

## Rise 285

### Chapter 285: Li Shu's Ancestor

The carriage reached the western part of the city, and the entourage grew significantly larger, with five additional large carriages whose deep tracks indicated they were heavily loaded. In addition, several older maids and young servant girls had joined them, along with seven or eight more guards and servant boys. The procession majestically moved toward the western city.

This was the temporary resting place for Li Shu before she went to find Zhu Ping'an.

Li Shu had just arrived in the capital yesterday. After a brief overnight stay, she hadn't even visited the old Li family residence yet. Early that morning, she had gone to the examination hall to look for Zhu Ping'an. She had originally planned to visit the residence together with him.

Zhu Ping'an lowered the curtain and drew back his gaze.

"Zhu Ping'an, are you nervous?" Li Shu's eyes sparkled like they were filled with water. With a half-smile, she looked at Zhu Ping'an, the corners of her lips slightly upturned with a teasing glint.

"Why should I be nervous?" Zhu Ping'an replied with a question of his own.

“Because the ugly bride is about to meet her in-laws,” Li Shu said with a laugh, covering her delicate mouth with her slender hand. She had metaphorically compared Zhu Ping’an’s visit to the Li family’s old residence to an ugly bride meeting her in-laws.

“Your Li family isn’t some dragon’s den or tiger’s lair. What’s there to be nervous about?” Zhu Ping’an curled his lip in disdain.

“But do you know what kind of family the Li family is?” Li Shu rested her cheek on her palm, her lips pursed sweetly as she smiled at Zhu Ping’an and asked.

“Probably one of those aristocratic families with clanging bells and steaming food—a far cry from the nouveau riche of Shanghe Village,” Zhu Ping’an said casually, hands behind his head, leaning back against the carriage wall, stretching out his legs as he relaxed with a lazy yawn.

Li Shu rolled her eyes at his words, then pouted slightly when she saw his nonchalant posture.

“My great-great-grandfather wore a five-clawed golden dragon robe,” Li Shu said lightly, one hand supporting her cheek, the other playing with a strand of her hair.

What?

You really never stop until you’ve said something shocking!

Zhu Ping'an's eyes opened in surprise at her words. Five claws? A golden dragon robe? Dragons were strictly ranked. A five-clawed, two-horned dragon was reserved exclusively for the emperor. Dragon motifs were imperial symbols—commoners and officials were forbidden from using them. Five claws meant a dragon; four claws meant a python. If it were a four-clawed python robe, maybe that'd pass, but five-clawed golden dragons? Was her Li family of imperial descent? Was her great-great-grandfather an emperor?

Then Zhu Ping'an suddenly recalled that when he was younger and could see auras, this troublesome girl's aura had been pure purple—majestic and overwhelming...

Could it be that she really is of royal blood?

But no, that couldn't be right. Her surname was Li, and her father's surname was Li. The current royal surname was Zhu. The royal family would never allow their descendants to change their surname. Even among commoners, changing one's surname was a serious offense—let alone among royals who cared so deeply about bloodlines and heritage!

For a moment, Zhu Ping'an couldn't quite figure out what kind of background Li Shu's family had.

"My great-grandfather was a prince ennobled by Emperor Hongwu."

Li Shu watched Zhu Ping'an's surprised expression, her lips curling into a playful smile. Her bright, dark eyes sparkled mischievously.

Ennobled by imperial decree?

Zhu Ping'an narrowed his eyes slightly at this fox-like girl, quickly flipping through the historical records of the Ming dynasty in his mind. Ninety-nine percent of princes of the Ming dynasty were from the royal family and bore the surname Zhu. Princes with the surname Li were extremely rare and usually only granted posthumously. It seemed he was starting to get a clearer idea.

"My great-grandfather shared the same bloodline as Emperor Hongwu," she added softly, her lips pressed together in a mysterious smile.

Same bloodline? Did she mean they were of the same origin?

Zhu Ping'an felt uncertain again. But judging from Li Shu's crafty expression, he began to suspect she was deliberately leading him astray. Ironically, her misleading hints actually brought him closer to the truth.

Same bloodline doesn't necessarily mean blood relatives. They could be related by marriage. Judging by her great-grandfather's background, it was most likely a marital relation.

The scope suddenly narrowed, and Zhu Ping'an felt that he was close to the answer.

“My great-grandfather’s surname was Zhu. He was treated as a son by Emperor Hongwu and raised under the care of Empress Ma. He once submitted three remonstrations at the risk of his life, angering the emperor. Emperor Hongwu nearly had him executed. Empress Ma was so heartbroken that she wept, and only then did Emperor Hongwu pardon him.”

Li Shu smiled as she looked at Zhu Ping’an. Her jet-black hair shone like lacquer, her skin as fair as jade, her eyes full of spirit. Every smile and gesture carried an indescribable charm—like a plum blossom about to bloom, subtly exuding grace and beauty.

Treated as a son by Emperor Hongwu? Raised by Empress Ma?

Zhu Ping’an squinted again. The more she tried to mislead him, the closer he got to the truth.

So what if he was treated as a son? So what if Empress Ma raised him? It was well known that Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang (Hongwu) had a famous quirk—or rather, a common practice of that era—adopting foster sons. Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang had reportedly adopted more than twenty of them. Empress Ma, kind-hearted and virtuous, treated these foster sons as her own and cared for them deeply.

Most of Zhu Yuanzhang’s adopted sons were minors—many were orphans, but some had living parents. Most had no prior relation to the emperor; they were taken in by chance. They all took the surname Zhu, lived in the emperor’s household, and were raised by Empress Ma.

Zhu Yuanzhang had seen too many orphans. He adopted brave and capable ones like Mu Ying because he believed in their potential. Once these adopted sons achieved merit, he allowed them to resume their

original surnames. During the renaming process, Zhu Yuanzhang would reveal the truth of their adoption. For example, when renaming Mu Ying, Zhu Yuanzhang asked: “Zhu Wenying, whose son are you really?” Mu Ying answered, “I’m the emperor’s son.” Zhu Yuanzhang asked repeatedly, but Mu Ying gave the same answer every time. Finally, Zhu Yuanzhang revealed his true origin. Mu Ying was so moved he wept and said, “The empress’s kindness is as vast as heaven and earth.” Zhu Yuanzhang then gave him the surname Mu, taking the character “Ying” from Wenying to form the name Mu Ying.

So, Li Shu’s great-grandfather was likely one of Emperor Hongwu’s adopted sons.

Which meant his original surname was likely “Li.” After being adopted by Zhu Yuanzhang, he took the surname Zhu. Once grown and honored, he resumed his original surname “Li.”

Li Shu’s great-grandfather was Zhu Yuanzhang’s adopted son, originally surnamed Li. He earned great military merit and was posthumously enfeoffed as a prince.

Then the answer became clear.

“Was your great-grandfather the Prince of Qiyang?” Zhu Ping’an asked with a faint smile.

If Li Shu’s words were like dark, swirling storm clouds, then Zhu Ping’an’s light remark was like lightning piercing through the sky. Though the storm had loomed for so long, that single flash of lightning illuminated everything.

“Ah? How did you know?” Li Shu exclaimed, her little mouth opening in astonishment, genuinely surprised.