

Rise 162

Chapter 162: Ancestors Bless Nephews, Not Uncles

When leaving the Li family, it was around four or five in the afternoon. Zhu Ping'an went to visit his mentor's house again, but there was still no one there. It seemed that his mentor wouldn't be coming back in the short term.

The autumn air was refreshing, though it was slightly warm. The flowers and plants under the sun seemed a bit lifeless. However, the crops in the fields, in contrast, were growing strong, bearing heavy fruits, and basking in the sunlight, striving to ripen.

Walking along the countryside path, Zhu Ping'an occasionally greeted the neighbors in the fields. Complimenting their crops for growing well made the neighbors happy for a long time.

As he neared home, he saw his mother, Chen, chatting with a group of aunties. His mother, with a face full of excitement, was telling them something, and the aunties all looked envious.

"Hey, isn't that your Ping'an, Aunt?" one of the aunties saw Zhu Ping'an and said to Chen.

Then Chen turned her head, saw Zhu Ping'an, and waved for him to come over.

Zhu Ping'an took a couple of quick steps forward, first calling out "Mother," and then greeting the other aunties around.

"Zhi'er, come on, tell your mother again what use this 'lín shēng' is. I always forget," Chen said, her face full of pride.

His mother really did enjoy this, didn't she?

But, since his mother was so fond of it, Zhu Ping'an knew he had to cooperate fully. So, he explained the privileges and uses of being a 'lín shēng' (a government stipend recipient) again, using simple language. Some parts were a little exaggerated, but his mother loved hearing it.

"Just wait and enjoy life, the way your Ping'an is, so smart, he'll definitely become an official in the future!" The aunties all expressed their admiration for Chen, praising Zhu Ping'an's intelligence.

"He's not really that smart, just hardworking. Every time I get up to cook, I can see him in the yard reading books and practicing calligraphy..."

Chen said this, but her face was filled with pride in her son.

In the past, Chen didn't care much for chatting with the aunties, but recently, she always liked to gather with them, no matter what they talked about, she would always steer the conversation back to her second son and enjoy everyone's envy. It made her happy all day long.

After enjoying everyone's various expressions of admiration, Chen reluctantly went home with Zhu Ping'an. On the way, the smile never left her face. She was beaming, as if she had become ten years younger.

When Zhu Ping'an and his mother returned home, no one was there yet. As usual, his father was busy with the ox cart, shuttling back and forth between the town and the mountain village. His older brother had gone into the mountains to prepare for the river banquet three days later. Chen started preparing dinner, while Zhu Ping'an went back to his room to copy the books he had borrowed from the Li family that day.

Everything was in order and running smoothly.

The first to return home was Zhu Ping'an's older brother, Zhu Pingchuan, who had gone into the mountains. This time, it seemed like his haul was much larger than usual, as his basket was full, and he was also holding two plump rabbits in his hands.

Not long after, Zhu Ping'an's father returned. After driving the cart into the yard, he unloaded the meat buns, fruits, and other items he had bought in town.

Dinner was warm and comforting, with an unmistakable sense of family love in the air.

It was so good to be home.

Zhu Ping'an couldn't help but sigh in appreciation.

Good to be home?

Not everyone shared that sentiment. For instance, Zhu Ping'an's uncle, Zhu Shouren, who had been traveling back all day and had just arrived home after dark, didn't think so. Home? How could it compare to the bustling, glamorous Qinhuai River?

The Qinhuai River was so much better. There, he was admired for his charm and elegance, unlike now, when he had to sneak back home.

As for why he had to sneak, it was all because of his nephew. The first time he went to take the imperial examination, who would have thought that he would pass not just the county exam, but also the more difficult provincial exam and the even harder imperial exam, coming in first place? Not only did he become a scholar, but he also received the top honors. As for him, he had been unlucky, always failing the exams year after year. Despite studying for decades and attempting more than ten times, a young, inexperienced kid had beaten him to the finish line.

It wasn't so bad when he was away, but the closer he got to home, the more embarrassed he felt. That's why he waited until it was dark, when fewer people were around and it was harder for others to recognize him, to sneak into the village.

Ah, the ancestors blessed the nephew, not the uncle.

Before the exam, he had consulted a fortune-teller, who said that the ancestors were watching over the Zhu family and that his success was almost certain. Yet, in the end, his nephew beat him. Perhaps he should find a feng shui master to check things out; it always felt like the second branch of the family was somehow hindering the first branch, suppressing his fortune.

While Zhu Shouren was lost in thought, he quietly snuck towards the Zhu family's old house.

Luckily, at this time, everyone was at home eating or resting, and there was no one on the street, allowing Zhu Shouren to arrive at the old house undisturbed.

He stood at the Zhu family's old house for a while, collecting his thoughts and emotions before gently pushing open the door.

At this point, dinner had already been finished at the old house. Old Master Zhu was sitting in the yard, enjoying the cool evening air under the starry sky. These past few days, Old Master Zhu had felt both happy and pained. He was happy because his little grandson had passed the exam and became a scholar, taking the top honors. But he was pained because his eldest son had failed again. In fact, Old Master Zhu's greatest wish was for his eldest son to pass the exam. If he had the say, he would have switched his grandson's honor to his eldest son. But reality was harsh, and even though he was happy, there was a lingering sense of disappointment towards his eldest son.

Old Master Zhu also worried about his eldest son. His little grandson had been home for two days, but why hadn't his eldest son returned yet? Was there any trouble on the road?

Just as Old Master Zhu was thinking about his eldest son, he heard the door creak open, and someone walked in.

The figure looked familiar.

Before Old Master Zhu could get a better look, the person came forward, knelt down, and let out a loud cry.

"Father, I am unworthy... I failed again, woo woo woo, I am unworthy... I left home in early February to prepare for the exam, reading and studying from morning till night without a break. I didn't have to take the county or provincial exams, but I never stopped studying. I even gave guidance to Ping'an to help him pass the county and provincial exams. But, alas, my luck was bad. My health failed me. I wasn't ill early on or later, but right before the imperial exam, I fell sick. I was worried that my body wouldn't cooperate, and I couldn't bring honor to the family. So I focused on teaching Ping'an, and he didn't disappoint me. But alas, I failed the exam because I was still sick. I'm unworthy, Father."

Zhu Shouren knelt on the ground, hugging Old Master Zhu's legs, crying with genuine sorrow.

So, it turned out that Ping'an had become a scholar thanks to the teachings of his eldest uncle. No wonder! The faint disappointment Old Master Zhu had felt toward his eldest son evaporated after hearing these heartfelt words.

"Ping'an has been home for two days already. Why did it take you so long to return?" Old Master Zhu couldn't help but ask.

"I was walking to save money. I traveled day and night..."

Zhu Shouren, holding onto Old Master Zhu's legs, sniveled and spoke earnestly.

It really had been day and night for Zhu Shouren. His eldest son had returned after dark, just to save money and ease the burden on the family. Old Master Zhu believed his eldest son's words wholeheartedly and, seeing him return so late, was moved to tears.