

Rise 90

Chapter 90: The Surprising Immortal Poetry Gathering (3)

"Uh, could you please repeat what you just said? I was a bit lost in thought..."

Just moments ago, Zhu Ping'an was fully focused on contemplating which dish to try next. Suddenly being called by name, he didn't catch what the person said, so he had to put down his chopsticks and look up to ask.

To his surprise, he found that almost everyone at the table was staring at him. Uh, this is the largest and most lavish banquet I've seen since arriving in the Ming Dynasty. I just wanted to try something new; it's not like I'm a spectacle...

"You are Zhu Ping'an, the top scholar from Jia Bang in Huaining, right? We have all shared poetry, but you've been silent this whole time. Do you look down on us?" A student stepped forward and repeated the earlier remark, deliberately using plain language to mock Zhu Ping'an for not understanding classical Chinese.

Many people joined in the fun, urging Zhu Ping'an to compose a poem to share with everyone.

"Oh, write a poem?"

Zhu Ping'an softly repeated the phrase and gently shook his head, humbly saying, "I'm not very good at writing poetry, so let's skip it."

Not being good at poetry, you're quite honest, huh? But if you think that will let you avoid writing a poem, you're sorely mistaken! You're underestimating us too much.

The student who stepped forward wore a polite smile and took a step closer, cupping his hands in salute, "You're being too modest. The renowned top scholar from Jia Bang, so young yet accomplished, who doesn't know you? Please don't decline."

"Exactly, don't refuse! That poem you wrote at the ten-mile long pavilion about being bitten by a snake and hearing the birds, um, that one was quite refreshing to us."

Someone nearby quickly chimed in, referencing the infamous poem Zhu Ping'an had written at the ten-mile long pavilion, ending with a teasing remark about it being refreshing.

In an instant, the hall was filled with laughter and cheers.

The singer responsible for reciting poems looked at the boy being interrogated with sympathetic eyes. The boy was only about thirteen or fourteen, and being mocked like this made the singer feel quite sorry for him. After all, the weak often empathize with each other.

"Once bitten by a snake, you hear birds everywhere. Outside the long pavilion, by the ancient road, a line of white egrets ascends to the blue sky... Hahaha, it's quite catchy! Isn't it well done? Don't refuse."

Someone loudly read aloud the poem Zhu Ping'an had once composed, accompanied by bursts of laughter.

The beautiful singer responsible for reciting poetry was hearing Zhu Ping'an's poem for the first time. In this cheerful atmosphere, she had put in effort to please the guests, but upon hearing Zhu Ping'an's poem read by others, she couldn't help but feel disappointed. How could someone of such low caliber pass the county examination and top the list? It seemed that only familial influence could explain that. She had thought they shared a bond, but it turned out he was just a spoiled rich kid. The singer's gaze towards Zhu Ping'an began to carry a hint of disdain.

Zhou Xuezheng and others, like Lao Li and Lao Zhao, also looked at Zhu Ping'an with furrowed brows, their expressions quite unpleasant.

Everyone clamored for Zhu Ping'an to write another poem based on this one.

A fellow villager sitting next to Zhu Ping'an was worried that he didn't understand the seriousness of the situation. Fearing that Zhu Ping'an might embarrass himself too much and affect Huaining's reputation, he leaned over and whispered quietly to him, also gesturing with his eyes toward Zhou Xuezheng and the others.

I see, Zhu Ping'an thought as he glanced around at everyone, a silly smile creeping onto his lips.

"Oh, that poem? It was just something I wrote for fun,"

Zhu Ping'an stood up after most of the laughter had died down, appearing a bit awkward but wearing an earnest smile as he spoke.

The laughter abruptly ceased. How could they mock a poem that was merely meant as a joke to amuse people?

However, it wasn't long before the laughter resumed.

This time, it carried a hint of self-deprecation; it was genuinely amusing that they had almost been deceived by this boy. He claimed it was just a joke, but was he really serious about that? Surely, it was merely an excuse to brush off the situation.

"Just a joke, huh?" The student who had stepped forward wore a knowing smile, as if he could see through Zhu Ping'an's little ploy.

"Yeah, when I was saying goodbye to my relatives at the ten-mile long pavilion, I saw everyone looking gloomy, so I casually wrote that poem to lighten the mood."

Zhu Ping'an spoke sincerely, but to everyone else, it seemed like he was putting on a show.

The crowd looked at Zhu Ping'an with different expressions, some with disdain. To say that a poorly written poem was just a joke was simply shameless.

The student who had stepped forward was quite quick-witted; as soon as Zhu Ping'an finished speaking, he followed up with, "Oh, so it really was just a joke."

At this point, he suddenly turned and said, "Then please compose a serious poem now, so that we can be enlightened!"

Hearing this, the crowd couldn't help but silently cheer, "Bravo!" Yes, just like that! You say it was a joke? Then let's see you write a serious one now, hahaha...

With his own spear against his own shield.

The student who had stepped forward left a good impression in everyone's minds, even among Zhou Xuezheng and the others. Seeing their appreciative looks, he couldn't help but feel that his decision was wise.

Opportunities are created by people.

The student who stood up felt satisfied with his decision to do so, and at this moment, looking at Zhu Ping'an, who was just a bumbling fool, he found him quite endearing.

"Seriously, just do one."

"Do one."

Everyone was emotionally charged, urging Zhu Ping'an to seriously write a poem, just waiting to see Zhu Ping'an make a fool of himself and for Huaining County to suffer embarrassment.

Zhou Xuezheng and others were also staring intently at Zhu Ping'an, eager to see what kind of laughable poem this bumbling fool would come up with next. They intended to present it to the respected lord of the government, as the imperial examination was a place for selecting talents for the country, and it must be taken seriously. They were determined to punish this person severely, even holding Huaining County's lord accountable, leaving no room for error.

"Uh, alright."

Zhu Ping'an glanced at the crowd and nodded. Everyone was watching him expectantly, and refusing any longer would be disrespectful. Furthermore, seeing Zhou Xuezheng's dark expression, if he failed to produce a poem that satisfied him this time, he feared he might end up being made an example of, ruining his chances for the imperial examination. This was not the outcome he desired; he wanted to walk far along the path of scholarship since all else was of lesser importance.

"Alright, here's a serious version of that joke about being bitten by a snake and hearing birds in the ten-mile long pavilion."

As Zhu Ping'an spoke, he began to write fervently on the pristine rice paper.

Master Hongyi, I apologize. If you see this verse in a few hundred years, please don't scold me too harshly.

Once Zhu Ping'an finished, he lightly blew on the ink and handed the completed paper, filled with writing, to the student who had stood up.

The student wore a mocking smile, not having much hope for the poem Zhu Ping'an handed over. He thought that Zhu Ping'an's earlier display of writing was merely an act of desperation, a bluff.

With a mocking gaze, he looked at the poem that Zhu Ping'an had composed, curious to see what kind of laughable verse this "talented person" had produced under pressure.

Just one glance, and the smile on the student's face withered, replaced by an expression akin to constipation...

What happened? The crowd was extremely curious about why he looked like that. Could it be that the poem from this "great talent" was truly so unsightly?

Thus, everyone couldn't help but be curious, mocking and asking questions.

The student couldn't utter a word, only passing the rice paper around for everyone to read. Soon, everyone wore a similarly constipated expression.

When the paper reached Zhou Xuezheng's hands, it was a bit crumpled from being handled, but the characters written on it were increasingly clear:

Outside the long pavilion, by the ancient road, fragrant grass stretches to the sky. The evening breeze brushes the willows, and the sound of the flute lingers; the sunset mountains are beyond the mountains.

At the ends of the earth, in the corners of the land, old friends are half scattered. One ladle of turbid wine drains the remaining joy; tonight, the dream of separation is cold.

Zhou Xuezheng found it hard to tear his gaze away from the rice paper...

The atmosphere at the Poetry Association had become quite strange. From the very beginning, everyone was laughing and chatting, toasting and exchanging pleasantries. Even when mocking and teasing Zhu Ping'an, the atmosphere was lively. But at this moment, the mood had turned strangely quiet. Normally, after someone recited a poem, there would be comments and discussions, but now, no one spoke, each wearing a look of constipation.