

Rise 92

Chapter 92: The Surprising Immortal Poetry Gathering (V)

Filial piety is the foundation of virtue and the source of education. Filial piety is the root of a person's moral character; those who possess such filial heart will not have poor virtues.

Although this student behaved inappropriately in the examination hall, considering his sincere filial piety, Zhou Xuezheng decided not to pursue the matter further.

Zhou Xuezheng's unwillingness to investigate does not mean that others are equally disinclined. The scholars from Tongcheng and Taihu counties, although briefly shaken by Zhu Ping'an's farewell poem, soon began to notice the numerous flaws in it.

The poetry was good, but it was merely an excerpt from a verse of "Ruan Lang Gui," which did not reflect true skill. Furthermore, no matter how well he explained it, he could not prove that this farewell poem was composed by him. His age and the style of this poem did not match at all; it was simply unconvincing.

Many people still categorized Zhu Ping'an's poem as something written by someone else.

Due to such sentiments, people were unwilling to let Zhu Ping'an take advantage of the situation and were reluctant to see Zhou Xuezheng deceived by him.

Moreover, many had composed poems earlier, yet the limelight seemed to have been stolen by Zhu Ping'an, and not many scholars were willing to accept this. It was a good opportunity to showcase their talents in front of Zhou Xuezheng and the elders, Li Lao and Zhao Lao.

Thus, someone suggested that since it was a poetry meeting, they should invite Zhou Xuezheng and others to propose a theme for poetry composition, limiting the participants to create poems on that theme, and compile the best works into a book, leaving behind a beautiful memory of this poetry gathering.

Although there is no first in literature and no second in martial arts, everyone is young and full of vigor; who doesn't have a competitive spirit? Furthermore, the scholars from Tongcheng and Taihu counties clearly had ulterior motives. As soon as the suggestion was made, everyone became excited and eagerly agreed.

Zhou Xuezheng was also pleased to hear this. He slightly bowed his head and discussed with Li Lao, Zhao Lao, and others for a moment before settling on a topic.

The topic was not difficult, but to write something innovative was not so easy.

"Appreciating Snow"

Upon hearing this topic, the students looked delighted. It was a theme they were familiar with, and everyone was eager to write a good poem about snow to leave a favorable impression in front of Zhou Xuezheng and the others.

When Zhu Ping'an heard the suggestion to write poems, he understood their intentions; it was nothing but to gain fame and make him look foolish. There were certainly numerous poems about snow written in the Qing Dynasty and later periods, and he could easily pull out one that would cause those people to embarrass

themselves. However, he was still just a young man. The farewell poem he had just recited had already put him in the spotlight, and if he did it again, he would likely be put on the hot seat. It was better to refrain from taking unnecessary risks.

The beautiful singer responsible for reciting poetry had just received Zhu Ping'an's previous farewell poem. She couldn't wait to read it and, after a long time, finally came to her senses, glancing at the poem and then at the table of young men...

At this moment, some of the scholars present had already finished their poems and wore expressions of pride.

As usual, the poems were copied several times, named, and passed around for everyone to read.

Once the first poem was shared, the second followed. The scholars were unwilling to be left behind and eagerly shared their snow poems with everyone.

During the poetry meeting, students occasionally shared their snow poems, some of which were excellent while others were not very good. As each snow poem was passed among the group, anyone with an opinion on any poem could stand up and express their thoughts, engaging in discussion with everyone.

Zhou Xuezheng, along with Li Lao and Zhao Lao, sat at the table, enjoying wine with poetry. Whenever they came across a good snow poem, they would take a sip of wine, share a few words of laughter, and offer some comments on it.

"Hmm, this one can be considered a fine piece... 'Sorrowful clouds linger over the sun terrace, blending the universe as the snowflakes dance. In harmony with the moonlight, it presents auspicious colors, competing in beauty with the cold plum blossoms. The songs of the Ying guests drift away, scattering like the sleeves of palace maidens in dance. Who would know of the kindred spirits that do not meet? Shanke, driven by inspiration, comes for you...' Li Gong, Zhao Gong, if there are no better poems, this one might just qualify as the highlight of today's poetry meeting. Tongcheng's Xia Luoming can indeed be considered a promising talent."

Zhou Xuezheng took a sip of wine and shared his thoughts about this fine work with the elders, Zhao Lao and Li Lao.

"Hmm, very good, very good. It has both grandness and meticulous detail, utilizing the moonlight and the cold plum blossoms effectively. It also makes good use of literary references; very impressive. This poem is likely to stand out today," Li Lao said, looking at the snow poem by Xia Luoming that Zhou Xuezheng had passed him, nodding with satisfaction.

At this moment, Zhao Lao, sitting nearby, stroked his beard and laughed, "Hahaha, don't draw conclusions too early. The one in my hand is not inferior to yours. Uh, it was written by Wang Jin from Taihu. 'A gentle breeze shakes the courtyard trees, fine snow falls through the curtain gaps. The mist drifts like clouds, while the snow gathers like flowers on the steps. I do not see the spring willows, only the white branches of the osmanthus. Unseen tears go unnoticed, longing is of no use...'"

