

Rise 217

Chapter 217: Setting up a Monument

This day was destined to be an eventful one. After Chen prepared breakfast, the whole family had just taken a couple of bites when someone from the Zhu family entered the house again.

Zhu Ping'an's grandfather was the first to step in, carrying his tobacco pipe. Right behind him were several village elders, followed by the village head uncle. Uh... and at the very end, there was another person—his eldest uncle, Zhu Shouren, who had not stepped out of his house for several days.

"Father, Grandpa Li, Grandpa Wang..." Zhu's father quickly put down his chopsticks and stepped out of the house to greet them.

"Grandfather, Grandpa Li, Grandpa Wang... Eldest Uncle."

Zhu Ping'an followed closely behind his father, greeting his grandfather and the others as they entered the courtyard.

"Hmm, good, it's great that Zhi'er is back." Grandfather looked pleased, then glanced at the village elders and the village head behind him, his face full of pride. "This is the exceptional talent of the Zhu family."

The village elders and the village head smiled and offered words of praise, but inwardly, they were not entirely convinced. Back when Zhu Shouyi's family was forced to split from the Zhu family, things had been very different. At that time, these same village elders and the village head had advised against it, but Grandfather refused to listen, insisting on preserving his eldest son's reputation and heartlessly forcing Shouyi's family to separate. And now, he was calling Zhu Ping'an a prodigy—what about back then...?

As Grandfather finished speaking, Uncle Zhu Shouren's face turned red. In the past, such compliments had always been directed at him. But... he had been studying for over twenty years and still hadn't managed to pass the scholar examination. Meanwhile, his nephew had studied for just half a year and had already soared straight to the rank of juren!

The envy, the jealousy, the bitterness!

Really, truly... But now that his nephew had passed the juren exam, wouldn't that mean his own chances of passing the scholar exam in the future would...?

Zhu Shouren felt both pain and joy in his heart... He had to admit, thick-skinned people really did live happier lives!

"Father, Grandpa Li, Grandpa Wang, Village Head, please come inside and have something to eat."

Standing at the doorway, Mother Chen warmly invited the village head and the others inside. However, she completely ignored Zhu Shouren, even rolling her eyes at him.

"Zhi'er has truly brought honor to our Zhu family this time! Back when he accompanied me to the child scholar exam, I could already see that he had great potential. I never expected my prediction to come true. He is destined for greatness! Zhi'er, don't forget your eldest uncle in the future!"

With a dignified demeanor, Zhu Shouren spoke without blushing or pausing for breath, shamelessly trying to take credit for Zhu Ping'an's success while openly hinting that his nephew should look after him in the future.

Upon hearing this, Chen nearly exploded with rage on the spot.

This shameless man had once taken out high-interest loans, and when the truth came out, he let her husband take the blame, nearly getting him beaten half to death. And he still called himself a scholar? He wasn't even close to Zhi'er's level. When the truth was finally exposed, he shamelessly cried and begged their father for forgiveness, causing their family to be cast out and forced to live in a run-down thatched hut that couldn't even keep out the wind and rain. To this day, she didn't know how they had managed to survive. Even their fourth brother's family had at least shown them some kindness and support, but the true culprit—Zhu Shouren—had never uttered a single word of apology!

Even when he took the child scholar exam, he had secretly borrowed money from her husband without telling her, and he still hadn't paid it back!

And now, just because Zhi'er had passed the juren exam, he had the audacity to claim credit and even ask for favors? If he was so capable, why didn't he pass the exam himself?

Chen had absolutely no goodwill toward Zhu Shouren!

"No need, Mistress Shouyi, we've already eaten. We're here today to discuss something with your family."

An elderly village elder, leaning on his cane, shook his head, coughed a few times, and then gestured for the village head to speak.

"This is how it is—since Ping'an has passed the juren exam, it is a great honor for our entire village. We checked the county records and discussed it among ourselves, and according to ancestral tradition, we would like to erect a monument in the center of our village. On one hand, this would be a way to reward and honor Ping'an, and on the other, it would serve as inspiration for the younger generation in our village."

The village head stepped forward and briefly explained their intention.

Zhu's father thought about it for a moment but hadn't yet responded when Chen's eyes lit up—this was a great thing! What was there to hesitate about? Without hesitation, she stepped forward and discreetly pinched Zhu's father hard on the back.

"Ow—ah, yes, of course!"

No one understood a wife better than her husband. Zhu's father immediately grasped Chen's intent. The pinch hurt, and he involuntarily cried out, but he went with the momentum and agreed.

Chen was extremely satisfied, her face beaming with excitement.

She had always had a bit of a show-off nature, something that had developed through years of conflicts with her sisters-in-law at the old house. Now that her second son had passed the juren exam, she had been wondering how to spread the news far and wide. But now, with a monument being erected—wouldn't that be the perfect way to flaunt it?

The more Chen thought about it, the more elated she became.

Since both parents had agreed, Zhu Ping'an naturally had no reason to object. Erecting a monument to encourage younger generations to pursue their studies was undoubtedly a good thing. Whether in ancient times or modern times, education was always important. If a monument could foster a culture that valued education in Xiahe Village, it would be an invaluable legacy.

"Since Ping'an has brought such honor to his ancestors, we also plan to erect a flagpole stone in front of the Zhu family's ancestral hall. This will serve as a testament to his achievement and a tribute to our ancestors. From now on, during major festivals, all villagers will come to your ancestral hall to offer incense and pay respects."

After explaining the first matter, the village head moved on to the next.

This time, Zhu Ping'an's grandfather was the first to express his approval. Early that morning, when the village elders and village head had gone to the old house to discuss this matter, Grandfather had been beside himself with excitement. Now that the village head had formally announced it, Grandfather was overwhelmed with joy. This was a tremendous honor for the Zhu family. Thinking of this, he felt an immense sense of pride. When his time came, he could finally face his ancestors without shame.

Zhu Ping'an had previously read about flagpole stones. In the feudal examination system, whenever someone passed the jinshi (highest-level exam), their family would erect a flagpole stone at the ancestral shrine or home entrance. A tall flagpole would be mounted on it, bearing a flag inscribed with the successful candidate's name and rank. This served as both a mark of distinction and a way to honor the family's legacy. The flagpole stone itself would also bear engravings detailing the scholar's achievements.

Both the monument and the flagpole stone were ways to bring prestige to the Zhu family, so naturally, they were met with enthusiastic support.

As soon as the Zhu family agreed, the village elders immediately revealed that the stone for the monument had already been selected, and all that remained was the engraving. The same was true for the flagpole stone.

Clearly, the village had been preparing for this in advance, simply waiting for Zhu Ping'an to return so they could inform him. Their enthusiasm was truly remarkable.

In fact, the village elders and the village head had strong practical reasons for valuing Zhu Ping'an's success so highly. In the feudal era, having a juren in the village was a major advantage. Beyond prestige, it meant that the county government would likely grant various benefits to the village—such as tax reductions and exemptions from labor levies. Furthermore, neighboring villages would hold them in higher regard, making it easier for young men from Xiahe Village to find good marriage prospects.

