

Rise 20

Chapter 20: I Herd Cattle in the Ming Dynasty

As the saying goes, excessive joy leads to sorrow, and I think that's true.

During dinner, an unpleasant thing happened. Halfway through the meal, First Auntie shared some news.

"Father, Mother, it's like this. Jun'er's maternal grandmother sees that he is clever and has decided to support his education. They don't want to delay Jun'er and want to send him to school."

Upon hearing this news, Zhu Ping'an instinctively felt something was off. It was rare to hear of a maternal family willing to help raise the children of a married daughter. The ancients said that a married girl was like spilled water. Was First Auntie's maternal family really that open-minded? Did Jun's uncle and aunt also agree?

In ancient times, there were no tuition fees for schooling, but there were "shuxiu" fees. Students would present gifts to their teachers as a sign of respect, which was essentially the same as tuition fees. This practice had already been implemented during Confucius's time; back then, it involved ham, but now "shuxiu" was all about money.

In rural areas, "shuxiu" fees were much cheaper than in towns, typically around a thousand wen per year, paid in two installments, along with vegetables, eggs, meat, and other gifts. Overall, it could be quite a significant expense.

However, it was said that First Auntie's family was well-off, so it might be possible.

Hearing that the Yue family was willing to pay for Jun'er's schooling, the grandparents were very happy. They valued the eldest son's family highly; if the eldest son could study, then Jun'er would definitely do well in school too.

The grandparents were pleased, especially since it was First Auntie's family footing the bill, so Chen and the younger aunts naturally didn't say anything.

"Jun'er will go to primary school, and Zhi'er isn't small anymore; he can take over Jun'er's job of herding cattle," First Auntie said, feeling proud since no one in the family opposed her. Then she turned her attention to Zhu Ping'an. "It's almost autumn; raise the cattle well so they can work on the farm."

You said just the day before that I was still young!

Did you really suggest that I take over Jun'er's job of herding cattle? Jun'er has never even touched a cow!

First Auntie's arrangement for Zhu Pingjun to herd cattle stemmed from recalling how the family often said that Zhi'er was clever and sensible, making her increasingly determined to cut off Zhi'er's thoughts of pursuing an education. On one hand, she was afraid of the family spending money unnecessarily; it would be better to let Zhi'er farm like the second brother to support himself. On the other hand, she was concerned that Zhi'er would steal the spotlight from her son, even though it was said that her son was destined for literary success.

"Sister-in-law, my Zhi'er is still young. How can he herd cattle when they are so big?" Chen frowned and opposed, thinking of things she didn't say aloud. Your Jun'er is going to school, so why should my Zhi'er herd cattle? Moreover, when has your Jun'er ever herded cattle?

The third aunt liked Zhu Ping'an and spoke up to support her. "Exactly, Zhi'er isn't even as tall as the cow's legs!"

"Our cattle are very gentle; they know the way themselves. Herding cattle is just about making sure they don't eat from other people's fields," First Auntie insisted. "Zhi'er has gone to the mountains with the second brother; herding a cow isn't a big deal, right?"

Chen was not at ease with Zhu Ping'an herding cattle, but First Auntie was persistent, making the dining table uneasy.

"A loving mother spoils her child. It would be good for Zhi'er to train a little. If he really can't handle it, we can always say later that he won't herd," First Auntie argued.

Grandma sided with First Auntie, implying her agreement in every word.

Chen sulked at the dinner table, hardly eating, while her hand sneaked under the table to pinch Zhu Shouyi, not knowing how many times she had done it.

Anyway, Zhu Shouyi has shown his teeth and grinned many times at the dinner table.

"Mother, eat more. Letting the cattle graze is good too. I like our cows," Zhu Ping'an said, extending his chopsticks to help Chen with her food, his soft childish voice comforting her.

The son's understanding made Chen feel much better, but thinking of her sister-in-law's children going to school while her own child had to graze cattle at such a young age still left her feeling somewhat dissatisfied.

"Zhi'er needs to graze cattle. From now on, give Zhi'er an extra half pancake at every meal," Grandfather spoke up.

Grandfather generally didn't interfere with matters in the inner courtyard, as long as things weren't too outrageous, he would turn a blind eye. Although he valued the eldest son's family, he was also quite fond of his chubby grandson, Zhu Ping'an.

As night slowly fell, the moon rose gently, with light floating clouds swirling around it, like a sheer veil draping over the moon. The moonlight was gentle, the night was beautiful, and everything was peaceful.

The moonlight was quiet and gentle, but the east wing was not.

"Why should his son go to school while my son has to graze cattle? You work hard, and Dazhuang has already put in so much effort; why does Zhi'er also have to graze cattle? Are we indebted to the eldest family?"

"You deadbeat, not saying a word!"

"Why did I marry a man like you, who doesn't even dare to speak up!"

For Zhu Shouyi, it was already not easy to keep some private money for the family, and opposing his parents and brothers-in-law's words would probably be too difficult. It was also good for boys to face some challenges; he thought this way too. Besides, his mother had said that if he couldn't graze cattle, then he wouldn't, which is why he didn't speak at the dinner table.

But Chen didn't care about any of that.

Poor old dad, I mourn for you.

Zhu Ping'an ungratefully slipped away; it's his own wife, he can coax her himself—good luck with that, Dad.

The shepherd boy rides a yellow cow, and his song echoes through the woods.

This poem perfectly reflects Zhu Ping'an's current situation: riding on the back of an old yellow cow, swinging his legs, with a bamboo water bottle tucked at his waist, and holding a fishing rod in his hand. The rod dangles a piece of hemp line with a handful of tender green grass tied to it. The grass hangs just in front of the cow's head, and the old yellow cow trots along, guided by the tender grass.

The makeshift saddle on the cow's back was made from bamboo by Zhu Shouyi last night, so Zhu Ping'an's small frame can sit steadily. The bamboo is lightweight and doesn't hinder the old yellow cow's movements.

As Zhu Ping'an sits on the cow's back, his thoughts drift along with the rhythm of the cow's hooves.

Speaking of which, the poem "The Cowherd Rides the Yellow Cow" was written by Yuan Mei during the Qing Dynasty, right? All poems and verses from the Qing Dynasty can be borrowed for one's own use. The lines from Nalan Xingde's "If Life Were Just as It Was at First Meeting," Gong Zizhen's "Fallen Blossoms Are Not Heartless Things," Zhao Yi's "Talents Arise in Every Generation," and even the works of Tsangyang Gyatso, "To See or Not to See," all become affordable for oneself.

I memorized quite a few of the Qing Dynasty's top scholar's eight-legged essays during my graduate studies. Although I can't recite them word for word, I remember a lot of the general ideas. The eight-legged essays of the Qing Dynasty are indeed more standardized than those of the Ming Dynasty.

Poems can all be borrowed or modified for use, but the eight-legged essays cannot necessarily be used directly. Each eight-legged essay is a composition on a given topic. Although the topics are based on the original texts of the Four Books and Five Classics, there are so many of them that I might not even know which one is the topic. If I'm lucky and the topic overlaps with what I remember, then I'm set, but if the topics differ, then it's all in vain.

In modern times, I study Classical Chinese, but if I had to write an eight-legged essay, I would absolutely be unable to do so. Nowadays, eight-legged essays are criticized, and schools never teach how to write them. Besides, I don't even know how to use a brush pen!

In summary, going to school is still very necessary.

Uh, it seems that the private school in Shanghe Village is not far from the low hill bordering Xiahe Village.

The small hillside is lush with water and grass; it would be better to graze cattle over there.