

Rise 84

Chapter 84: Don't cry, Ang'er, Stand Up and Fight

During the exam period, time always seems to pass quickly, and in the blink of an eye, three days have gone by. As noon approaches, the entire Huaining County is bathed in warm sunlight, with crowds bustling in the streets, creating a lively scene.

In the distance, a simple-minded youth, surrounded by a group of people, is rushing helplessly towards the county office.

"Come on, An Ge'er. If we're slow, we won't get good spots!"

"Exactly, we're waiting to see you make it to the top list again!"

"During this exam, Zhi'er, do you have confidence..."

Uncle Zhu Shouren and others crowd around the helpless Zhu Ping'an, teasing him in a playful tone as they walk. They don't give Zhu Ping'an time to respond; as one finishes mocking him, another quickly jumps in, creating a barrage of banter.

"I..." Before Zhu Ping'an can utter a second word, he is interrupted.

"An Ge'er, don't worry. Even if you don't make it this time, it's fine. After all, you've already brought honor to our hometown with the last top list..."

"Hahaha, indeed, indeed..."

The students from the same town are all energized, dragging Zhu Ping'an along, singing and chatting, as they head toward the county office.

Zhu Ping'an looks helplessly at Uncle Zhu Shouren and the fellow townsmen, feeling as if he is more anxious than the emperor himself. It's almost the same as the first time the results were announced; he is again being pulled along by the crowd. No, it feels even worse this time—at least last time, the journey wasn't this noisy.

The county office hasn't posted the second high school results yet, but the crowd is packed tightly, even more so than the first announcement.

"Look at An Ge'er, it's all your fault for being greedy and wasting time. Now we're stuck on the outskirts." A companion complained as they looked at the throng of people.

"I agree. Even if you have no confidence left, you shouldn't give up like this."

"Just because of one failed exam, how can you be so scared that you don't dare to come?"

Among the students attending the exam, eager to check the results, someone jumped in to blame Zhu Ping'an for wasting time with his greed, which only fueled the criticism.

"Don't blame him, don't blame him. I apologize on behalf of my nephew."

At this moment, Uncle Zhu Shouren stepped forward, acting like a kind elder shielding his younger kin from the storm, standing up to take all the blame for Zhu Ping'an.

"Brother Zhu is truly a kind elder..." People looked at Zhu Shouren with admiration.

Zhu Ping'an really didn't know what to say. This morning, after viewing the exam topics by the river, he didn't see any tasty snacks along the way and ended up ordering a cheap dish—a small plate of braised pork and a bowl of rice porridge—at the inn's lobby. Before he could even start eating, his uncle and the others insisted on taking him to see the results. At that time, it was still early before the announcement, and since he had just ordered his food, of course, he wanted to finish eating; he couldn't let it go to waste. Just after finishing, they pulled him along like last time. On one hand, he hadn't made them wait; on the other hand, the results hadn't been posted yet. Besides, having seen the results last time, he knew the list was large enough, and the writing was big enough to be seen clearly from the outskirts.

They were really making a big fuss over nothing.

The same person who opened the betting last time was back at it again. This time, Zhu Ping'an was in the booklet, but the description of him at the back read: This boy is thirteen years old, from the village of Xiahe. On the way here, he composed a poem at the long pavilion: "One morning bitten by a snake, everywhere I hear birds cry; outside the long pavilion, by the ancient road, a line of egrets flies up to the blue sky." Currently residing in a certain inn's woodshed, greedy and lazy, he topped the list in the first county exam, but reliable sources say he merely had good luck. The betting is now open, claiming he can make it to the top list, the second list, or fail altogether...

Uncle Zhu Shouren's eyes lit up when he saw this. He fumbled in his sleeves for a moment and then pulled out a small amount of silver, pressing it down on Zhu Ping'an's name, who had failed the exam.

The fellow townsmen and scholars laughed, saying they were just trying to catch a good omen. One by one, they placed silver and copper coins on Zhu Ping'an's name, no less than a hundred wen each.

Under their influence, others who had been hesitant and uncertain also began to put their money on Zhu Ping'an's name. After all, what was there to lose? They thought, having been bitten by a snake and hearing the call of the birds, that they had already had a stroke of good luck. If they could succeed this time, wouldn't that be like the sun rising in the west?

Seeing this, the person running the betting quickly reduced the odds on Zhu Ping'an's failure threefold, barely managing to halt the influx.

