

## Rise 147

### Chapter 147: Finally Waiting for You

At this time, the Zhu family's old residence had just finished breakfast. Old Master Zhu was sitting in the courtyard, puffing on his pipe. He was dressed in a coarse blue robe and frowned as he looked at the clothes drying on the ropes in the yard. The somewhat newer blue robe he often wore had been washed by his third daughter-in-law yesterday, under the orders of Old Madam Zhu (Liu), and it still wasn't dry.

"Old woman, who told you to wash it? If someone comes, what am I supposed to wear?" Old Master Zhu puffed on his pipe a few times, but he couldn't hold back and turned to complain to Old Madam Zhu, who was busy inspecting the chickens.

Recently, Old Madam Zhu suspected that one of her gluttonous daughters-in-law had been stealing eggs because the chickens weren't laying as many. Early this morning, she came to "inspect" the chickens. This didn't involve literally touching their bottoms but checking the area between their abdomen and backside, gently feeling for any hardness. If there was, it meant the chicken was about to lay an egg. Old Madam Zhu was a seasoned expert at this and could predict with 99.9% accuracy how many eggs the chickens would lay tomorrow. If the numbers didn't match, someone was sure to be scolded.

"You've been wearing it for over half a month! If I didn't wash it, you wouldn't even know its original color. Besides, who's coming? No one's visited in weeks. Aren't you heading to the fields today? Why dress up so formally?"

Old Madam Zhu was counting eggs as she replied without looking up.

"What's wrong, Mother? Are the eggs fewer again?" The fourth daughter-in-law walked out of her room, surprised to see Old Madam Zhu inspecting the chickens. She quickly distanced herself from suspicion. "It wasn't me, Mother! I've been feeling unwell lately and can't eat eggs."

"Oh, sister-in-law, Mother didn't even say it was you. Why so nervous?" The eldest daughter-in-law's voice came from inside the main house, even before she appeared.

"Well, dear sister, perhaps you're the nervous one. I'm not worried at all," the fourth daughter-in-law replied with a sly smile, covering her mouth as she laughed.

Within moments, the courtyard became lively. When the third daughter-in-law came out from her room, the scene became even more chaotic—like a boiling pot about to run dry.

"Enough! It's just an egg—why such a fuss? Fourth daughter-in-law, where's your husband? The third son has already been in the fields for a while. Why hasn't the fourth one moved yet?" Old Master Zhu couldn't take it anymore. He tapped his pipe on the chair leg and glared at Old Madam Zhu, annoyed that she couldn't even manage the daughters-in-law properly.

"That's right, fourth daughter-in-law. Didn't I tell you to call your husband? Why has it taken so long?"

Old Madam Zhu, scolded by her husband, didn't dare retort and instead vented her frustration on the fourth daughter-in-law.

"Mother..." The fourth daughter-in-law smiled awkwardly. "Shouxin... he said he wanted to rest for a bit after breakfast to gather his energy for the fields. But he hit his head accidentally. I don't think he can work today..."

Old Master Zhu's face darkened upon hearing this. His fourth son was utterly useless.

"He hit his head? Was it serious? How careless! Let him rest, then," Old Madam Zhu said, showing concern.

"Hit his head? Why doesn't he just—" Old Master Zhu began, but before he could finish, the sound of their gate opening interrupted him.

"Uncle Zhu! Good news, great news! Quick, clean up the courtyard. Something good is happening!" The man who had just been scolded by an old farmer earlier now ran in, panting heavily.

"What's going on?" Old Master Zhu and the others quickly asked.

Before the man could respond, another voice came from the entrance. They turned to see the old farmer himself, also gasping for breath as he walked in.

"What's the matter? Brother Zhu, I'm not exaggerating here—this is fantastic news, and I heard it first. Your eldest son, he..."

The old farmer didn't even have time to thank anyone before launching into his news. But just as he was about to reveal the key details, a group of aunties and older women crowded in from the gate, taking over the conversation.

"Your eldest son has passed the provincial examination as a Scholar."

"And he ranked first."

"He's incredible! The officials from the county couldn't even wait to enter the village before setting off firecrackers. They wouldn't ride their horses; instead, they insisted on marching in with a full procession, playing music and beating drums. They couldn't be stopped."

Relatives started arriving one after another—seven aunts and eight uncles—chiming in with additional details, their voices lively and expressive, as if they had been there themselves.

"Really?" Old Master Zhu, who had been scowling moments before, was suddenly overjoyed. His anger vanished, and his face bloomed into a bright smile.

"It's true! The officials delivering the good news are already setting off firecrackers at the village entrance. They'll be here soon," people replied in a chorus, unwilling to be outdone.

Hearing the confirmation, Old Master Zhu dropped his precious pipe like it was nothing. Suddenly agile, as if he were 30 years younger, he leapt three feet high and dashed to grab the still-damp blue cloth robe hanging on the line. In a flash, he was off to his room to change clothes.

Old Madam Zhu, meanwhile, abandoned the chicken she had been handling. She tossed the squawking, nearly fainting old hen aside, her face flushed with excitement. It was as if time had rewound to the day the matchmaker had brought a young and dashing Old Master Zhu to her family's home.

He passed?

The eldest aunt, who had been arguing with the fourth aunt and third aunt, suddenly lit up like a goddess descending from the heavens. Her energy and vitality were fully restored, her fighting spirit magnified a hundredfold. She glared at her two sisters-in-law with an expression that said, You weaklings with a combined combat power of just five are no match for me.

"Oh, I almost forgot. Yesterday, Shouyi bumped his head, and I cooked an egg to treat the swelling. Haha, I almost wrongfully blamed it on Eldest Sister-in-law. How terrible of me, haha... Eldest Sister-in-law is so magnanimous; she'll surely forgive her younger sister-in-law. You know, when my husband left, I had a dream about a golden toad hopping into your room. We had it divined, and it was said that your husband would definitely pass the exam. And sure enough, he passed!"

The fourth aunt clasped her hands over her mouth, repeatedly apologizing to the eldest aunt. She even claimed responsibility for things she hadn't done, as if taking the blame were an honor she didn't want the third aunt to steal from her.

"Congratulations, Eldest Sister-in-law," said the third aunt, who wasn't one to flatter but couldn't resist offering a congratulatory remark.

"Yes, congratulations to the eldest family. I always knew you were blessed."

"Indeed! Our village hasn't had a scholar in years, and now your family's Shouren has done it!"

"Your Shouren is the only one who passed from our village!"

Villagers began to pour into the Zhu family courtyard, their voices rising in a cacophony of admiration and compliments.

"Oh, it's nothing, nothing. Please, everyone, have a seat. We're all neighbors, after all. Oh, by the way, Shouren's father took the exam with the second family's Zhi'er. Did Zhi'er pass as well?" The eldest aunt beamed, her demeanor as graceful as that of a matron, inviting everyone to sit down—even though there were only two stools in the courtyard. And despite already knowing only one person had passed, she couldn't resist mentioning Zhu Ping'an.

"No, just your Shouren passed," the villagers replied, their voices brimming with flattery.

The eldest aunt's smile grew even more radiant, embodying her role as the matriarch of the family. Her laughter rang out with genuine joy.

If this were modern times, this would be the perfect moment for background music:

"Finally, I've waited for you. Luckily, I didn't give up..."