

RISE OF THE POOR

Chapter 1: The Son of a Poor Family

This is Xiahe Village, an ordinary yet extraordinary small village.

Nestled between mountains and rivers, it boasts beautiful scenery. The mountains are lush with trees, the waters are rich with fish and shrimp, and in front of the village, there are fences, while behind it stand loquat trees. The villagers plant melons and beans around their homes. The village has the simplicity of fences and thatched huts, as well as the tranquility of green mountains and clear waters.

In modern times, this place would undoubtedly be considered one of the most beautiful villages, but in ancient times, things were different—there was only poverty and backwardness, not beauty.

At the western end of the village, there is a high slope. From the top of this slope, most of the village can be seen. On the slope, a five or six-year-old child with a sturdy appearance was looking down at the village and reflecting.

What good is the beautiful scenery of green mountains and clear waters when transportation is inconvenient and people rely on nature for survival, constantly suffering from natural disasters? For those struggling to make ends meet, what else can they appreciate besides food? Instead of watching the sun rise over the mountains, they'd rather be given a coarse grain bun—it would be much more practical.

Isn't it strange for such thoughts to come from a child?

Actually, it's not. Although the body is that of a five or six-year-old, inside is the mind of a graduate student from the 21st century who specialized in classical Chinese literature. After being rejected for jobs over 100 times and lamenting before bed about how hard it was for a humanities student to find a job in their field, the next thing he knew, he woke up as this child named Zhu Ping'an, with the nickname Xiao Zhi.

This body had fallen ill before he arrived and likely couldn't make it through. Somehow, he woke up and had taken over this body.

After many days of subtle probing, he discovered that this was the Ming Dynasty, the era of the Four Books, Five Classics, and the Eight-legged

Essay. This realization left him silently staring up at the sky—he had truly ended up in a time that matched his field of study...

But since he was here, he decided to make the best of it. Thinking back to the frustration of not being able to apply his skills in the 21st century, now that fate had given him a chance at employment, it would be a waste not to seize it. After all, in his past life, he had been an orphan with no ties.

"Xiao Zhi! Xiao Zhi! Time to go home, or you'll get spanked and cry again by your mom!"

A group of rowdy kids rushed past the bottom of the slope, afraid they'd be scolded and punished by their elders if they got home late.

Xiao Zhi! What a nickname. Even a name like Huzi (Tiger) or Shitou (Stone) would sound better. Of course, he was just complaining; he knew the reason behind the tradition of giving children humble names in ancient times.

In the eyes of the ancients, the reason why children had a hard time surviving was that from the moment they were born, they had to pass through a series of obstacles set by ghosts and spirits. If they failed to pass these obstacles, they would lose their lives. Livestock, on the other hand, were different. Their lives were seen as cheap, and they didn't need to face these trials, which is why their survival rate was so high. Therefore, people believed that the more lowly and inhuman a child's name was, the better. After all, livestock had such a high survival rate. The more like an animal, the easier it was to survive and

fool the underworld ghosts, avoiding the trials altogether if the child was mistaken for livestock.

When Zhu Ping'an heard that there were boys in the village named "Goumei" (Dog Sister) or even "Goushi" (Dog Poop), he felt a sense of relief, as if he had narrowly escaped misfortune. Compared to these names, "Xiao Zhi" (Little Pig) was much milder in taste.

It had been more than ten days since Zhu Ping'an arrived in this era, and he had gradually moved from being unaccustomed to reluctantly accepting this reality.

Living in this time, the naming customs were a minor concern; the real challenge was the way of life. This was a period dominated by old morals and old ethics. There was no electricity or internet, but more concerning were the widespread beliefs in the Three Bonds and Five Relationships, the Three Obediences and Four Virtues, and the fatalism involving gods and ghosts. Those novels that depict protagonists from the future arriving with a halo of greatness, shaking the world with just one move, and becoming invincible with the wave of a finger? Pure nonsense. If you tried such antics after time traveling here, you would have been burned to ashes by the village elders.

This was no exaggeration. In the village, Old Wang Tou had been force-fed a large bowl of water mixed with burnt paper talismans just because he had

been talking in his sleep for a few nights. Wang Er Mazi from the neighboring village came back from the county speaking like the Huji people (foreigners), and after boasting a few sentences, he was tied to a post and left to bake in the sun for three days, accused of being possessed by a ghost.

How could one person possibly fight against an entire world?

So, in the ten-plus days since he arrived, Zhu Ping'an had been doing his best to play the role of a little child. Cautious and careful, he avoided doing anything out of the ordinary, lest he be tied to a stake and roasted alive. He definitely did not want to be his own spokesperson ("bring salt").

It was getting late, and he had to hurry home, or he would be scolded again. Zhu Ping'an stretched out his little legs and dashed down the hill toward home.

Why did it feel like there was a cool breeze blowing between his thighs? Could it be that his little legs were moving so fast that they had reached lightning speed?

When Zhu Ping'an reached the bottom of the hill, he stopped and looked down, only to see a little noodle hanging between his legs, fluttering in the wind.

Split pants?

How could you expect someone with the mental age of over twenty to wear split pants? How could anyone have fun like this?

This was intolerable! When he got home, he definitely had to fight for the right not to wear split pants.

As he walked along, the thatched mud-brick houses were scattered in disarray. Xiahe Village, though nestled between mountains and rivers, was still a remote and poor place. The locals' use of the land and water was limited to meeting basic survival needs. When they needed to build a house, they went up the mountain to cut down a few trees to bring back for beams. When they ran out of rice, they went to the mountains to pick wild vegetables and fruits, or caught a few small fish from the river to throw in the pot. The economy was still that of a feudal small farming society, with most villagers relying on their small plots of land to survive. Only a few landlord families were somewhat better off.

