

## Rise 213

### Chapter 213: My Little Zhi'er Has Been Sensible Since Childhood

In winter, the village is at its most peaceful. Every household has finished farming work, allowing them the rare opportunity to rest and relax at home. Especially when it snows, people are even more reluctant to go outside, choosing instead to stay under their blankets or by the fire, doing handicrafts or simply enjoying a good sleep-in.

However, today was an exception for Xiahe Village. Despite the snowflakes swirling in the air and the howling northern wind, the cold did not dampen the villagers' enthusiasm. The entire village was ablaze with excitement and cheers.

The reason for this unusual commotion was one significant event: Zhu Shouyi's thirteen-year-old youngest son had passed the imperial examination at the county level.

Early in the morning, when the official town messenger set off firecrackers to announce the good news, the village had been in an uproar ever since. Even after the messenger received his customary red envelope and rode off on his fast horse, leaving Xiahe Village behind, the celebration continued like a roaring sea of joy.

Zhu Ping'an's house was packed with people, and the courtyard was just as crowded.

Besides the local villagers, Zhu Ping'an's grandparents from the Zhu family's old residence were present, along with his third uncle, third aunt, and their beautiful daughter Xiaoyu. His fourth uncle and fourth aunt were there as well, alongside his eldest aunt and his cousin Zhu Pingjun. However, his eldest uncle, Zhu Shouren, was absent. Supposedly, he had caught a cold after staying up late reading the night before and was

now "recovering" under his blankets at the old residence. But to the villagers, they all believed that Zhu Shouren was simply too ashamed to show his face, so he faked an illness.

The grandfather sat inside, puffing on his dry tobacco pipe, listening to the villagers' congratulations. Though happy, he couldn't help but sigh a few times. On the other hand, Zhu Ping'an's fourth uncle and aunt strutted around proudly among the villagers. However, his grandmother and eldest aunt were not as pleased, their expressions tinged with jealousy. If possible, they would have much preferred for the eldest uncle to be the one who passed the exam.

Although the villagers congratulated both Zhu Ping'an's family and the old residence, many of them secretly recalled the family division that happened ten years ago. They quietly mocked the grandfather, believing he must deeply regret his decision.

If they had not split the family, wouldn't they now be enjoying a hundred times more glory? The eldest son, whom they once had high hopes for, had failed even to pass the scholar examination. Meanwhile, the second son, who had been forced to take the blame, not only became wealthy but also raised a grandson who passed both the scholar and county-level exams in just one year.

Beyond the elevated social status, the most immediate benefit of passing the imperial exam was exemption from taxes and corvée labor. Unfortunately, in order to protect the eldest son's reputation, the old residence had insisted on formally dividing the family with the village head as a witness, even registering the separation at the county office. Because of this, they could not enjoy any of these privileges. The Zhu family's old residence was likely filled with regret, unable to eat or sleep well in the past few days.

The happiest people were undoubtedly Zhu Ping'an's parents and elder brother. His mother, Chen, was especially overjoyed, her smile so wide that she seemed unable to close her mouth.

"Second Aunt, you're now the mother of a Juren official! We all envy you so much. Come on, tell us—how did you raise such a talented scholar?"

The villagers, both envious and curious, flattered Chen while eagerly asking about her parenting methods.

Upon hearing this, Chen's smile grew even brighter. She waved her hands humbly, but her words were anything but modest:

"Oh, I don't know anything about raising scholars. I just raised him like everyone else. But you know, my Zhi'er has been sensible since he was little. When he was just two years old, he already knew how to care for his mother."

The villagers, filled with curiosity and admiration, immediately pressed for more details about how the only Juren in Xiahe Village had shown such wisdom at the tender age of two.

Chen lifted her chin proudly, her face brimming with maternal pride. "Oh, you wouldn't believe it. Our Ping'an has been thoughtful since he was a baby. When he was just two years old, still wrapped in swaddling clothes, life wasn't easy for us. One time, I had an argument with your second brother at home. Don't be fooled by your second brother's usual mild demeanor—he can be quite infuriating in an argument! That time, he made me so angry that I started crying while holding little Zhi'er in my arms. Guess what happened next?"

"What's this? Haha, Second Sister-in-law beat Second Brother." Some villagers jeered, causing everyone to burst into laughter.

Once the laughter subsided, Chen shook her head, her face full of pride and fondness as she continued, "He has thick skin and strong flesh. If I hit him, wouldn't my hand hurt instead? At that time, our little Zhi'er was only two years old. When he saw me crying, he knew to pull out a diaper from his swaddling clothes to wipe my tears..."

A mere two-year-old, understanding how to feel for others? Back then, Zhi'er was incredibly robust. It wasn't until he recovered from an illness at the age of five that he finally became more sensible. At two years old, he was still nursing—how could he possibly understand anything?

"He was just wetting himself," Father Zhu couldn't hold back any longer and interjected.

The entire courtyard then erupted into good-natured laughter, filling the air with joy.

Chen was in high spirits, and having cold water poured on her enthusiasm by Father Zhu naturally didn't sit well with her. She glared fiercely at the innocent-looking Zhu Shouyi, forcing him to lower his head like a quail before she let it go.

Then, like a victorious rooster, Chen continued to proudly share stories of how Zhu Ping'an had been intelligent, sensible, diligent, and studious since childhood. The villagers listened with great interest, occasionally chiming in with words of agreement and admiration. This only fueled Chen's enthusiasm further, making her praise Zhu Ping'an even more extravagantly—almost as if he were one of a kind in the heavens and on earth. If Zhu Ping'an were present, he would surely be blushing from the compliments.

Chen wasn't the only one showering Zhu Ping'an with praise. On the other side, Zhu Pingjun, ignoring his mother's disapproving expression, was also excitedly telling the villagers about Zhu Ping'an's childhood. Naturally, he included himself in the stories—sometimes in a positive light, sometimes in a negative one. But Zhu Pingjun didn't care. He was speaking with such enthusiasm that he was practically spitting as he talked. Clearly, he was someone who thrived on attention and hadn't enjoyed being the center of it in a long time.

"Let me tell you all, at first, Zhi didn't even have the chance to take the child scholar exam. It was only because one of our senior classmates had a sudden family emergency and had to go home for mourning—do you understand 'mourning'? It means observing filial piety—that a spot opened up. Our teacher initially wanted me to go, but I said, 'No, let Zhi go instead.' That's how Zhi got the opportunity. Otherwise, would he have achieved what he has today?"

"Don't doubt it, this is true. And why did I give the opportunity to Zhi? Because he's just a tiny bit smarter than me. Let me tell you a childhood story. When we were young, Zhi and I were very close; we were always playing together.

One time, Zhi wanted to go up the mountain with Brother Dachuan to pick fruit. But I wanted to play with him. However, Zhi really wanted to go pick fruit with Brother Dachuan. So, he suggested playing hide-and-seek. He told me that if I couldn't find him, I had to keep looking and never come out on my own..."

At this point, Zhu Pingjun looked emotional, gazing up at the sky at a forty-five-degree angle.

"That day, I foolishly hid in the firewood pile for half the day... until my mother started a fire to cook dinner..."

Hearing this, the eldest aunt was furious. She wished she could grab this so-called "reincarnation of a scholarly deity" and give him a proper beating. What a shameless fool!

That day, the entire Xiahe Village remained lively until evening. As the sun set, the villagers gradually dispersed. The Zhu family elders stayed at Zhu Ping'an's house for dinner and only returned to the old residence under the snowy night.