Hearing this, Zhou Xuezheng, Li Lao, and the others all laughed. "What Zhao Lao said is quite right. Let's hold off on our conclusions for now. But if there are no other fine works, it seems the top spot will be chosen from these two pieces today."

Xia Luoming from Tongcheng, hearing Zhou Xuezheng and the others' evaluations of his snow poem, glanced at Zhu Ping'an with a proud expression.

On the other hand, Wang Jin from Taihu showed little reaction, engaging in light conversation with others, his expression unchanged.

Xia Luoming looked down on Zhu Ping'an at this moment, as almost everyone had finished their poems, while Zhu Ping'an had not written a single word.

At Xia Luoming's signal, several scholars from Tongcheng approached Zhu Ping'an, holding their wine cups.

"Sir, why have you not started writing?"

The scholars from Tongcheng mocked Zhu Ping'an, asking loudly.

This loud question drew everyone's attention.

"I'm not good at writing poetry; I have only thought of one line at this moment," Zhu Ping'an said, looking quite earnest as he admitted that he had only come up with one line.

The surrounding students burst into laughter upon hearing this. "Just one line after all this time!"

The students from Tongcheng and Taihu laughed even louder, having anticipated this moment.

"Haha, this fox has finally shown its tail!"

That farewell poem was certainly written by someone else, wasn't it? Otherwise, why can't you write even a simple snow poem now?

Zhou Xuezheng and the others also looked over. Unlike the other students, their gazes held no mockery, only some expectation. That farewell poem could not have been written by someone else; how could such talent be content to lend their pen to a young man? Moreover, it couldn't have been overheard from elsewhere. Once such fine poetry emerged, it would spread widely. Why had they only just heard of it now? Therefore, they still held some hope for Zhu Ping'an.

"One line, just one line! Write it out for everyone to see," the students from Tongcheng and other counties urged.

"How can one line make a poem? Let's forget it," Zhu Ping'an shook his head.

"It's fine, just write it quickly," the students from Tongcheng and other counties were not about to let it go so easily; they were waiting to see Zhu Ping'an make a fool of himself.

"Uh, then I'll put together a few lines on the spot, but please don't take offense. I really only have one line worth mentioning; I'm not trying to deceive everyone," Zhu Ping'an emphasized again and again before writing, making it clear that this poem only had one line he was satisfied with, while the rest were hastily thrown together.

"Alright, just write! We can't wait any longer," the crowd was uninterested in Zhu Ping'an's explanations and kept urging him on.

Under the pressure from the crowd, Zhu Ping'an began to write, and everyone gathered around to see what this promising talent had come up with after only conceptualizing a single line.

As soon as the first line was finished, everyone doubled over with laughter.

On the snowy white Xuan paper, there appeared this line:

"A piece, two pieces, three, four pieces."

Someone shouted out Zhu Ping'an's line loudly, and uproarious laughter erupted: "What, is this really a poem? One, two, three, four—are you counting? Oh no, it hurts to laugh! Is the next line going to be five, six, seven, eight? I can't take it anymore!"

"This is just something I quickly put together; it's not the line I was thinking of," Zhu Ping'an said, trying to defend himself amidst the laughter.

The crowd scoffed at this, saying, "Come on, we could put together something better in a heartbeat!"

"Quick, write the second line!" they urged.

With more pressure and ridicule, Zhu Ping'an wrote another line.

This time, the laughter grew even louder, with many people laughing so hard they couldn't stand up, pounding their chests in amusement.

"Five pieces, six pieces, seven, eight pieces—hahaha, your counting is really unique, hahaha..."

Amidst the laughter, Zhu Ping'an's voice seemed weak, "This is just me filling up space."

"Filling space? You can't even write poetry! This is hilarious!"

As the laughter continued, Zhu Ping'an wrote his third line.

"Thousands of pieces, tens of thousands of pieces."

The crowd was now too weak to comment; they laughed until tears were nearly streaming down their faces. If they weren't scholars, they would have been rolling on the ground with laughter.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight... once you start counting, it doesn't rhyme anymore, just 'thousands' and 'tens of thousands,' how ridiculous!"

If anyone were to claim that the previous farewell poem wasn't written by someone else, who would believe it? Everyone laughed while considering how Zhou Xuezheng and the others might feel, and how the official would react.

"Hmm, the next line is the one I actually conceived," Zhu Ping'an habitually reminded everyone before writing again.

"Just write already!" the crowd laughed and urged.

"I've warned you, don't blame me for playing tricks! And don't lump me in with the likes of Ruan Ji!"

"Flying into the reeds, never seen again."

As soon as Zhu Ping'an finished this line, a curious person read it out loud again. After finishing, he realized this line seemed different from the previous ones, and then everything changed.

Why did this line, when added to the earlier ones, have a sense of bringing the poem to life?

Once Zhu Ping'an completed the last line, everyone's laughter abruptly stopped.

This final line seemed to revitalize the entire poem.

Zhou Xuezheng, Li Lao, Zhao Lao, and the others exchanged glances; it seemed the top piece of the evening would be hard to decide, yet somehow also easy to choose.

In an instant, the poetry gathering fell into silence.