

Rise 83

Chapter 83: Struck by Dumb Luck

The two characters "Ding Chou" on the red paper hit the faces of Uncle Zhu Shouren and others surrounding Zhu Ping'an like two loud slaps, hard enough to leave a sting.

****Pa... Pa...****

The sound still echoed. Uncle Zhu Shouren twitched at the corners of his mouth, staring blankly at the list, unable to pull his gaze away for a long time, as if he were determined to see the characters "Ding Chou" as something else.

The other students were similar to Uncle Zhu Shouren, each one stunned by the two characters "Ding Chou," their minds in a daze...

"Cough, cough, cough, there must be a problem with the list..."

One unsuccessful student, pulling his gaze back from the first-class list, mumbled with red eyes. Besides a problem with the list, he could not think of any reason why Zhu Ping'an would make it onto the first-class list.

"Perhaps... perhaps there was a mistake during the grading..."

Another student, who couldn't accept the result, came up with a second reason for why Zhu Ping'an might have made it onto the first-class list.

In truth, it was simply that these people did not want to accept the result. The imperial examination is notoriously strict, and the county exam is the most basic level. Although it is a bit more lenient than the provincial and imperial exams, there should be no mistakes in grading. The county exam has a strict set of rules to prevent cheating, one of which is to copy the candidates' answers to a new sheet to prevent them from leaving marks on the exam papers or for graders to recognize their familiar candidates' papers. The graders do not read the original papers; instead, clerks from outside the county transcribe them in red ink and cinnabar, which have been checked and verified by multiple people, eliminating mistakes like writing the wrong seat number. Moreover, each exam paper must pass through the hands of multiple graders and be reviewed repeatedly before the results are announced.

However, no matter what, these people did not consider Zhu Ping'an's abilities but instead attributed it to other reasons. After a heated and active discussion among everyone, they unified on a single reason for Zhu Ping'an making the first-class list: this glutton, who had been bitten by a snake and heard birds singing, had simply struck it lucky on this exam!

As a result, in addition to being called a glutton, a fool, and a disaster magnet, Zhu Ping'an gained yet another title: the lucky boy.

The six people listed in the second class were fine, but the others who failed to make the list looked at Zhu Ping'an, this boy who had gotten lucky, with strange expressions.

It wasn't that we lacked talent; it was just that our luck was bad.

With a sigh of unwillingness, the unsuccessful students packed their things and set off on their way home.

Uncle Zhu Shouren also sighed at fate's cruelty, slowly walking back to the inn with the crowd. After decades of hard work, he had only managed to make it onto the second-class list, while Zhu Ping'an, through sheer luck, had made it onto the first-class list. Fate really does play tricks on people. However, luck cannot be replicated, and there was no need to dwell on it too much; after all, he had passed the provincial exam. Zhu Ping'an's luck couldn't possibly continue; his journey in the imperial examination was likely at an end. Yes, indeed, it must be.

Zhu Ping'an, who had not had a chance to speak since the list was announced, watched as everyone sighed and left, feeling powerful about his luck. He couldn't help but slowly extend his right hand as if he wanted to call out to them.

But the next moment, the scene shifted. Zhu Ping'an turned his palm upward, brought four fingers together, and abruptly extended his middle finger, performing a gesture that was modernly popular but unknown in ancient times: the iconic middle finger salute.

At this time, everyone began to disperse, and the crowd in front of the list thinned out. Zhu Ping'an slowly walked to the front of the list to take a closer look. This county exam had over 1,300 participants in the first round, with more than 700 on the second-class list and 50 on the first-class list, along with one person at the top. The first and second-class lists were arranged in circles, without a specific ranking, and Zhu Ping'an was located in the most central small circle of the first-class list. The top candidate only had the seat number "Jia Zi," indicating that he was seated in the front, quite far from Zhu Ping'an, and had no impact on him.

Returning to the inn, the students in the lobby congratulated Zhu Ping'an on making it onto the first-class list with mocking tones.

Zhu Ping'an responded politely to each one, seemingly oblivious to their sarcasm.

True gold fears no fire. Zhu Ping'an looked down on debating with them, finding it pointless. Not to mention that these people were likely waiting for him to argue, just to step on him and show off. After all, the first round of the county exam was actually quite basic, with seventy percent of the participants making it onto the list. There were still the second, third, and fourth rounds to go, each more challenging than the last. Let them stir up trouble; when the results of the subsequent rounds came out, their faces would be swollen from their own actions, and he wouldn't need to lift a finger.

It would be interesting to see their expressions then.

As everyone watched Zhu Ping'an leave calmly, their mockery intensified, interpreting his calm departure as a sign of overwhelming shame.

"Look, look, he doesn't even dare to argue; he must feel guilty inside."

"What's guilt? Maybe he's up to something; he might have given some benefit to the county magistrate."

"Shh, Brother Wang, be cautious with your words. What can this glutton, who lives in a shack, offer the county magistrate? The magistrate is famously upright and just in the county... He, this time, is just lucky. Just wait; tomorrow's exam will surely put him back in his place..."

"Oh, that's true. Haha, how can luck last long... Let's see how he does in the next exam."

The atmosphere in the lobby grew lively. The remaining students were either like Zhu Shouren, who had just passed the examination, or those who had succeeded this time. After drinking some wine, everyone was in high spirits. Someone suggested they mimic those who had set up betting tables in front of the list and open a betting pool to see if the glutton bitten by a snake and who heard birds singing could make it onto the list in the next round.

"I'll bet 100 wen that he won't make it."

"I'll bet one tael of silver that he won't make it..."

In the end, they couldn't open the betting table fast enough; all the students in the inn's lobby placed their bets, but all were wagering against Zhu Ping'an.

Thus, everyone exchanged knowing smiles, feeling a sense of camaraderie, and raised their cups in unspoken agreement, toasting and drinking together.

Back in his room, Zhu Ping'an was completely unaware that he had once again become the target of everyone's mockery. He tidied up his belongings, sat down at his desk, opened the laws and previous cases, and read with great interest under the sunlight streaming through the window.

The second round of the exam was to assess judgment, focusing on the candidates' abilities to discern right from wrong and to draft various administrative documents. This showed that Old Zhu's examination reform genuinely aimed to select truly educated, knowledgeable, and capable practical talents for the country. Unfortunately, the rigid eight-legged essay format severely restricted this goal.

As Zhu Ping'an read through the laws and cases, he couldn't help but mock Old Zhu's good intentions. Dreams may be grand, but reality is harsh. If Old Zhu knew that most of the people selected by his method were just bookworms, he would surely weep bitterly in his midnight dreams.