

Rise 238

Chapter 238: Yesterday's Replay

"Son-in-law and our lady, now that's truly a match made in heaven—talented gentleman and beautiful lady. Both families are perfectly satisfied."

While Zhu Ping'an was reading the marriage contract at Wang Xiao'er's home, Wang Xiao'er kept offering flattering words.

After reading the contract, Zhu Ping'an tucked it into his robe, intending to return it to Miss Li when she eventually made a fuss and canceled the engagement, so she wouldn't have to worry about it anymore.

"This time, I really owe you, Brother Wang," Zhu Ping'an said, giving a deep and respectful bow once more.

Wang Xiao'er sidestepped again to avoid the gesture and humbly replied, "Son-in-law is blessed with great fortune. Even without me, you would have turned misfortune into fortune."

"Brother Wang, you must be joking. If it weren't for you, I fear I wouldn't have made it out alive this time." Zhu Ping'an gave another cupped-hands salute, but this time he only bowed slightly, in case Wang Xiao'er tried to avoid it again.

Zhu Ping'an's impression of Wang Xiao'er had definitely changed.

The first time he met Wang Xiao'er, the man had asked if he was Zhu Ping'an and then shoved twenty taels of silver into his hands. The second time was also to deliver silver, and the third was when Wang Xiao'er rode along with the Li family's carriage upon their return.

Overall, he had seemed like an ordinary servant of the wealthy Li family—nothing remarkable. But who would've thought he was hiding his true strength? When he had saved Zhu Ping'an earlier, the spear in his hands seemed to tear through space and time. That speed, that accuracy, that power—it was the demeanor of a true war general. As the saying goes, "One month for staff, one year for sword, a lifetime for spear." The spear is the most profound and difficult weapon to master among military arms. Anyone can swing a stick, but give them a spear and they wouldn't know what to do. The spear is known as the "king of all weapons." In battlefield confrontations, it's far more effective than swords or staves. When wielded well, a spear almost seems alive. In cavalry charges, a spear dances like a dragon, its tip flashing cold light, forming a barrier around horse and rider. Where it strikes, ghosts wail and gods cry. A great general wins a hundred battles with it.

Anyone who can wield a spear well has the potential to become a commanding officer. Just looking at Wang Xiao'er's appearance, one would never imagine he was such a skilled spearman.

Moreover, from his speech earlier and how he subtly avoided Zhu Ping'an's bows, it was clear he was a thoughtful and meticulous person.

Wang Xiao'er was hiding his strength, and so too, perhaps, was the Li family. What Zhu Ping'an had seen was surely just the tip of the iceberg. With that in mind, the devious Miss Li Shu canceling the engagement seemed all the more inevitable. After all, that girl had sky-high pride and came from such a powerful family—having grown up with all that, how could she ever agree to bear children for what she called a "mud-legged pauper, a poor scholar, a toad"?

Yes, no need to worry about canceling the engagement anymore.

There was just one thing he couldn't figure out—why had his mother, Madam Chen, gone to propose marriage to the Li family right after he left?

And more puzzling, why did the Li family agree? Yes, he was a licentiate, but young talents were plentiful in the Ming Dynasty. Many had backgrounds far more prestigious than his. So why did the Li family say yes? If they were just an ordinary rich landlord's family, that would be one thing—but they weren't.

These two questions left Zhu Ping'an completely baffled.

"Brother Wang, there's something I don't understand—how exactly did the engagement between your lady and me come about?" Zhu Ping'an brushed the snow from his clothes and asked Wang Xiao'er, who stood to the side.

"Son-in-law, can just call me Xiao'er. As for the engagement between you and our lady, I'm not too sure either. Matters of the master are not for us to gossip about. Best to ask him directly when you return."

Wang Xiao'er answered this way, so Zhu Ping'an felt it was best not to press further.

Wang Xiao'er kept saying he wasn't sure, but there was still a trace of unusual expression on his face. It's just that Zhu Ping'an didn't notice.

Let us rewind time to yesterday.

Yesterday was the Laba Festival. Wealthy Master Li, missing his beloved daughter, made a special trip from out of town back to Shanghe Village to spend the festival with her, bringing back several carriages full of gifts. On that day, the Li family was adorned with lanterns and decorations, and a festive atmosphere filled every corner.

After Zhu Ping'an rode off from home yesterday, Madam Chen stood at the village entrance for a long while—when a son travels far, a mother worries.

After standing for a while, Madam Chen turned back toward home. Before she even got there, she saw a few somewhat unfamiliar, flamboyantly dressed aunts in the village chattering excitedly about something.

Originally, Madam Chen wasn't particularly curious and intended to just walk past them and head straight home. But as she neared them, she heard a phrase that instantly caught her attention: "Li family of Shanghe Village."

What about the Li family of Shanghe Village? You see, Li Shu, the young lady of the Li family in Shanghe Village, was the daughter-in-law Madam Chen had high hopes for.

So, Madam Chen slowed her steps.

"The young lady of the Li family in Shanghe Village—she's truly a beauty beyond words. In all my years, I've never seen such a lovely girl," one of the women said.

Upon hearing this, Madam Chen wholeheartedly agreed. She had seen Li Shu before—as a child, she was like a jade maiden beside the Goddess of Mercy. Just a few days ago, she'd seen her again in town—now grown, she was even more stunning, like a fairy from the heavens. There was simply no girl in the surrounding villages who could compare.

"Exactly. She's not only pretty, but also a gem of a person—filial, sensible, gentle, kind, and a master at managing a household. That huge residence of theirs is kept in perfect order under her care."

Then Madam Chen heard these aunties continue to shower Li Shu with praise.

But the next sentence made Madam Chen extremely anxious and uneasy.

"So, let's all just rely on our own abilities. You speak on behalf of Young Master Wang from the town, you're speaking for the scholar's son from the county, and as for us—well, let's not sabotage each other. As for who Miss Li will marry, we'll let fate and skill decide," said one of the flamboyantly dressed aunties after a while.

"That's not fair, Auntie Hua. You've already been to the Li family twice, and we've only been there once. Clearly, you're favoring Young Master Sun, the one you're matchmaking for..."

Immediately, another flamboyantly dressed auntie protested, and soon enough, the group of women fell into a noisy squabble.

Madam Chen's face turned pale. So these women were all matchmakers, and they were all trying to arrange a marriage with the Li family! From the sound of it, some of them had already gone twice—who knows how far things had progressed?

What to do now?

Li Shu was the daughter-in-law she had truly set her heart on—the only suitable choice for her son Zhi'er. Beautiful, filial, and someone who would bring good fortune to the family—one in a million.

It's all Zhu Shouyi's fault. Just wait until I get back—I'll deal with him! I kept saying we should propose early, but he insisted that Zhi'er needed to focus on exam prep and mustn't be disturbed. Look what's happened now—others have already made their move.

In the midst of this anxious whirlwind of thoughts, Madam Chen's eyes suddenly lit up. From what they were saying, "rely on your own abilities," it meant the engagement wasn't set yet. That meant—there was still a chance.

With that thought, Madam Chen quickened her pace, nearly flying as she hurried home.

