

RISE OF THE POOR

Chapter 10: The Ancestral Worship and the Return of Fortune

After the sun rose once again, the Zhu household became bustling with activity.

"Eldest daughter-in-law, second daughter-in-law, go to the kitchen and prepare everything. Take out the rabbits and wild chickens that the second son prepared yesterday."

"Third daughter-in-law, sweep the yard again."

"Fourth daughter-in-law, go wake the fourth son. Have him go to the village store to buy some snacks, sunflower seeds, and fruits, and also get some wine."

Early in the morning, Grandmother started ordering her daughters-in-law around, busying them until the house was cleaned up and looked brand new.

The ingredients gathered the previous day had been processed overnight. The wood ear mushrooms and other wild fungi were baked on the stove last night, and this morning the eldest aunt and mother soaked them. Bamboo shoots were peeled, and other ingredients had undergone initial preparation.

Grandfather, rarely seen in new clothes, was wearing an almost-new blue cloth gown, clean and neat. He sat in the center of the courtyard, smoking his pipe, occasionally glancing at the door and listening for any sounds.

The gown Grandfather was wearing was a primary style of men's clothing from the Ming Dynasty. It was a one-piece long robe with slits on both sides, but the central slit was covered by hidden folds. This was one of the more formal types of clothing for men during the Ming Dynasty.

The eldest uncle was not studying in his room anymore. Dressed in the attire of a scholar, he looked much more presentable than Grandfather, strolling around the courtyard with his hands behind his back.

Before long, the fourth aunt had called the fourth uncle to get up. He walked out of the room lazily, yawning and disheveled.

"Fourth son, straighten up your clothes! Look at yourself!" As soon as Grandpa Zhu saw the carefree appearance of the fourth uncle, he immediately blew up, glaring at him and scolding him fiercely.

But since the fourth uncle was Grandma Zhu's favorite, she quickly came to his rescue when she saw Grandpa Zhu getting angry.

"Alright, I told the fourth daughter-in-law to hurry him up. You, rascal, quickly clean yourself up and go to the village store to buy some snacks, fruits, and sunflower seeds. Also, fetch some wine for your father."

Grandma Zhu stuffed some money into the fourth uncle's hand, and he gleefully accepted it, tucking it into his sleeve pocket while promising to complete the task perfectly.

The eldest uncle, along with Father and the third uncle, went to the neighbors to borrow tables and chairs. Although the family had two sets, they knew that with the arrival of the great-uncle's family, it would be a lively affair with many people, and two sets of tables and chairs wouldn't suffice.

By mid-morning, the sound of horses neighing came from outside. Grandpa Zhu put down his pipe and rushed out like the wind.

"They've arrived!"

Grandpa Zhu's voice came from outside, and everyone rushed out in a swarm. Zhu Ping'an squeezed out with them.

Outside, three large horse-drawn carriages had stopped, two of which were identical, while the third was slightly larger.

It turned out that not only had the great-uncle's family come, but the great-aunt's family had also arrived. It was a lively scene as the three carriages squeezed together to bring both families over. The two identical carriages belonged to the great-uncle's family, while the slightly larger one belonged to the great-aunt's family.

The great-aunt had heard that the great-uncle's family was moving south to join their eldest son, so she brought her family along to bid farewell to the great-uncle's family.

The great-uncle and great-aunt's families were clearly more prosperous than Zhu Ping'an's. Their clothing was of a higher grade, with everyone dressed in the latest styles made of silk. Although the great-uncle's family engaged in commerce, the great-uncle was clever and wise. After earning money, he invested in land, buying a lot of it. By spending some extra money at the local government office, he was able to register as a farmer. If anyone questioned

it, the great-uncle would simply say, "I'm a landowner. Look at all the land I have. What else could I be but a landowner?"

The eldest son in the great-uncle's family, who is also Zhu Ping'an's big cousin, is doing business in the south. His wife is at home taking care of the two children and looking after the elderly. The youngest son of the great-uncle's family is the third cousin, who has just started a family and currently has no children.

The great-aunt is a very warm-hearted and generous old lady, while the great-uncle is like a gourd with a sawed-off mouth—he speaks very little. He has a son and a daughter, both of whom have their own families. The second cousin's family has two children: a 12-year-old cousin and a 10-year-old cousin; the little aunt's family has only one cousin, who is eight years old this year.

Looking at the clothing of several cousins, the styles and fabrics are much more fashionable, making them look quite good. Then, looking at himself, he feels rather out of place; the only thing Zhu Ping'an can be thankful for is that he no longer has to wear split-crotch pants, or else he would only be hanging from a branch in the southeast.

The Zhu family ancestral hall was built with contributions from the Zhu family after they moved here. Although it doesn't cover a large area, great care is

taken with the decorations, and the entire hall cost much more than the old Zhu family residence. The ancestral worship ceremony is led by the great-uncle, who first reads a difficult and obscure sacrificial text. Then he offers incense and burns paper money, followed by presenting a cup of wine before the deity. After that, he leads the grandfather and the eldest son of the second great-uncle to place the sacrificial pork and lamb on the offering table, reciting prayers and performing three bows and nine prostrations with great seriousness.

Zhu Ping'an, along with his older brother and cousins, is led by several great-uncles to kneel in the courtyard. At this moment, Zhu Ping'an envies the several female cousins and younger sisters who do not have to participate in the ancestral worship. Otherwise, these delicate little girls would surely find it difficult to kneel properly.

Rather than such a cumbersome ancestral worship, it would be better to work hard to bring glory to the family. Of course, Zhu Ping'an wouldn't dare say such things out loud.

While kneeling on the ground to worship the ancestors, that strange phenomenon appeared again. Zhu Ping'an once more saw the aura of fortune, and this time it was not just the people; even the space above the ancestral hall had a column of fortune.

It was truly an uncontrollable ability; he had no idea when he might see the aura of fortune, and it appeared suddenly without any warning. The path to freely controlling this power was indeed long and arduous.

The great-uncle's family and the great-aunt's family were surrounded by a misty white aura of fortune. However, strangely enough, there was a strand of rich blue aura on the white aura column in the Zhu family ancestral hall. This blue aura accounted for about one-tenth of the white aura column; blue signifies official favor. Perhaps the ancestors of the old Zhu family were blessing a nobleman because of their descendants' filial piety. It was just unclear whether the one being blessed was the uncle or himself, since only the two of them could study. But it should probably be himself; if it were the uncle, he would have already passed the scholar exam long ago. After all these years, it was unlikely that he couldn't even pass the scholar exam.