

Rise 91

Chapter 91: The Surprising Immortal Poetry Gathering (4)

Why is the atmosphere so strange?

But did that young man write some nonsensical poem again?

Why do everyone's expressions seem so odd, as if a relative of a young lady had come to visit?

The beautiful singer in charge of the hymn was quite surprised. Why did everyone look like that after seeing the poem written by that wastrel young man? It felt strange...

After a few minutes, the previously silent atmosphere suddenly became noisy. People either murmured to themselves, whispered to each other, or quietly questioned, transforming the upstairs atmosphere into one reminiscent of a market:

"Though the artistic conception is beautiful and heartfelt, fresh and elegant, it still feels off. What kind of poetic form is this? I can't find any corresponding name for it; it's truly nonsensical. Can he even write poetry?"

"Can a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old boy have such feelings of 'half of my friends have fallen away'? Your friends are only thirteen or fourteen years old, without any floods, earthquakes, or disasters. How can they fall away?"

"Perhaps the entire Huaining County's scholars are worried that we will scrutinize them like this, pondering over the talents in the top examination. To cover up the good work he did outside the long pavilion on the ancient path, where a flock of white egrets flies into the blue sky, they band together to fabricate this, but it's a pity that this poem is beyond saving. Even with the combined efforts of the entire Huaining County, they can only produce such nonsensical poetry..."

"It's probably copied from somewhere else..."

"I feel it's also copied from another place. I wonder how much it cost to buy this. How could a young boy produce such poetry?"

"This child must be crazy for fame; did he spend his family's fortune to buy this poem?"

At first, people's voices were not loud; they were only tentatively questioning. However, when many people started to express doubts, the exchanges sparked, and the volume increased. Initially, everyone questioned the title of the poem, and then they began to doubt its content.

"Was this poem written by you?" After a long time unable to tear his eyes away from the poem, Zhou Xuezheng finally looked up. However, a multitude of questions filled his mind, causing him to raise his head and stare at Zhu Ping'an, asking loudly.

Before seeing this young man, he had heard tales of his actions, such as being bitten by snakes, listening to birds, and his antics during the county exams. Zhou Xuezheng felt a fire of indignation in his heart, sketching an image of the young man: a round face, big ears, and a completely useless appearance.

But upon seeing this boy, he discovered he looked like a simple, honest farmer's son, yet gave off the impression of being gluttonous and completely squandering his parents' hard-earned money, which made him quite disgusted.

When the crowd mocked him earlier, the boy remained calm and composed, which surprised Zhou Xuezheng.

When he held the brush in one hand and waved his sleeve to write with fervor, and the poem was passed to him, his astonishment was no longer just a little, but completely filled him.

What kind of boy is this? Questions surged one after another, leaving Zhou Xuezheng unable to contain himself.

The poetry of the entire Qing Dynasty, the Republic of China, and even modern times was all "written" by me. No matter which poem it is, this world has yet to see them. They will be introduced to this world for the first time through my hands. How could they not belong to me?

"Yes, I'm not good at poetry; this poem took me months to conceive," Zhu Ping'an answered candidly, humbly, with no trace of arrogance, like a simple young man.

"Some have questioned the title of this poem; how do you explain that?" After hearing Zhu Ping'an's first answer, Zhou Xuezheng immediately raised another question.

Upon hearing this question from Zhou Xuezheng, everyone upstairs became very interested, wanting to see how this young man would respond.

Because the farewell poem that Zhu Ping'an wrote really couldn't find any corresponding poetic title.

"As I mentioned earlier, I'm not good at poetry. The titles of ancient poems are fixed musical forms with structured melodies. Writing poetry requires matching them with their tunes, but I was not satisfied after several attempts. Either the words didn't fit the melody, or the melody didn't match the words. One day, I accidentally read the 'Ruan Lang Gui' by the great Song dynasty poet Xin Qiji, and I felt quite a connection with the second half of it. So, I took the second half of that title, adjusted its tones and rhythms slightly, and after pondering over it for several months, I created this farewell poem. I'm not good at poetry; any shortcomings will surely make Elder Zhou laugh."

Zhu Ping'an dared to bring this farewell piece by Master Li Shutong from the Republic of China here, and he had already thought through his words in advance, so he would not be aimlessly vague.

