dynasty, and his successors introduced new legal codes. Now, the primary use of this text was for the imperial exams.

As Zhu Ping'an was engrossed in his reading, the young women who came to the river to wash clothes and pound rice arrived once again. They were already used to seeing this young scholar sitting by the river reading every morning. To them, he had become a daily curiosity and a break from the oppressive feudal rules. Every day, they teased him a little before moving on.

With so many young women together, they didn't worry about anyone gossiping.

"Little scholar, why didn't we see you reading here yesterday? Hehehe, could it be that..." a bold young wife chimed in with a teasing voice from the group.

Then came a large group of women giggling, along with the shy scolding from unmarried young ladies.

Every morning, Zhu Ping'an had to endure their teasing from these young women and wives, and he was used to it by now.

"Yesterday was the county exam, and I went to take the test," Zhu Ping'an said as he put his book back in his backpack, preparing to leave.

Zhu Ping'an had almost reached an unspoken understanding with these young women and wives; whenever they came here to pound rice and wash clothes, he would take his things and leave.

"Hee hee, if you keep working hard like you do every day, little scholar, you're sure to pass," one of them teased.

Hearing the voice from behind him, Zhu Ping'an couldn't help but smile. Since he began participating in the imperial examination, he had only heard comments about failing or gaining experience; this was the first time someone said he would pass.

"Thank you, I appreciate your kind words," he replied without looking back, waving his hand in thanks.

Zhu Ping'an's words made the young women laugh even more. If it had been someone else, they would have humbly responded, "Oh, no, I'm not that good," but he, unashamedly, said he would borrow their good fortune. What an interesting young man he was!

After leaving the riverside, Zhu Ping'an looked for a snack, eager to taste all the delicacies of Huaining.

And so, he spent the day, then repeated it all over again.

The next day, after finishing breakfast and returning to the inn, Zhu Ping'an found the other students in a state of excitement, all in chaos.

"Quick, quick, go! The county magistrate is about to announce the results!"

As soon as the words were out, the crowd became agitated, faces flushed with either excitement or anxiety, and a large group of people rushed out. Even Zhu Ping'an, who had just returned, was pulled along by his uncle Zhu Shouren and others out the door.

In an instant, it was as if a drop of cold water had splashed into a hot oil pan, causing the entire street to become a hubbub of activity.

Zhu Ping'an was nearly jolted into spilling the crab roe soup and lotus seed porridge he had eaten that morning as he was dragged along by his uncle and others.

The announcement of the county exam results was to take place in an open space outside the county office, and although the time hadn't come yet, the wall where the results would be posted was already crowded with students. Everyone was eager to secure a good spot, almost ready to fight over it. Zhu Ping'an and his group had arrived late, so they could only stand at the back.

Fortunately, since the results hadn't been announced yet, the students remained composed. However, a few were still kneeling at that moment, murmuring prayers, asking the passing deities for blessings to make it onto the list.

"Estimate the results, and place your bets."

"In this book, if a student passes, fifty wen will be awarded."

A commotion arose nearby; someone had actually set up a betting booth near the announcement area to predict the results of this exam.

At this moment, few scholars criticized it. Most people eagerly participated, saying that betting for good fortune was a refined activity.

"Zhi'er, what's your seat number?" Uncle Zhu Shouren asked with enthusiasm, as the previous three announcements for the county exam had been based on seat numbers, and only the last one would announce names, known as the "long list." That's why Uncle asked Zhu Ping'an for his seat number.

Seeing Uncle like this, it was clear he intended to bet that I wouldn't pass.

Zhu Ping'an told Uncle Zhu Shouren his seat number, and Uncle immediately raised a coin and squeezed into the crowd.

After a while, Uncle came back, head down and dejected. When Zhu Ping'an inquired, he learned that his name wasn't even on the betting list. Among the ten predictions made, he didn't appear at all, not even on the last-ranked list, showing just how little faith others had in him.

After some time, a gong sounded, and several officers in bright red uniforms, playing the suona, escorted a small official carrying the announcement document. The crowd became excited and parted, allowing them to enter and post the results.

The announcement document was large, and the small official, with the help of the officers, managed to post the big red document on the tall wall while standing on a high stool.

This was a large sheet of red paper, displaying seat numbers, with a total of over seven hundred numbers written in a circular format on the list. The characters were big enough to be seen even from the outskirts of the crowd.

Soon, the crowd erupted with excitement; voices of joy and despair mixed together. Some couldn't contain their happiness and shouted that they had passed, shaking those beside them, while others cried tears of anguish, accusing the county magistrate of unfairness and claiming the exam was rigged.

Zhu Ping'an stood on his tiptoes, carefully searching for his seat number on the list. Before he could finish reading the entire list, he heard his uncle's excited voice nearby.

"Sure enough, your seat number is really not on the list, Zhi'er. No worries, no worries. This time, you've gained experience from failing, and next year your chances will be better."

Uncle Zhu Shouren stroked his beard, comforting Zhu Ping'an with the air of an elder, yet his eyes were full of delight. Hmm, you didn't pass, did you? The county exam is not as easy as you think. My status as a scholar was not earned lightly; you must be envious, right?

Among the more than ten scholars who had come to take the exam with them, excluding Uncle and two other scholars who didn't need to participate, only six out of the eleven who took the county exam had passed, creating a sense of superiority for those who did.

Of course, Zhu Ping'an was the primary target of comfort, though it was more fitting to describe it as ridicule.

Some mocked, saying, "You managed to take the exam; your goal of being a filler has been achieved. Truly commendable."

Even the words of comfort were like this: "Although you didn't pass, you ate well during the exam."

Or they would openly mock him, saying things like, "You're a failure, dreaming of being on the list like a snake biting a bird; who do you think you are?"

Just as the laughter was reaching a peak, another gong sounded, and several officers in bright red uniforms surrounded a small official who came forward.

"This time, the county exam has announced fifty first-class results, and the head of the list is on this announcement. Clear the way; let me post this list."

Seeing that many people were crowded around the recently posted second-class list, the small official raised his voice and called for everyone to make way, allowing the officers to enter and post the results.

Uncle Zhu Shouren and the more than ten scholars, who were comforting Zhu Ping'an, ignored the announcement of the first-class results, knowing they had nothing to do with him. The first-class results included only genuine talents; Zhu Ping'an, having entered the examination hall, would only find himself vastly inferior to them. Thus, they continued to "comfort" Zhu Ping'an.

"Look at you; you're just a glutton. From now on, use that appetite to study instead..."

"Your writing is probably so smeared with grease that the county magistrate mistook it for cheating. You must never let that happen again..."

"Zhi'er, don't be discouraged; although you didn't pass this time, you gained experience... If you work hard in the future, your uncle will definitely find time to teach you..."

Clatter, clatter, as everyone grew more animated, suddenly, a trembling voice emerged...

"Everyone... everyone, there's a seat number on the first-class list that seems... seems to belong to An Ge'er..."

The crowd, who had been laughing heartily, suddenly fell silent, as if they had swallowed something unpleasant. They instinctively looked up at the recently posted first-class list.

And there it was, Zhu Ping'an's seat number prominently displayed on the list.