

Rise 224

Chapter 224: I Loved Him at First Sight

The cooking smoke rises in spirals, and the sounds of dogs barking and chickens crowing fill the air; the setting sun dips in the west, painting the sky with red clouds.

The evening in Xiahe Village gives a warm and comfortable feeling, one that you can watch countless times without getting bored.

Zhu Ping'an, bathed in the glow of the sunset, returned to Xiahe Village from Li Dacai's house. Before even reaching his doorstep, he could hear a commotion and noisy voices. From a distance, he saw a group of villagers gathered in front of his house.

What's going on?

With confusion in his mind, Zhu Ping'an walked over. Upon seeing him approach, the villagers standing in front of his door greeted him and made way. Zhu Ping'an responded to each of them and walked through the path they made.

He then saw his grandparents, along with his uncle's family, gathered in front of the house. His mother, Chen, and his father were also there. His mother, Chen, had a slightly unpleasant expression on her face.

His uncle's family was arguing, but it wasn't with his own family.

After greeting his grandparents, Zhu Ping'an walked to his parents' side. He glanced at the commotion caused by his uncle's family, then looked at the villagers, who were gossiping and waiting to see the drama unfold. He walked over to his uncle's family and tried to mediate.

"Uncle, Aunt, and Jun Ge, why are you standing at the door? Come inside. If there's something to discuss, let's sit and have a cup of tea and talk slowly."

The so-called family matters should not be aired in public. Even though the family was divided, they were still one Zhu family.

Aunt was sternly lecturing Zhu Pingjun, clearly reluctant to go inside. Uncle, however, listened to Zhu Ping'an's advice and nodded gracefully. After his grandmother said something to Aunt, she reluctantly took Zhu Pingjun by the arm and followed his grandmother into Zhu Ping'an's house.

As soon as his uncle's family entered the house, the crowd dispersed, having understood the situation. They greeted Chen and the others politely before going into the home.

Zhu Ping'an was the last to enter the house, following his parents inside. Once inside, he found that his uncle's family was still arguing in the house. No one could stop them.

From the heated argument, Zhu Ping'an gathered that the cause of the commotion was a family dispute over arranging a marriage for Zhu Pingjun. Some days ago, a matchmaker had approached his aunt to discuss a potential marriage for Zhu Pingjun. It was said that the girl's family was quite well-off. The girl's father was a scholar, and her family owned a large amount of fertile land, living quite comfortably. When his aunt heard

this, she was thrilled, but she didn't immediately agree. She consulted with Uncle, who, upon hearing that the girl's father was a scholar, was also very pleased. Having a scholar for a father-in-law would certainly benefit him in the future.

In addition, these days, Uncle and Aunt had been feeling overwhelmed by Zhu Ping'an's family's recent celebrations, and finally, their own family had some good news. Look, a scholar's family had approached them to form an alliance—what a prestige! This was a step up. Both Uncle and Aunt were very pleased, and even Zhu Ping'an's grandparents agreed. However, they hadn't anticipated that Zhu Pingjun would object.

In ancient times, matchmaking was a matter of family agreement and parental will. Uncle and Aunt, with the approval of the parents, used their authority to push for the marriage, but despite the parental consent, Zhu Pingjun refused to cooperate.

"Jun'er, just listen to your mother. Be good and go with Wang Matchmaker to the betrothal ceremony," Aunt coaxed him sincerely.

"I won't go to the betrothal ceremony. I won't go!" Zhu Pingjun shouted, raising his head defiantly, crossing his arms and tapping the ground with his foot, swaying from side to side.

A betrothal ceremony, or "Na Cai," was similar to modern-day matchmaking. In ancient China, women often "lived in seclusion, their beauty unknown to all." After a matchmaker facilitated the union, the man would visit the woman's home for the first time, an event known as "looking at the bride," or "xiang qin." This was a key moment for the success of the marriage, especially for the man, who had to be careful and perform well to win the favor of the woman's parents.

Zhu Pingjun's firm refusal meant that the marriage could not proceed. Uncle and Aunt, who had hoped for this marriage to bring honor to the family, naturally tried all means to convince him.

"Jun'er, how could your mother harm you? The girl's family is excellent. Her father is a scholar, and they own many acres of good land. If you marry her, you'll never have to worry about food or clothing. I've had your fortune read, and they said you're like the Star of Literature. This could be your destiny. Your father-in-law is a scholar—he can tutor you, and you might even become a top scholar!" Aunt urged him patiently.