"An Ge'er, you should also place a bet, ha ha ha! Knowing oneself and one's opponent, hmm, yes, if you fail the exam, at least you'll have some silver as compensation. Brilliant, absolutely brilliant," the fellow townsmen and scholars surrounding the betting booth exclaimed when they saw Zhu Ping'an approach to place a bet.

"This young man, this betting will stop now," the person running the betting said, worried that Zhu Ping'an would bet on his failure and thus lose all his capital.

"Oh, that's a pity. I was going to place a bet on the top ranking," Zhu Ping'an replied, shaking his head lightly.

Hearing that Zhu Ping'an wanted to bet on the top ranking, the person running the betting showed joy on his face. Finally, someone was betting on a high score, so he wouldn't suffer too great a loss.

"Although we're stopping the betting, since it seems we're so fated to meet again, let's make an exception this one time," the person running the betting called out to Zhu Ping'an, acting all friendly.

"Thank you, three taels, on the top ranking," Zhu Ping'an gently placed a bar of silver on the betting booth for the top ranking and cupped his hands in thanks.

"Hey, Zhu'er, how can you explain this to your uncle..." Uncle Zhu Shouren shook his head when he saw Zhu Ping'an betting three taels on the top ranking, sighing over the family's misfortune.

Others mocked Zhu Ping'an for trying to put on a brave front.

Just then, the sound of a gong rang out. A small official came forward with the list of results, surrounded by the yamen runners.

The crowd was in an uproar, all eyes glued to the small official, urging him silently to post the results quickly.

As expected, the results were soon posted.

With the list now displayed, the expressions of those watching varied widely—some were joyful, others were sorrowful, and some even cried out in despair, tears streaming down their faces.

"There are no characters 'Ding Chou' on it, really none..." Fellow townsmen stared at the list for a long time, their faces brightening with joy.

"Hmm, ha ha! Five taels of silver will be mine!" A scholar who had bet five taels on Zhu Ping'an's failure realized he could earn five taels from a one-to-one payout, and he was instantly overjoyed.

"Shh, calm down, let's not repeat yesterday's mistake. The top ranking hasn't been posted yet," Zhu Shouren once again stood up at this crucial moment, appearing calm and composed, reminding everyone not to follow the previous errors and to learn from past lessons.

"..."

Zhu Ping'an called out to everyone, wanting to say something, but he was interrupted before he could finish.

"An Ge'er, don't be sad. Let's wait for the top ranking," someone said with a joyful expression to comfort Zhu Ping'an.

Zhu Ping'an looked helpless.

After a while, another sound of a gong rang out, and another small official came to post the results.

Uncle Zhu Shouren and the others carefully studied the list again and again. Finally, one person couldn't contain his joy and trembled as he said,

"Did you see? There's no 'Ding Chou'..."

Once those words were spoken, the surroundings erupted with joy.

Uncle Zhu Shouren nodded repeatedly.

With no "Ding Chou" on the second list, and also no "Ding Chou" on the top ranking, that meant Zhu Ping'an had failed the exam.

He had failed...

I made a wish in the temple, waiting day after day, and finally, that wish had come true today.

Uncle Zhu Shouren and the other scholars were almost moved to tears of happiness. Although among the six fellow townsmen who took the second exam, three had also failed, Zhu Ping'an was among them! At least they would all earn some silver, while Zhu Ping'an had not only failed but had also lost his entire fortune.

"An Ge'er, don't be sad. At least you gained experience this time."

"Exactly! An Ge'er, don't cry. I'll cover your travel expenses back home."

"Zhu Er, don't cry. I'm here for you," Uncle Zhu Shouren and the others surrounded Zhu Ping'an, offering various comforts—some encouraged him to gain experience, while others promised to cover his travel costs, with Uncle appearing as a benevolent elder.

The essence of everyone's comfort could be summed up in one phrase: An Ge'er, don't cry. Stand up and keep going.

The sounds were bearable, but why were you all laughing?

At that moment, Uncle Zhu Shouren and the others felt a sense of superiority over Zhu Ping'an, and their mood couldn't be better.

Just as everyone was celebrating, a timid voice broke through,

"Ahem, well, my seat number for this exam is 'Jia Xu'..."

Jia Xu?!

Wait a minute...

Everyone looked up, only to see the two characters "Jia Xu" glaring brightly on the top ranking... as if they had transformed into two slapping hands rushing toward them.

Listen, that sound of a heart breaking...

People clutched their chests, unable to believe it, as they looked down at the silly young man surrounded by everyone...

Hearts shattered, faces pained—what the hell! Why didn't you say earlier that you had changed your seat number!