

Rise 231

Chapter 231: The Carriage Clan

"From a distance, it's a skin, up close, four hooves."

After entering the yard, Father Zhu was tying up the black horse while explaining to Zhu Ping'an the key points of selecting a horse. Of course, these were things Father Zhu had heard about; the old Zhu family had never bought a horse in such a long time. However, it was clear that Father Zhu had done his homework, and at least this "matted" black horse seemed quite sturdy.

After Mother Chen had looked at the black horse, she went to the kitchen to prepare dinner. Today, Father Zhu had returned a little earlier. After tying up the black horse, he fed the big black cow with feed and water, which made the cow quite pleased. The cow mooed loudly at the black horse, showing off.

The "matted" black horse ignored the cow's display, flicked its tail, and circled around a pillar, seemingly with some rhythm.

After feeding the big black cow, the village blacksmith arrived at Zhu's house carrying a large box. This was the blacksmith Father Zhu had arranged to meet in town. He was supposed to come in the evening to fit horseshoes on the newly bought horse.

This black horse had just reached adulthood and hadn't had horseshoes fitted yet. Father Zhu thought that since Zhu Ping'an would be traveling to the capital for the imperial exam, he might need to cross mountains and hills, and fitting horseshoes would help the horse better adapt to the terrain.

A horseshoe is a horseshoe-shaped iron piece that is nailed into the horse's hoof. The hoof is made of keratin, so it doesn't hurt, similar to human nails. The purpose is to prevent excessive wear of the hoof during walking and running, which could damage the horse's feet. The bottom of the horse's hoof is the horse's "nail," which protects the hoof. In nature, the horse's nail would naturally protect its feet, but when humans use horses, the wear on the hoof can outpace natural growth, so the horseshoe is used to protect the feet, allowing the horse to move freely on all kinds of terrain.

"This saddle is something I made in my spare time, just as a gift for Ping'an," the blacksmith said, pulling a saddle from the box and placing it on the "matted" black horse's back, then demonstrating how to secure the saddle.

"Thank you, Uncle Sun, but I can't let you work for nothing," Zhu Ping'an said, cupping his hands in gratitude, though he insisted on paying.

Father Zhu, being straightforward, also said that he couldn't let Blacksmith Sun work for free and that he should be paid.

"If you must pay, then I'll go ahead and nail the horseshoes," Blacksmith Sun shook his head and insisted on not accepting payment.

"That won't do; the materials cost money, so we must pay," Father Zhu said helplessly, stepping back.

After a bit of back and forth, Blacksmith Sun finally agreed.

Although the "matted" black horse looked a bit proud, it still had a certain intelligence about it. While Blacksmith Sun was securing the saddle, the horse only turned its head curiously without kicking up a fuss.

Despite being newly adult, the "matted" black horse didn't seem to mind humans and should be easy to ride.

Blacksmith Sun pulled out a bunch of horseshoes, nails, a hammer, a severely curved knife, and some other miscellaneous tools from the box. Zhu Ping'an, curious, looked at the horseshoes. They were shaped like small C's, with seven holes around the edges—three on the left side and four on the right.

Nailing horseshoes onto the "matted" black horse was hard labor. Blacksmith Sun bent down and squatted on the ground. With Father Zhu's help, he first used the severely curved knife to trim the horse's hooves that were too long. Then, he shaped the front and inner parts of the hooves with a rasp.

On the other side, the charcoal fire in the forge burned hot, and Blacksmith Sun selected four horseshoes of the right size for the black horse and threw them into the fire to heat them up.

The "matted" black horse stretched its head curiously, watching everything. Its face was full of curiosity.

This horse had a big heart. If it were any other horse, it would probably have kicked up a fuss by now.

Blacksmith Sun quickly hammered the horseshoes into shape on the anvil, then used tongs to quickly press them onto the hoof that Father Zhu had lifted. He left an imprint, then threw the still-hot horseshoe into cold water to cool it, saying that it would increase the horseshoe's wear resistance.

After that, the cooled horseshoe was placed on the marked hoof, and the specially made nails for fixing the horseshoe were hammered in at an angle with a hammer. Master Sun, after hammering and working for a while, finally completed the task, and all four horseshoes were nailed to the hooves.

The stylish black horse, curious, kept tapping its hooves on the ground, seemingly very comfortable. The four hooves rhythmically tapped the ground, bouncing up and down as it walked back and forth around the wooden post.

The horse's head was held high, with a tuft of split mane fluttering in the wind...

It looked like an arrogant, quirky, fashionable horse.

After sending off Master Sun, Father Zhu fed the black horse some grass mixed with saltwater, and the horse ate happily.

Speaking of which, the black horse showed no signs of being unfamiliar with its new surroundings. It seemed to have adapted quickly, as if it had always been familiar with the place. One couldn't help but admire the horse's big heart.

After the big black horse finished eating its grass, Father Zhu kept an eye on it, and Zhu Ping'an tried to mount the horse, stepping into the stirrup.

Uh, it's a bit heavy.

The black horse turned its head and looked at the poor creature sitting on its back, who could only walk with two hooves. Then, it lowered its head and went back to eating its grass.

After dinner, Mother Chen worked overnight to make a saddle pad from rabbit fur and coarse cloth to prevent Zhu Ping'an from sitting on the cold saddle during winter.

Once the saddle pad was ready, Mother Chen tied it securely to the saddle with straps. She touched it, and it was soft and warm. Satisfied, she placed the saddle aside and asked Zhu Ping'an to try sitting on it.

"It's really warm, thank you, Mother."

Zhu Ping'an placed the saddle on a stool and sat down to try it. It was soft, comfortable, and warm. He couldn't help but thank his mother, Chen.

In the following days, aside from reading books, practicing calligraphy, and writing formal essays, Zhu Ping'an added another daily routine: taking the black horse to the gentle slope below the school to practice riding.

Before practicing riding, whenever Zhu Ping'an had time, he would bond with the proud, quirky black horse, feeding it hay, giving it water, and brushing its fur.

I have to admit, this horse has a big heart.

Every time Zhu Ping'an tried to mount the black horse, the horse would always turn its head to look at him and then trot away. When the black horse galloped, Zhu Ping'an would struggle to maintain his balance, but luckily, the saddle and stirrups helped him avoid falling off.

Speaking of having such a horse, if it were in modern times, it would be like having a car, Zhu Ping'an thought sarcastically. He had once envied and resented those second-generation heirs who owned cars, but now, in ancient times, he had fulfilled his own wish.

"Hehehe... Zhu Ping'an, you look like a clumsy frog sticking to the horse's back."

While Zhu Ping'an was awkwardly practicing riding, he suddenly heard a mocking voice from behind, as light and sweet as a lark.