

RISE OF THE POOR

Chapter 3: The Farmhouse Courtyard is Full of Troubles

"Enough, Second Daughter-in-law, she was just speaking offhand," Grandma Zhu clearly leaned towards Aunt Zhao, implying that Chen was making a big deal out of a small matter.

"Mother, why are you saying that? This is no trivial matter! How can family members slander each other like this? My son is still young; he can't handle all this fuss." Chen immediately stood up to refute, protecting Zhu Ping'an like a hen with her chicks.

"Second Sister-in-law, why are you speaking to Mother like that?" Aunt Zhao skillfully avoided the main issue, shifting the topic to criticize Chen for being disrespectful to Grandma Zhu.

"You're just stirring the pot!" Chen shot Aunt Zhao a cold smile, her eyes filled with disdain.

"Enough! It's just a meal; what's the big deal?" Grandpa Zhu slammed his smoking pipe on the table, glaring at his second and youngest sons, signaling them to keep an eye on their wives so they could at least have a peaceful meal.

Zhu Shouyi obediently reached out to pull Chen down to sit, and although Chen looked displeased, she still sat down to give her husband face.

"Father, I'm doing this for our family's sake! What if we really were possessed and brought misfortune upon us? That would be terrible!" Aunt Zhao carefully balanced her words, giving Grandpa Zhu face while stubbornly clinging to the notion of possession.

"Shut your mouth!" Chen was infuriated to see Aunt Zhao's relentless attitude, nearly bursting with anger.

"Being so nitpicky is truly disgraceful," their uncle remarked, his face high and aloof as he shook his head in disdain.

Aunt Zhu watched the scene with great interest, not intervening but instead striving to cultivate the demeanor of a proper lady, thinking that one day, if her husband became a scholar, she could be the scholar's wife. If her husband were to pass the higher examination, she'd be the wife of an official, so she needed to carry herself with grace. Watching her two younger siblings quarrel

without dignity only made her feel superior and elegant.

However, Zhu Ping'an looked down on his aunt. If she were truly a proper lady, she would have extinguished the dispute long ago instead of watching the drama unfold.

Seeing Grandpa's dark expression, Zhu Ping'an felt this situation couldn't go on. After all, this was an era of feudal patriarchy; gaining a reputation for being unfilial could lead to being pointed at in the village.

"Mother, Aunt Zhao, what's wrong?" Zhu Ping'an walked over to his mother's side, his short legs moving as he raised his chubby little face with curiosity.

So cute and polite, even greeting Aunt Zhao warmly, which made her, who had just been slandering Zhu Ping'an, feel a bit embarrassed.

"Your Aunt Zhao says you're possessed," Chen shot a glare at Aunt Zhao as she spoke angrily.

"Mother, what does it mean to be possessed?" Zhu Ping'an asked innocently, like a curious child.

In response, Chen glared at Aunt Zhao again.

Grandpa also turned his gaze to Aunt Zhao, showing signs of dissatisfaction. Aunt Zhao's face turned pale; she realized she might have overreacted but couldn't let go of her pride. She bent down to coax Zhu Ping'an and asked, "Little Zhi'er, Auntie wants to know why you've started washing your hands and face lately."

Zhu Ping'an was not really a five-year-old child; he wasn't about to let her catch him off guard. He dashed over to Chen's side, comfortably leaning against her, his big eyes looking innocent as he said to Aunt Zhao, "Last time I was sick, the white-bearded grandpa who treated me said I got a stomachache because I ate something dirty with my hands. I didn't want to drink the bitter medicine, so I started washing my hands and face before meals like he said."

Although acting cute was shameful and pretending to be naive was ridiculous, how could you expect a five-year-old kid to act mature? It's a life of its own! If only he could do barbecue and present himself (with seasoning)!

When it comes to the old doctor with a white beard, Zhu Ping'an subtly glanced at everyone's expressions. Most of them had already been

convinced. It's worth noting that Zhu Ping'an had also done his homework; this old man with a white beard was no simple person. He was a well-known physician in the county, rarely making house calls. Even when he did, it was usually for high-ranking officials and wealthy individuals. The last time he treated Zhu Ping'an was purely by coincidence—he happened to pass by during a visit to a friend and saw the Zhu family in a state of panic, feeling pity for them, which prompted him to intervene.