Thus, Zhu Ping'an responded fluently, neither humble nor overbearing, speaking with conviction and sincerity.

After all, everyone present was well-read, and they were familiar with Xin Qiji's "Ruan Lang Gui":

The lights are dimming in front of the mountain as dusk approaches, and clouds come and go over the mountain peak.

In the sound of partridges, I count the homes in the village, meeting an old friend in the Xiang River.

I wave my feather fan and adjust my silk scarf; in my youth, I was covered in dust from riding horses.

Now, I am haggard, composing verses to summon the soul; a Confucian cap often misleads me.

The second half of the poem is just as Zhu Ping'an said, "I wave my feather fan and adjust my silk scarf; in my youth, I was covered in dust from riding horses. Now, I am haggard, composing verses to summon the soul; a Confucian cap often misleads me." Aside from slight differences in tone and rhythm, it indeed matches the second half of "Ruan Lang Gui."

In simple terms, "ci" refers to the lyrics in a song, while "cipai" is actually the name of a musical score with a fixed form and structure. Writing ci is the process of filling words into a fixed musical score, so writing ci is also called "filling lyrics." "Cipai" did not come into being naturally; it has its origins and development history. Therefore, although Zhu Ping'an's farewell based on the second half of "Ruan Lang Gui" is somewhat bold and whimsical, it can still be understood.

"Hmm, although there are some inappropriate parts, we are not overly pedantic; this ci is fresh and unconventional, avoiding clichés. However, how do we explain that half of our close friends are scattered and we are left with only a jug of turbid wine to enjoy the remaining joy? You are still young; how can you understand that half of your close friends are scattered, leaving only the remaining joy?"

Zhou Xuezheng temporarily set aside the issue of the cipai, but he raised questions about the words Zhu Ping'an had used in his farewell.

"Zhou Lao, you can observe my current situation. I have many distinguished guests, yet there is not a single close friend present. Otherwise, how could a playful work have come to this? In the past, we were close friends, either working in the fields or serving in wealthy households, struggling for our livelihoods. Upon careful reflection, I cannot help but feel that close friends have indeed scattered. As for 'a jug of turbid wine to enjoy the remaining joy,' it is merely my attempt to express sorrow through new lyrics."

Zhu Ping'an cupped his hands in salute toward Zhou Xuezheng, and a hint of loneliness appeared on his honest face.

Li Lao and Zhao Lao, who were sitting next to Zhou Xuezheng, nodded upon hearing this, agreeing with Zhu Ping'an's words. From the moment they entered the room, they had sensed that the students from counties like Tongcheng and Taihu were somewhat cold toward Zhu Ping'an, even those from the same county seemed less enthusiastic. The thirteen-year-old boy, among a group of people much older than him, could not help but feel a sense of isolation.

"Then why did you eat, drink, and sleep during the examination?" This was almost Zhou Xuezheng's final question.

While eating, drinking, and sleeping in the examination hall is not entirely forbidden, it is a practice reserved for provincial exams, where one must not leave the examination hall for several days. A county examination only lasts one day; it would be manageable to endure. Eating, drinking, and sleeping in such a setting is quite improper; even if one possesses some literary talent and intelligence, the attitude is too unrefined.

"Oh, this actually has its reasons. I was quite chubby as a child, and my mother adored me. When I grew a bit older, I lost weight, and my mother often blamed herself for not taking good care of me. This time, the boy's examination is my first time away from my parents. My mother is worried and anxious about whether I can take care of myself. I thought that after leaving home, I should eat more, gain some weight, and when I return home, I want my mother to see me and feel that I've gotten fatter. That way, she wouldn't worry and blame herself. Of course, I also indulged in eating a bit too much, haha..."

Zhu Ping'an smiled shyly, speaking sincerely, with his eyes full of longing for his hometown and parents.

Once Zhu Ping'an spoke, the entire poetry gathering fell into a deeper silence. His words, reminiscent of a lamb kneeling to nurse, evoked feelings of nostalgia for parents among many students far from home, and resonated deeply with the older individuals.

"Foolish child!" Zhou Xuezheng sighed, waving his hand to signal Zhu Ping'an to sit down.