

## Rise 41

### Chapter 41: The Shocked Zhu Family

The setting sun had not yet dipped below the horizon, and the afterglow had not turned golden, but Zhu Ping'an had already ridden his old yellow cow home.

In the village, the children were joyfully playing a game of "eagle catching little chickens," including his companions, the black dog and Er Niu. The black dog played the role of the eagle, while Er Niu acted as the hen. A group of children shouted and laughed, each one as muddy as a little monkey. Upon seeing Zhu Ping'an returning on the old yellow cow, the children cried out for him to join in their fun.

"You all enjoy yourselves; I have to go home, or I'll get beaten again," Zhu Ping'an politely declined the group of rascally kids while sitting on the cow's back.

"Little piglet, you're such a coward, hahaha..."

"My mother even broke her broom on me, and I didn't even blink... Little piglet, you're such a coward, hahaha..."

The group of rascally kids laughed proudly and continued rolling around in the dirt.

Zhu Ping'an looked speechlessly at this group of kids who seemed to have no idea where their pride came from. Honestly, these foolish kids sure know how to have fun. You're playing "eagle catching little chickens," rolling around in the dirt, and throwing dirt on each other—what kind of adventurous pride comes from getting beaten by your parents?

Riding the old yellow cow home, the atmosphere was different from the usual chaos of chickens flying and dogs barking; instead, it was a subtle contest of snarky remarks among the sisters-in-law. Grandpa had forcefully suppressed the matter of the two guan of money, so even if Fourth Aunt, Mother, and Third Aunt were unhappy, they had to keep quiet. In this feudal era, filial piety was a mountain no one dared to defy. However, they could still discuss other topics, as it was still too early to cook. The several sisters-in-law, although appearing to get along, exchanged sarcastic remarks as they worked in the yard.

"Oh, you wouldn't believe it! I went to send Jun'er to school today, and that old Master said my son has talent! I totally believe that old Master; a strict teacher brings forth excellent students. The stricter he is with Jun'er, the happier I get..." First Aunt proudly boasted about her son while picking vegetables, her face beaming with delight.

Whenever it came to discussing Jun'er's schooling, First Aunt would always be in high spirits. At that moment, however, Mother Chen always appeared dejected and somewhat resentful.

"We still don't know where the money for Jun'er's education came from!" Mother Chen said, her tone dripping with bitterness.

First Aunt's expression faltered slightly, but she still forced a smile and replied, "You all saw it; it was money sent from my family."

"Big Sister-in-law, we saw it, but I also saw you taking two guan of money from mother," Fourth Aunt raised her chin, speaking in a snide tone like a young lady from the Republic of China.

After going in circles for a while, the sisters-in-law eventually ended up back at the topic of the two guan of money. As the tension rose again, Grandma cleared her throat. Immediately, the sisters-in-law fell silent once more.

Just as it quieted down for a moment, First Aunt calculated that it was almost time to cook and began to brag again.

"Little sister-in-law, schooling is tiring too. Early to rise and late to return. Sometimes, I regret sending Jun'er to school; I'd rather he be out herding cows like Zhi'er. Later, I have to make something delicious to replenish Jun'er, and of course, Zhi'er too, since herding cows is tiring as well."

First Aunt spoke with an air of superiority, her words expressing regret, but everyone could sense her pride. It was clear she was saying, "My son is excellent and studying hard to be the top student, while your son is just a cowherd."

Mother Chen was already displeased, and First Aunt's remarks further provoked her, visibly causing her anger to rise.

Zhu Ping'an, hearing this from outside, quickly slapped the cow's rear and charged into the house, interrupting the brewing tension.

"Mom, hurry and sew me a school bag; I need it for tomorrow!" Zhu Ping'an shouted as soon as he entered.

His words made First Aunt, who had just been boasting, feel even prouder. She chuckled, looking at Zhu Ping'an on the back of the old yellow cow, and said loudly, "Zhi'er, why do you need a school bag for herding cows?"

This was a blatant expression of disdain!

Fourth Aunt also laughed. Although she sided with Chen regarding the two guan of money, outside of that matter, they were not on the same front.

Hearing this, Chen's face immediately fell. What does this mean? Are they looking down on my son? Your husband studying for exams is all thanks to the hard work of my husband who toiled away to earn that money! Your son studies, my eldest son farms, and my youngest son tends to cattle, yet you still make snide remarks.

Zhu Ping'an quickly summarized what he had to say.

"My cattle grazing land is on the grass field in front of the private school. I listen to the lessons outside the school and even had my father make me a brush, see, it's this one." As Zhu Ping'an spoke, he held up the crude brush in his hand. "I listened to the teacher's lectures outside the private school and practiced my calligraphy on this wooden board."

Zhu Ping'an's words immediately attracted the attention of his family.

Looking at the rough brush and the crude wooden board in Zhu Ping'an's hand, Chen felt a pang of sadness and nearly cried.

"Today, the teacher saw me eavesdropping on the lessons," Zhu Ping'an continued.

"Did the teacher scold you?" Fourth Aunt asked excitedly, as if she were watching a play. After marrying into the family, Fourth Aunt had never been pregnant and envied her sisters-in-law, especially the second sister-in-law who had two sons; she couldn't stand seeing others doing well.

Fourth Aunt really was like a crow, but a strange one, as what she said was always the opposite of reality. For example, in the past, she mocked Zhu Ping'an for not being able to make money from the flowers he picked, yet he ended up making a profit. There were many similar instances, and this was another one.

"The teacher praised my writing, saying it's better than the children in the school. The teacher wants me to attend the school tomorrow," Zhu Ping'an said with the unique excitement of a child.

First Aunt and Fourth Aunt both felt as if they had swallowed flies; their mocking expressions hadn't even had time to disappear before being replaced by looks of shock. The switch between those two expressions left them looking as if they had indeed eaten flies.

First Aunt and Fourth Aunt spoke in unison, "Attend school? But we have no money at home."

Grandmother, who had remained silent, also spoke up, fearing that her daughter-in-law Chen might get the idea of sending Zhu Ping'an to school. "Second daughter-in-law, we truly have no money left."

Mother Chen felt even more that Zhu Ping'an's grandmother was biased. She readily gave money for her eldest son without blinking, yet wouldn't spare any for her own son's education.

To avoid putting the family in a difficult position over this matter, Zhu Ping'an continued speaking.

"The teacher specifically said to tell you all that he won't charge me any tuition. He said he wants to teach me for free."

Still not charging any money?

First Aunt's expression was utterly fascinating, and Fourth Aunt was filled with envy and resentment.

As for Mother Chen, her expression mirrored First Aunt's earlier smug look when she was praising Zhu Pingjun, conveying the idea that her son was amazing and similar sentiments.

Third Aunt was genuinely happy; she had always liked Zhu'er, her obedient and thoughtful little nephew who cared for his younger sister.

"Mother, why are you still standing there? Hurry up and sew me a school bag; I'm going to school tomorrow!" