

## Rise 148

### Chapter 148: That Night, the Golden Toad

When Old Master Zhu changed into his still-damp blue cloth robe and came out of the house, the government officers, who were bringing the good news, had already approached, blowing their horns and beating their drums.

The sound of firecrackers rang out outside.

"Hurry up, Uncle Zhu, quickly, get ready! They're setting off firecrackers outside!" The villagers, hearing the crackling of firecrackers, couldn't help but urge Old Master Zhu. The official messenger was almost here, and the Zhu family's yard still hadn't been tidied up.

Without Old Master Zhu needing to give orders, the villagers eagerly began to get busy in the Zhu family's yard. Some swept the ground, others watered the plants, some boiled water to make tea, the young and strong went to move the tables, and those living nearby went home to bring over candy, melon seeds, and fruits. Soon, the old Zhu family's house was completely refreshed.

"Hurry up, Third family, go to Second family and get some money for the red envelopes, we've already sent all the money to Eldest family." While preparing the celebratory money, Old Madam Zhu found that there was not enough cash for the red envelopes and urged the Third family to go to Zhu Ping'an's house to get some money for the occasion.

"His wife won't make it in time. The messenger is almost at our doorstep. I've got some cash on me, so you can use it for now."

"I've got over ten coins here."

"I have some as well; this is my hidden savings I kept aside when my wife wasn't looking."

The villagers were so eager that they scrambled to give their money to Old Madam Zhu to use for the red envelopes and rewards. One uncle even took off his shoes and, without hesitation, stuffed a few copper coins, which smelled of foot odor, into Old Madam Zhu's hands.

As soon as the red envelopes were prepared, there was a clamor at the gate. Then the crowd parted, and the officials who had come to deliver the good news entered one after another, playing their instruments and coming before Old Master Zhu and his family.

"Congratulations, congratulations! Congratulations to Master Zhu for passing the imperial examination and being appointed by the Education Officer as a scholar to receive monthly support from the government!"

"Congratulations to Master Zhu for placing first, wishing him continued success and glory in the future!"

"Congratulations, congratulations! Congratulations to the Old Master and Old Madam! From now on, you two can just enjoy the blessings. Master Zhu might even become the top scholar one day!"

The officials delivering the good news were eloquent and well-versed in such matters. As soon as they entered the Zhu family's yard, they immediately recognized Old Master Zhu and Old Madam Zhu as the

family members, so they quickly walked over to them and began to lavish praise and congratulations without hesitation.

Hearing the good news from the officials, the villagers in the house were also overjoyed, following Old Master Zhu's lead. They thought, "Look how impressive Master Zhu is. He might even become the top scholar one day!"

"Shared joy, shared joy!" Old Master Zhu, grinning like he had drunk half a jin of old wine, clasped his hands in return and had trouble speaking clearly. "Wife, hurry, hurry! Give the money to the officials. They've come such a long way!"

Old Madam Zhu seemed to be reliving the days when she was the village beauty, feeling so excited that her hands were shaking as she handed over the red envelopes to the officials delivering the good news.

"Hehe, thank you, Old Master and Old Madam. No need to rush the red envelopes. Let's first read the good news announcement. Then, you can keep the notice. This is a great event that will bring glory to your ancestors." The official holding the red paper did not hurry to accept the red envelopes, wanting to read the notice before collecting them.

"Alright, alright, you're right, you're right," Old Master Zhu nodded repeatedly, smiling so widely his face almost couldn't hold it.

"Congratulations to Master Zhu Ping'an of your esteemed household, who has been appointed as the Education Officer of Southern Zhili. He achieved first place in the Anqing Prefecture entrance examination

and was recognized as a scholar from Huaixian County, with successive victories in the provincial examinations, and is now being recommended for the capital's royal exams."

The official holding the red paper unfolded it, cleared his throat, and began to read the announcement with great enthusiasm.

After reading, the official was surprised to find the entire yard suddenly silent. The Old Master, who had been grinning widely just moments ago, had now closed his mouth and was muttering to himself.

Why did the Old Madam look so happy, yet her face turned pale?

What happened to this family? They were fine just a moment ago. Why did they look as though they were stunned with joy after hearing the announcement? Oh, it could be that they were shocked by the appointment of the Education Officer, or perhaps the unexpected honor of the scholar position left them so pleasantly surprised. After all, a scholar with the government's support would receive four liang of silver every year, not to mention the additional benefits like rice, flour, and oil.

The officials delivering the good news had no idea that Old Master Zhu was actually overwhelmed with a thousand thoughts and frustrations. They mistakenly thought he was so overjoyed that he had become dazed.

The yard was quiet for a few seconds before someone tremblingly spoke up.

"It must be a mistake."

It must be a mistake?

Upon hearing this, the official who was reading the red-paper announcement quickly looked down at it, reading every word carefully. He hadn't made any mistakes; how could it be wrong? He had even practiced several times on the way here without a single error.

"It must be a mistake, It must be a mistake!"

Voices of similar confusion rose from the yard, like a group of ducks quacking.

The official's face turned red as he reread the announcement—there was nothing wrong! Uh, could everyone be playing a prank on us? The people of Xiahe Village sure are interesting.

"It must be a mistake, they've split the family! This is the Zhu Shouren household, Zhu Ping'an is his nephew, we just passed by Zhu Ping'an's house earlier!"

The official was stunned. Did they go to the wrong door?

Actually, it wasn't entirely their fault. Thinking about it, the courier had rushed here from Xingtian Prefecture with three fast horses overnight to Huaining County. The timing was tight, and Huaining County was far from Xiahe Village. The official who signed off on the announcement didn't expect Zhu Ping'an to be a young man.

If it had been a report from the town, there wouldn't have been any mistake, but with the county's personnel handling it, mistakes were bound to happen, especially with the villagers misleading them. A series of factors had led to this error.

At that moment, Chen stood outside the door of Zhu Ping'an's house, looking longingly at the bustling old house, then dejectedly walked inside holding the shoe insert, thinking that out of sight, out of mind.

How could someone like the first uncle have won? The heavens must have been blind for a moment to let someone like him slip through the cracks.

Chen felt uncomfortable, and after entering the yard, she no longer had the mood to continue making shoe insoles. She decided to rest in her room for a while. Just as she sat down on the bed, she heard the sounds of drums and firecrackers outside again.

Is it never-ending?

Once again, Chen furrowed her brows. What's the point of flaunting it just because he passed the imperial exam? What frustrated her even more was that the sounds seemed to have come into the yard, and even the firecrackers felt like they were being set off right outside the main gate.

What was the old house up to? No need to show off like this, right? This must have been her sister-in-law's idea. Is she angry that I didn't go to the old house to congratulate them? Thinking about her husband's behavior, Chen gritted her teeth, counted a hundred coins from the head of the bed, wrapped them in a handkerchief, and prepared a small congratulatory gift to avoid having people block the door.

Just as Chen stepped out from the inner room, she saw many people in the yard.

"Ah, Second Sister-in-law, congratulations! I knew it! On the day Zhi'er went to take the exam, I had a dream, and a golden toad hopped to your house. Someone calculated that Zhi'er was sure to pass, and sure enough, Zhi'er made us proud! He passed the exam and even came in first!"

Fourth Aunt eagerly grabbed Chen Shi's hand, speaking her congratulations with the kind of closeness that suggested they would always be good sisters-in-law.

On the other side, the aunt who had been dragged along by the crowd looked at Fourth Aunt, her face a little contorted. What about basic honesty? Didn't she say that a golden toad hopped into my house?

"Congratulations to Ping'an's mother."

"Congratulations to the second family, Ping'an is really impressive."

"I could tell from when Ping'an was young that he was no ordinary person."

Chen stood there for a while, stunned, before realizing what had happened. The one who passed the exam was her own second child, not the first uncle.

At that moment, Chen's furrowed brow relaxed, and the discomfort in her heart vanished. Her face, which had been filled with disappointment, brightened into a radiant smile.

"Oh, it's nothing, my second child just got lucky."

Chen spoke humbly, but the pride in her words couldn't be hidden.