

Rise 216

Chapter 216: Marriage Proposal

Zhu Ping'an's return home quickly spread throughout the entire village.

Of course, this had a lot to do with Chen, who, while taking out slop early in the morning, casually mentioned it to Aunt Li, who was also emptying slop. Within half an hour, the entire Xiahe Village knew that the second son of the Zhu family, who had passed the imperial examination as a juren, had returned. As a result, when Zhu Ping'an came back from his morning reading, he was met with a house full of relatives—uncles, aunts, great-aunts, and more. Just greeting everyone with "Uncle this" and "Aunt that" took him quite a while.

Seeing that Zhu Ping'an had now become a juren yet remained so polite and respectful according to seniority, these relatives became even more excited. They praised and complimented him endlessly. One elderly man even swore that when Zhu Ping'an was born, he saw a fiery red glow in the sky behind the Zhu family's house, as if the heavens were ablaze...

All these exaggerated remarks made Zhu Ping'an blush.

His mother, Chen, was thoroughly enjoying the atmosphere. She would occasionally bring up stories from Zhu Ping'an's childhood, such as how he was already herding cattle at the age of five. This would trigger another round of admiration from the gathered relatives, to which Chen would humbly wave her hand, saying, "How could my Zhi'er be that smart? He was just a tough little rascal when he was young." However, the smile on her face was as bright as if she had just downed two taels of liquor...

"Auntie, my second cousin's youngest daughter is twelve this year—sensible and hardworking! Everyone in the surrounding villages praises her. I think she would be a great match for your Ping'an Lang..."

After chatting aimlessly for a while, one great-aunt suddenly shifted the topic, hinting at introducing her cousin's youngest daughter to Zhu Ping'an. After all, he was now a juren, which meant he could become an official at any moment. If a relative's daughter were to marry him, their entire family would reap enormous benefits. And as the matchmaker, she herself would gain considerable prestige.

Hearing this, Chen's expression changed. Before she could respond, someone else voiced their opposition.

"Auntie, I'm just speaking frankly. Your cousin's youngest daughter is indeed sensible and hardworking, but her looks..."

One of the aunts immediately stood up to object. She didn't explicitly say what the girl looked like, but her disapproving "tsk-tsk" sound was enough to make the message clear.

Chen breathed a sigh of relief upon hearing someone rejecting the proposal on her behalf. However, before she could fully exhale, the same aunt spoke again—this time making her hold her breath once more.

"If you ask me, my second aunt's eldest daughter is the real beauty here! She's from Zhaotou Village—you've seen her, haven't you, auntie? Such a wonderful girl! So many matchmakers have worn down their doorstep trying to arrange a marriage for her..."

After disparaging the previous suggestion, this aunt immediately promoted her own relative, making it abundantly clear what her intentions were.

"Forget it. Your second aunt's daughter is already sixteen—three years older than Ping'an Lang! If you ask me..."

Another woman joined the fray.

And just like that, the Zhu family's courtyard turned into a scene of chaos, like a flock of ducks quacking away. One after another, they all tried to introduce their relatives to Zhu Ping'an, eager to claim a share of his future success.

Chen's face darkened. Many of the girls being suggested were ones she had seen before. Compared to her ideal daughter-in-law, Li Shu, these girls weren't even on the same level as Li Shu's maids—let alone Li Shu herself. It was like comparing a golden phoenix soaring in the sky to a bunch of ordinary little sparrows fluttering on the ground. There was simply no comparison.

Li Shu was not only beautiful but also intelligent, kind, filial, and capable of managing a household. Moreover, she came from a good family. Most importantly, Chen believed that Li Shu would bring great fortune to her husband. Only a girl like her was worthy of her Zhi'er. As for these relatives, no matter how close they were, when it came to her son's lifelong happiness, they could all take a step back. How could a village girl be fit to marry someone who would become a high-ranking official in the future? If that happened, how would her Zhi'er hold his head high in the outside world?

Seeing the swarm of relatives competing to introduce potential brides, Zhu Ping'an's face twitched...

"Ahem, well, our Zhi'er already has arrangements," Chen coughed lightly and said, somewhat apologetically, to the relatives who were on the verge of a verbal brawl.

For a moment, the courtyard fell silent. Then, the relatives began pressing for more details—who was the girl? How did she look? What was her character like?

Chen simply smiled and remained silent.

Her mysterious and confident attitude made the relatives give up on pushing their own daughters and nieces.

At critical moments, it was still his mother who had his back. Zhu Ping'an couldn't help but give Chen a grateful look.

Chen, seeing her son's relieved and appreciative expression, thought he had figured things out. Since her second son often went to borrow books from Li Shu's house, and since Li Shu was so beautiful and well-mannered, maybe he had already developed feelings for her. The idea made Chen's imagination soar.

In ancient times, people were often too shy to express their feelings about marriage. If a girl approved of a match, she would simply blush and retreat to her room without saying a word. The boy, at most, would say something vague like, "I'll listen to my mother's wishes."

Thus, Chen completely misinterpreted Zhu Ping'an's gaze.

The relatives stayed at the Zhu household for quite some time. Only when cooking smoke began to rise from the village houses did Chen politely invite them to stay for a meal. The relatives, after thanking her, reluctantly took their leave.

Watching them disappear into the distance, Zhu Ping'an let out a long sigh. This... felt even harder than the imperial exam.

"Tsk, they made me delay my chicken soup," Chen huffed, slightly indignant, before heading back into the kitchen to continue simmering it.

His elder brother, Zhu Pingchuan, stepped out of the house and joked, "Zhi-di, did any of them catch your eye? Tell me about it."

Zhu Ping'an shook his head vigorously.

Then, in a somewhat hesitant voice, Zhu Pingchuan said, "Well, um... Juan'er has a younger cousin..."

It was obvious that his future sister-in-law had put him up to this.

Before he could finish, Chen stormed out of the kitchen, wielding a fire poker with an intimidating aura.

"Zhu Dachuan, I dare you to say another word!" She grabbed Zhu Pingchuan by the ear and raised the poker as if to strike him, though she hesitated upon seeing the glowing embers on it.

"Mother... mother... I'm getting married soon...!" Zhu Pingchuan yelped in protest.

"So what if you're getting married? You're still clueless! I'll scold you in front of your wife all the same," Chen huffed, giving him a glare before finally letting go—after one last firm pinch.

"How am I clueless?"

Zhu Pingchuan muttered in protest, only to be met with another threatening wave of the fire poker. He wisely fell silent.

"Think about it yourself," Chen scolded before returning to the kitchen.

Think about it myself? Zhu Pingchuan was utterly confused. He turned his bewildered gaze toward Zhu Ping'an.

"Ahem, Brother, I'm going to my room to study," Zhu Ping'an coughed awkwardly and swiftly retreated, leaving Zhu Pingchuan standing alone in the courtyard, completely baffled.

How was I being clueless? Introducing a wife to my younger brother is a good thing, isn't it? How did I end up getting scolded for it?