

Rise 118

Chapter 118: The Old House

After having breakfast, Zhu Ping'an went to the old house. In addition to the fine tobacco leaves he had bought in the town, his father, Zhu Fu, had also asked him to bring two wild chickens, a fat rabbit, and two fish, all of which were hunted by Zhu Fu and his elder brother in the mountains. Although his mother, Chen, didn't say anything, her expression seemed somewhat displeased.

"I'll go to the old house and to my mentor's place, then I'll go back home to study well. I'll earn a title for you, Mother, one day."

Zhu Ping'an noticed that his mother, Chen, was a bit unhappy. He knew she had always been dissatisfied with the old house, so he deliberately tried to cheer her up before leaving.

"I know you're just trying to fool me with those things. Alright, go ahead, come back early, and I'll make something good for you," Chen's mood improved significantly, and she waved her hand, urging Zhu Ping'an to leave and return quickly.

After saying goodbye to his mother, Zhu Ping'an carried the items and headed towards the old house. Along the way, he met several villagers, who greeted him as uncles and aunts. As before, the villagers were full of questions, all about the upcoming exam, and many felt that Zhu Ping'an had brought honor to the village.

This was just the first step of the imperial examination. Zhu Ping'an felt a bit embarrassed by the villagers' praise.

The walk from home to the old house was only a few minutes, but because of the conversations with the villagers, he ended up taking more than ten minutes to arrive.

He opened the door to the old house and called out, "Grandfather, Grandmother."

The first thing that caught his eye was his little Fourth Aunt, who rushed over with a loud voice, "Ah, Zhì'er is back! Mother, Mother, come quickly, Zhì'er is back! Ah, why are you bringing so much stuff? Chicken, rabbit, and fish!"

As she spoke, Little Fourth Aunt took the wild chicken and rabbit from Zhu Ping'an's hands without hesitation, as it had been several days since they had had any meat.

Good to see you, Airport Security Officer.

"Hello, Fourth Aunt," Zhu Ping'an greeted her with a silly smile.

"Good, good, Zhì'er is even better! He's made our Zhu family proud. The other day, there was drum beating and gong ringing, you wouldn't believe how lively it was." Holding the chicken and fish in one hand and the rabbit in the other, Little Fourth Aunt's face was full of smiles.

Soon, as Little Fourth Aunt called out, Grandmother came out from her room, her white hair neatly combed.

"Zhì'er, you're back! Your grandfather has been asking about you for a while. Come in, come in! Old Fourth's family, go pour Zhì'er a bowl of water." Grandmother didn't look in very good health, but when she saw the wild chicken, rabbit, and fish Zhu Ping'an brought, her expression seemed to brighten slightly.

Behind Grandmother came Grandfather, who was wearing his nearly new blue cloth jacket that he usually didn't like to wear, looking neat and tidy.

"Zhì'er is here, good, good, good grandson," Grandfather praised as soon as he saw Zhu Ping'an. Not long ago, when someone came to the town to deliver good news, Grandfather happened to be there. When the visitors found out he was Zhu Ping'an's grandfather, they praised him for having such a good grandson, saying that he would definitely have great achievements in the future. He was the youngest scholar in the town, even the best in the entire Anqing Prefecture. That day, Grandfather felt so flattered by the praise, but the only regret was that he was wearing rough cloth at the time, so he didn't look very presentable. Since then, Grandfather had been wearing this almost new rough cloth jacket.

Zhu Ping'an then took out the high-quality tobacco leaves he had bought in town and handed them to Grandfather, making him even happier. Grandfather repeated his praise a few more times.

After entering the room, Grandfather and the others asked about the exam, and Zhu Ping'an explained everything in detail.

"I've always seen that Zhì'er is different from others. I knew he would have a day where he'd stand out," Little Fourth Aunt said, patting Zhu Ping'an on the head, and then added with a sense of sentiment, "He'll make a name for himself one day."

Make a name for himself?

Shouldn't that be "stand out"?

Don't use idioms if you don't know them. It sounds creepy. By the way, when I was young, you didn't think I'd stand out, did you? When I washed my hands, you even said I was possessed.

"It's 'stand out,'" Grandfather corrected, tapping his pipe on the table with emphasis.

"Oh, oh, 'stand out,' cough, cough..." Little Fourth Aunt quickly corrected herself, covering her mouth.

After a while, Grandmother couldn't help but ask, "Zhì'er, how is your uncle now? Has his illness gotten better?"

Zhu Ping'an was taken aback by the question. What illness? When did Uncle get sick? Uncle was living so freely and well outside. What illness was he talking about?

"Stop hiding it from me. Your uncle has already written to the family, saying that he's sick and that you've been taking care of him. He also mentioned that the family had sent him money twice. He said he had told

you not to tell us because he didn't want us to worry. It's just that he really has no money for medicine, so he wrote to the family. The family doesn't have enough money, so your aunt went to her parents' house to borrow some, and sent it to him through someone. She hasn't returned yet."

Grandmother's face showed concern, her expression full of worry.

So this was the reason why Grandmother was so anxious!

Uncle really went too far! Looking at Grandmother's worried face, thinking about Aunt borrowing money from her parents, and then imagining Uncle, who was out drinking and having a good time in the Dui Jun Tower in Anqing, Zhu Ping'an felt completely speechless about his hypocritical uncle. If he wanted money, just ask for it. But instead, he made everyone worry by pretending to be sick. It really made him feel like he was disappointed, wishing he could do more for the family.

But now, if he spoke up, he was afraid Grandmother and them wouldn't accept it. Moreover, Uncle had already written a letter beforehand, setting everything up. Uncle was good at saving face, and if he spoke out, Grandmother and Aunt probably wouldn't believe him.

After chatting for a while, Zhu Ping'an was about to leave.

Grandfather stopped him from leaving, saying that Grandmother and the others should take care of the chickens, rabbits, and fish Zhu Ping'an brought, and that he should stay for dinner before leaving. Only when Zhu Ping'an mentioned that he had to go to see his teacher, Old Master Sun, did Grandfather finally let him go.

"Zhi'er, work hard. Your uncle is almost certain to succeed this time. You also need to work hard and bring glory to the family," Grandfather instructed as he stood at the door.

Uncle is indeed set. Set to fail!

Zhu Ping'an silently complained in his heart. But seeing Grandfather's hopeful face, he couldn't bring himself to expose what Uncle had done.

Bringing glory to the family? Uncle could not be relied upon for that, it would have to come from himself.

Just as Zhu Ping'an finished his silent complaints, he saw the fortune above Grandfather and the others' heads again. But this time, in addition to the white fortune above their heads, he vaguely saw something else in the fortune, though it was too unclear to see properly.

What's this? Why is there some change? Strange.

However, fortune is always a bit pointless. It's mysterious and hard to grasp, and you can only see it—it doesn't provide any substantial help to him. Zhu Ping'an didn't pay much attention to it.

Relying on others is like swallowing a three-foot sword, depending on others is like climbing to the ninth heaven. In the end, only one's own effort is the most reliable.

He blinked, calmed his mind, then bade farewell to his grandparents and turned to leave.