The landlords had big businesses, with hundreds of acres of fertile land that they rented out. The rent alone was more than enough for an average family to work their whole lives for. With that money, they could buy more land or set

up shops, and the money would keep rolling in, making their lives sweeter than honey. For poor families, the output from their own small plots was barely enough to fill their bellies. They had to rent land to farm, and since there were no land tax reduction policies in ancient times, after paying off the heavy taxes and rent, if they could feed the family, they were already doing well.

The Zhu family was slightly better off, with over ten acres of fertile land, making them a middle-class family in the village. However, with so many mouths to feed, and the eldest brother not contributing to production due to his studies for the imperial exams, the Zhu family was still struggling to make ends meet.

Of course, from the outside, the Zhu family seemed to be doing okay. Compared to the typical thatched mud-brick houses in the village, at least the Zhu family lived in a timber and earth courtyard house. But in reality, the Zhu family's situation was worse than the average household in the village.

As soon as Zhu Ping'an entered the house, he was met by his current mother, Mrs. Chen, who was standing at the entrance to the courtyard with a stern look on her face, glaring at him. When she saw that he had returned in one piece, her expression softened like ice melting in spring. She had been waiting for him to come back. Chen, in her thirties, dressed as a young woman, had a touch of feistiness in her eyebrows. Her hair was pinned up with a lacquered hairpin that had lost its paint, and there were two patches on her clean buttoned ruqun (traditional dress).

"Mother, I don't want to wear split pants anymore," Zhu Ping'an said as soon as his short legs crossed the threshold, beginning his campaign for the right to wear normal pants.

Before he could finish speaking, Chen grabbed him by the ear.

"You little rascal! I worked hard to raise you, scrimping and saving to make you clothes, and now you're complaining? You're still so young, and you already don't want to wear split pants?"

"Mother, ow, it hurts! I'm not a two- or three-year-old anymore!" Zhu Ping'an cried out in pain, pulling on Chen's arm with his chubby little hands and tiptoeing to ease the pain.

What nonsense! You're only five! Chen looked down at her five-year-old son and couldn't help but find his remark amusing. Her little son, full of life and vigor, was far more spirited than his older brother.

Although it's amusing, Chen's strength hasn't diminished. This little brat was never obedient in the first place. A few days ago, he fell ill, and now he's even more resilient, running around all day.

"You still know pain, huh? Running wild everywhere, and if you get taken by beggars, I'll be at peace," Chen said, glaring at Zhu Ping'an. The thought of children going missing in the county town gave her lingering worries. Fortunately, with people coming and going in the village, it was quite safe.

"Second sister-in-law, what boy isn't wild? It's better for him to be sturdy, so don't punish Xiao Zhi," Aunt Zhang, who was washing dishes by the well in the courtyard, looked at Xiao Zhi with some envy and persuaded Chen to cool down. Zhang was just thirty but only had one daughter, Zhu Pingyu, who was a year younger than Zhu Ping'an, so she envied Chen for having two sons.

"Don't plead for him, third family! This brat will take the roof off the house if he's not beaten for three days," Chen said, pulling Xiao Zhu Ping'an's ear and dragging him to the kitchen.

"Say, do you dare to run wild and not come home for meals in the future?" Chen shouted, but then she quietly took a peeled boiled egg from the steamer. Looking out the window to ensure no one was paying attention, she quietly stuffed it into Zhu Ping'an's hands.

An egg! Zhu Ping'an's eyes lit up. After eating plain meals for over ten days, he finally saw something meaty.

There was simply no way to refuse this.

"Ouch, mom! I won't dare again," Zhu Ping'an said, taking the egg while pretending to cry out.

In the twenty-first century, eating was one of his few hobbies. When "A Bite of China" aired, he had saved every penny to try all the affordable delicacies, and he could definitely be called a seasoned foodie.

It was pure, natural, and harmless. It was soft and tasted incredibly good—far better than modern eggs, although that might be due to the fact that he had only eaten bland food since coming here.

"Little clever one," Chen chuckled, tapping Zhu Ping'an on the forehead. She whispered, "Hurry up and eat. When you get to the table, you'll have your heart set on the big house."

At this moment, Zhu Ping'an felt extremely warm inside. In this life, whether it was his fiery mother, his dull father, or his somewhat serious older brother who was about ten years old, all of them treated him well from the bottom of their hearts.

With kind parents and a loving brother, warmth was evident everywhere.

This was also the main reason Zhu Ping'an accepted the fact that he had crossed over. As an orphan in the twenty-first century, he had never felt the warmth of a family. Here, he experienced the kind of care reminiscent of a cow licking its calf, and he gradually became willing to accept it.

"Mom, you're really great! When I grow up, I'll be sure to honor you well," Zhu Ping'an said, hugging Chen's thigh with emotion. "I am your son, and I will definitely honor you both well in the future."

Chen looked at her little son, who was clinging to her like a spoiled brat, clearly enjoying the moment. She felt her little son was much cuter than her eldest. Earlier, she had called for her eldest son, but that silly boy, just like his father, had said something about how eating secretly wasn't the behavior of a real man, which nearly made Chen so angry she could fall over. She had no choice but to send him away. Fortunately, her little son wasn't so rigid; she found it amusing and playfully tapped his forehead. "Just don't annoy me too much, and I'll be grateful. Wipe your mouth before anyone sees."