"Alright, let's put this matter to rest. No one should mention anything about spirits or curses from now on. We are all good descendants of the Zhu family. If I hear any bad rumors about my own family outside, don't blame me for invoking our ancestral laws!" Old Master Zhu could still discern the important issues and didn't allow his daughters-in-law to bicker endlessly. With a timely slap on the table, he brought their quarrel to an end.

The consensus since ancient times has been that harmony in the family brings prosperity. Spreading rumors about curses within the family is detrimental to the entire clan. Old Master Zhu had worked hard for the prosperity of the family since his youth. He tightened his belt to support his eldest son's education for this very reason, hoping day and night for the family to flourish under his stewardship. He simply couldn't allow any problems within the family.

With the argument settled, the old man put down his pipe and picked up his chopsticks.

As soon as Old Master Zhu moved his first chopstick, the Zhu family began their dinner. This reflected the ancient feudal patriarchal system. It had been over ten days, and Zhu Ping'an was no longer surprised by this. The only thing that still left him unsettled was the food on the table. The so-called dishes consisted only of boiled vegetables with salt or steamed food with salt. He recalled that stir-frying became popular only after the method of extracting vegetable oil emerged in the mid-Qing dynasty; now, stir-fried dishes seemed to be the privilege of wealthy families, while farmers were reluctant to use animal fat for cooking. The staple food was made of coarse grains shaped into small buns, mixed with wild vegetables, giving them a strange color and unpleasant taste, making it quite difficult to swallow. The porridge was acceptable in taste but too thin, reflecting his little chubby face in it.

Meals were served in fixed quantities, determined by Old Lady Zhu. Men received two buns each, while women and children only got one. The porridge was also differentiated: men had thick porridge, while women and children had soup-like versions.

Grandmother Old Lady Zhu showed favoritism when distributing the buns and porridge. The families of the eldest uncle and the fourth uncle received larger buns, while their own family and the third uncle's family got smaller ones. Moreover, the eldest uncle of the Zhu family would have three buns, justified by the fact that he needed to study hard. There were many such examples of favoritism; for instance, when making scrambled eggs, which were seldom

prepared, Old Lady Zhu would always serve more to the eldest and fourth uncles.

Especially today, Old Lady Zhu, whether out of compensation or some other reason, kept serving scrambled eggs to the fourth uncle and fourth aunt, who would intentionally show off to mother Chen, making her so annoyed that she nearly bit them. The atmosphere at the dinner table was tense, as if a fight was about to break out, reflecting the overall unrest in the world.

Zhu Ping'an remembered that when he first arrived in this world, he had tried to take some eggs, only to be blocked by his grandmother's chopsticks, who insisted that the eggs were for adults to replenish their strength because they worked hard. However, Zhu Ping'an had yet to see his grandmother give eggs to his father.

Every family has its difficulties.

Not getting enough to eat or eating poorly was definitely a dire punishment for a foodie like Zhu Ping'an.

After all, Zhu Ping'an had the psychological age of over twenty years, so he could endure it, but looking at the little girl Yuer, who was in his third aunt's

arms, continuously biting her fingers and staring at the eggs with her big watery eyes, made him feel a bit sorry for her.

His mother Chen, the third aunt, the eldest aunt, and the fourth aunt frequently had disputes at the dinner table for various reasons, such as taking the same bun or serving the same dish. In short, the dinner table was never quiet.

In fact, many of the family conflicts could be traced back to one word: poverty. If they were wealthy, there wouldn't be any conflicts over these trivial matters. The saying goes, "When people are poor, their ambitions are short, and when horses are thin, their fur is long."

However, looking at his own thin arms and legs, becoming wealthy seemed incredibly difficult. Many experiences from his past life were hard to apply here, and his major was Classical Chinese literature, which didn't give him any knowledge about inventions like glass-making. He wasn't even proficient in the cooking skills often found in female time-travel novels. Of course, that didn't mean he was completely useless. He at least had several hundred years of common sense and knowledge of Classical Chinese. Achieving wealth was a long and arduous journey, but it wasn't entirely out of reach.