

Rise 119

Chapter 119: Seeing the Beauty Again

After leaving the old house, Zhu Ping'an first returned home. His father had already left early to tend to the ox cart, and his elder brother had gone to the mountains to check the traps set yesterday. His mother, Chen, was at home alone, sewing a purse. When she saw Zhu Ping'an return from the old house, she casually asked a few questions. When she found out that the old house had only given Zhu Ping'an a bowl of water, her expression darkened a little. Zhu Ping'an quickly changed the topic, which eased his mother's furrowed brow.

After chatting with his mother for a while, Zhu Ping'an returned to his room, placed a box of tea he had bought from Anqing Prefecture in his bag, and took two rabbits with him. He told his mother he was going to visit his respected teacher. After hearing this, his mother Chen took a basket and filled it with dried wild mushrooms from the yard, asking Zhu Ping'an to take it along.

"Fresh vegetables aren't available yet, so take this along to add to your teacher's meal," said his mother, handing him the basket.

"Mm." Zhu Ping'an nodded enthusiastically, appreciating his mother's thoughtfulness.

The road from Xiahe Village to Shanghe Village was one Zhu Ping'an had walked countless times, and he had visited his teacher, Master Sun, many times as well. He was very familiar with the route.

Master Sun never closed his door at night, and during the day, there was no need to knock. Zhu Ping'an simply walked right in.

Master Sun was not in the yard, but his wife, Mrs. Sun, was there, working in the bamboo patch Master Sun had planted, loosening the soil.

"Mrs. Sun," Zhu Ping'an called softly from a distance.

Mrs. Sun looked up as she saw Zhu Ping'an entering with a basket of rabbits. A smile appeared on her face. "Ping'an is here! Why are you bringing so many things again? Come, come, find a seat. I'll make you a pot of tea once I finish here."

Zhu Ping'an grinned foolishly and walked over. He took the hoe from Mrs. Sun's hands and said, "I can't wait to drink the tea you make, let me take care of the soil loosening."

"You child," Mrs. Sun said, looking at the hoe now in Zhu Ping'an's hands, slightly scolding him.

Zhu Ping'an just responded with a silly grin.

After washing her hands, Mrs. Sun went inside to brew some tea. She brought out two cups and placed them on the stone table outside.

As Zhu Ping'an loosened the soil, he asked Mrs. Sun why Master Sun wasn't at home.

"Oh, it's because of you," Mrs. Sun replied. "You passed the top exam in Anqing Prefecture, and that old man is so happy, he was invited to visit an old friend in Anqing Prefecture. He hasn't come back yet. Meanwhile, his bamboo is fine; he hasn't forgotten about it. He even sent someone to tell me to loosen the soil for him." Mrs. Sun complained.

Master Sun didn't plant many bamboo trees, and Zhu Ping'an soon finished loosening the soil. After washing his hands, he took a cup of tea that Mrs. Sun had brewed, slowly took a sip, and praised her tea. He then took the opportunity to present the box of tea he had bought from Anqing Prefecture as a gift.

Mrs. Sun hesitated but eventually accepted the tea. Shortly after, Zhu Ping'an's bag was filled with several freshly washed apples.

After bidding farewell to Mrs. Sun, Zhu Ping'an left Master Sun's house. After a moment of thought, he headed to another place he often visited in Shanghe Village.

At a large mansion, Zhu Ping'an approached and knocked on the large door between two stone lions.

There was no response. Zhu Ping'an didn't feel discouraged and knocked again.

Then, an impatient voice came from inside, followed by the door opening, and a man in his forties poked his head out.

"Eh? It's you, kid—no, I mean, young master," the doorman said, recognizing Zhu Ping'an and recalling the recent rumors about the youngest child scholar in the town. His attitude shifted from casual to more respectful.

"Hehe, sorry for disturbing Uncle Li's beauty sleep, I came to borrow some books again," Zhu Ping'an said with a silly smile, cupping his hands in apology.

"Ha, look at what you're saying, young master, come in, come in," the doorman, Uncle Li, opened the door, allowing Zhu Ping'an to enter.

After entering, Zhu Ping'an cupped his hands again in gratitude and headed toward the study, as he was familiar with the layout.

As he walked toward the study, he noticed a young man not far away, deep in thought.

Under the warm sunlight, the young man stood in front of a study room that had cost several hundred taels of silver to build. With his hands behind his back, he looked down at the ground, where a small silver frost coal worth just a few silver pieces lay. His mind was filled with many thoughts: What is life for? Is it for earning money, or for studying and taking the imperial examination to become an official? And once one becomes an official, does that mean there are no more ambitions?

For example, my father...

He sank into deep thought...

At this moment, Zhu Ping'an walked past him, and coming from another direction was a young girl with a blue ribbon tied in her hair, her chubby face still round with baby fat.

When she saw Zhu Ping'an, her face lit up with joy, but she first walked toward the young man standing nearby.

The Bun Girl walked up to the boy and said, "Why are you still standing here? Your payment for carrying charcoal is twenty coins. Go to the front yard and settle up with the accountant. This is not a place for you to stay."

"Uh, yeah, okay," the boy quickly nodded and walked out.

At that moment, Zhu Ping'an also saw the boy clearly and called out, "Jun Ge? Didn't you go to your grandmother's house with Auntie?"

Hearing the voice, the boy looked up and saw Zhu Ping'an. He happily shouted, "Xiao Zhi, why are you here? Come quickly, they won't let us stay here. I was bored at my grandmother's house, so I came out for a walk. I didn't expect to be mistaken for a servant, but luckily this family is generous. I carried a basket and they gave me twenty coins, hehe..."

Uh... Zhu Pingjun...

"Zhu Ping'an, what brings you here? You're here to borrow books, right? Come on in!" The Bun Girl called out from a distance, then turned to the boy beside Zhu Ping'an and shouted, "Hey, you, yes, you, go to the front yard and settle your account. This is not a place for you to stay."

Zhu Pingjun was instantly struck as though by lightning, his face twitching. How could there be such a difference between people from the same Zhu family?

Zhu Ping'an explained to the seemingly thunderstruck Zhu Pingjun, "Jun Ge, I'm here to borrow books."

"Hey, I'm talking to you. Hurry up and leave. This isn't a place for you. If you don't leave, they won't settle your payment," the Bun Girl urged again.

"Okay, okay, cough, cough... Well, Xiao Zhi, I'll be going now." Under the Bun Girl's urging, Zhu Pingjun said a few words to Zhu Ping'an and walked toward the front yard.

As soon as Zhu Pingjun left, Zhu Ping'an heard a clear, sweet voice like a lark.

"Hua'er, are you itching for a scolding? Why hasn't the silver frost charcoal been moved yet? The seafood father sent is going to melt!"

Accompanying the voice was its owner. Without even needing to look, Zhu Ping'an knew from the voice that it was the sly girl, Li Shu.

Surrounded by maidservants and older women, the young lady had white teeth, red lips, and graceful gestures. Just looking at her appearance could enchant anyone. But that was all there was to her appearance. As for her inner character, well, Zhu Ping'an just secretly curled his lips.