"I won't go, mother. You just said I'm like the Star of Literature. Why would I need to rely on them? Haven't you heard? Relying on a mountain means the mountain will collapse; relying on water means the water will flow. You have to rely on yourself," Zhu Pingjun retorted.

Zhu Pingjun swung his legs confidently, his expression full of pride and vitality.

Is the Wenchuxing star descended to the mortal world?

Looking at Zhu Pingjun, who was swinging his legs, full of pride, with the confidence that he could ride a tiger up a mountain or capture a dragon in water, Zhu Ping'an felt like a herd of grass mud horses was galloping over his head. By the way, the last time he visited Old Master Sun, Sun had still been lamenting that Zhu Pingjun was a rotten wood that could not be carved, and the village's opinion of Zhu Pingjun was rather negative...

Hearing Zhu Pingjun casually say, "If you rely on a mountain, the mountain may collapse; if you rely on water, the water may flow away, but you still have to rely on yourself."

Zhu Ping'an couldn't help but want to correct him: "If you rely on a mountain, the mountain may collapse; if you rely on water, the water may run away; relying on yourself... but you have no skills at all, what can be done!!!" Of course, Zhu Ping'an would never say this aloud.

"Rely on yourself? You'll be waiting to drink the northwest wind," his uncle, in a fit of anger, spoke the truth.

"Heh, why can't I rely on myself? This time, they want to connect with our family precisely because of me. My mother just said that the matchmaker, Wang, personally said that the young lady took a liking to me at first sight!"

Zhu Pingjun raised his head, a proud expression on his face.

"Then why don't you go?" his uncle asked, furious.

"A real man is never without a wife! I haven't even gone to the matchmaking yet, and the scholar's daughter already likes me at first sight. I'll go take the exam next year and become a scholar, like a pig becoming a scholar or a juren... just a scholar's daughter..." Zhu Pingjun said, his face full of disdain.

Uh, seems like the sudden excitement has clouded his judgment, Zhu Ping'an thought, speechless. Brother Jun is making the imperial exams seem so easy, as though the exam is something his family organizes.

Moreover, Zhu Ping'an still had doubts about the matchmaker's words. It's not that he looked down on Brother Jun, but a simple analysis of the facts suggested that Brother Jun had achieved nothing and his reputation in the village was poor. His uncle hadn't passed the scholar's exam despite trying year after year; the woman's family was from a scholar's lineage and owned tens of acres of good land, so they could definitely find someone better. How could they fall for Brother Jun at first sight? Love at first sight was all nonsense, especially in the feudal Ming dynasty where women were kept in seclusion, particularly in scholar families where the rules were even stricter. How could a woman from such a family have the opportunity to see Brother Jun, unless...

With that thought, Zhu Ping'an subtly asked his aunt, "Aunt, did the matchmaker really say that the young lady liked Brother Jun at first sight?"

Upon hearing this, his aunt puffed up with pride. "Of course! The matchmaker Wang swore on heaven that the young lady liked Brother Jun at first sight. She even swore that if any of her words were false, she would give me ten taels of silver."

"Aunt, hmm, before agreeing to this marriage, it would be good to inquire about the young lady privately. If she's truly a good match, I believe Brother Jun will go for it," Zhu Ping'an said, a strange expression on his face, his words trailing off.

The matchmaker was clearly trying to cover up something.

Zhu Ping'an vaguely suspected that the scholar's daughter might have a physical problem. If he guessed correctly, she might have one blind eye. Otherwise, she should be able to find someone better. Of course, he

couldn't say this openly. In the Ming dynasty, a woman's reputation was almost more important than her life, and he couldn't irresponsibly say anything without basis.

If the uncle's family hastily agreed, only to find out that the new bride had a blind eye, they would probably have the following conversation when confronting the matchmaker:

"Aunt: 'Old Wang, the bride you introduced for our Jun'er has a blind eye! You need to refund the matchmaking fee and give me another ten taels of silver. You swore that if any of your words were false, you'd give me ten taels of silver!'"

"Matchmaker Wang: 'She does have a blind eye.'"

"Aunt: 'You lied to us! Why didn't you tell us before? Give me the money!'"

"Matchmaker Wang: 'I did tell you! I said, that girl liked your Jun'er at first sight!'"

After Zhu Ping'an subtly reminded his aunt, her gaze towards him became a bit strange, as if she thought Zhu Ping'an might be jealous that their Jun'er had found a good match.

"Mm."

So his aunt just responded vaguely, not taking Zhu Ping'an's words seriously.