

## Rise 211

Chapter 211: There is a happy event

The snow-covered mountain village needs no ink to become a poetic painting.

The mischievous children, who usually clung to their warm beds, didn't need their parents to wake them up this morning. As soon as dawn broke, they eagerly put on their cotton-padded clothes, called for their friends, and rushed outside to play in the snow. The once-pristine white snow quickly became covered with small footprints, turning the picture-perfect scene into a chaotic mess, as if trampled by pigs and dogs.

Some of the naughtier children would shake a tree just as their friends stood beneath it, sending a shower of snow down upon them. Watching their companions turn into little snowmen, they would laugh gleefully before running away, only to be tackled into the snow moments later in playful revenge, rolling together as laughter echoed through the village.

When the cooking smoke rose from the chimneys, the mischievous children were each dragged home by their furious mothers, ears in tow...

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"Husband, why don't you stay home today?" Chen, the mother, glanced at the gently falling snow outside while eating breakfast. She addressed Zhu Father, who was focused on his meal.

Zhu Father looked up from his bowl at the snowfall outside, smacked his lips, swallowed his rice porridge, and casually wiped his mouth before saying, "How could I do that? Yesterday, I promised Granny Zhao from Shanghe Village that I'd take her to town to visit her relatives. With this snow, who knows how many people are counting on our ox cart?"

"You don't know how to enjoy a good life," Chen muttered in annoyance.

A little while later, she put down her chopsticks and stared outside for a long moment. "The snow is getting heavier. Eldest son just took two flatbreads and left to clear the snow at Juan'er's house. He didn't even have a bowl of hot soup before going."

Zhu Father continued eating and replied, "Juan'er's family will give him hot soup. Don't worry about it. They cherish him now."

"What do you know? Their family wouldn't make porridge as thick and fragrant as ours. They must be reluctant to use too much firewood," Chen retorted. She was slightly displeased that her eldest son had rushed out so early to shovel snow at his future father-in-law's house.

"I know you too well. You're just jealous." Zhu Father chuckled, picking up another flatbread. "Besides, Eldest Son finished shoveling our yard before heading out."

"Who's jealous? I'm just worried about him!" Chen's face flushed slightly, but she refused to admit it. She quickly changed the topic. "Speaking of Eldest Son, I can't help but think of our Second Son. It's been so long, and we still haven't heard from him."

"He'll be back soon. It's not his first time traveling far. He can take care of himself, so stop worrying." Zhu Father put down his flatbread and comforted her.

"I won't be at ease until he's back." Chen sighed, then suddenly brightened as if remembering something. "Oh, speaking of Zhi'er, I just remembered! Yesterday, when I went to town with Eldest Son, guess who I ran into?" She nudged Zhu Father with her elbow, her eyes sparkling with excitement.

Zhu Father almost choked on his food. How was he supposed to guess that?

"Er Gouzi's mother?" he tried hesitantly.

"Pfft, of course not! I met the daughter of Master Li, the wealthy landowner from Shanghe Village. She used to come over and play with Zhi'er when they were little. She was already a cute child back then, but now—oh my—she's as beautiful as a fairy from heaven! No village girl can compare to her. She recognized me from afar and kept calling me 'Auntie' so sweetly. She's well-mannered, kind-hearted, and incredibly filial—she was in town to burn incense for her father's health. While I was selling goods, people couldn't stop praising her. So many families are hoping to marry her into their homes. Tell me, wouldn't she make a perfect wife for our Second Son?"

Chen looked at Zhu Father warmly. Ever since she met Li Shu yesterday, this thought had taken root in her heart.

Zhu Father shook his head upon hearing her words.

"What's wrong? Is there something wrong with the girl?" Chen asked regretfully.

"What are you saying?" Zhu Father put down the pancake in his hand and said to Chen, "The girl is perfectly fine."

"If she's fine, then why are you shaking your head? Don't underestimate the importance of arranging things early. Our son and Shu'er may be young now, but many people have their eyes on good matches. If we wait too long, someone else will take her." Chen was a little anxious.

"The Li family girl is good, but I doubt she'd take a liking to our family. I've heard people say that the old Li family isn't simple. They have quite the background and probably wouldn't consider a small household like ours." Zhu Father shook his head.

"How big of a background could they have?" Chen was skeptical and full of pride in her son. "My son is a scholar! How could he not be good enough for their family? If he wanted, he could even marry a princess."

"I don't know exactly how big their background is, but it's significant. I heard that even the county magistrate treats them with great respect. They've seen plenty of scholars. It's better for us to find a simple village girl to marry." Zhu Father shook his head again. He wasn't sure just how influential the Li family was, but over the years of driving carts, he had heard plenty about their great status.

"A village girl? That won't do. I saw the Li family girl yesterday, and no village girl can compare to her." Chen shook her head. "Besides, our son probably wouldn't be interested in them either."

"If Zhi'er could pass the imperial examination, then the Li family wouldn't have anything to say, right?" Chen asked hopefully.

"Passing the examination isn't like planting crops. You can't just say it and make it happen." Zhu Father curled his lips.

"Oh, right! Yesterday, when I was talking to the Li family girl, she even mentioned Zhi'er. She called him 'Brother Ping'an.' I think there's hope! Oh, and she also said that maybe Zhi'er will pass the examination and become a ranked scholar this time." Chen took a few bites of rice and continued speaking.

"She was just humoring you," Zhu Father said, curling his lips.

At that moment, a series of loud firecrackers burst outside. The sound was intense, and it seemed like they were the thick, expensive kind that villagers usually wouldn't splurge on.

"Whose happy occasion is this? Why haven't I heard anything? Is someone getting married or sending off a daughter?" Chen craned her neck to look outside, both curious and puzzled. "Just the other day, I was talking with the other women while sewing shoe soles, and none of them mentioned any celebrations."

Zhu Father was also confused. According to the village customs, whether it was a wedding or a funeral, the neighbors would always be informed so they could help and contribute. Yet, no one had mentioned anything to him, and he wasn't on bad terms with anyone in the village.

Then, the sounds from outside the village grew louder, like a pot of boiling water spilling over. There was the clanking of objects, a cacophony of voices, and the sound of approaching footsteps.

Zhu Father and Chen were extremely curious.

Soon, the footsteps reached their door. Their front gate was pounded on loudly, and a chorus of excited voices erupted.

"Brother, open the door! Great news! There's great news!"

"Second Aunt, hurry and open the door! There's a joyous occasion!"

"Get ready quickly! The county officials have arrived at the village entrance!"

Before Chen and Zhu Father could react, the door was forcefully pushed open. A large group of people bustled in—neighbors, relatives, uncles, and aunts—filling the house with excitement and commotion.

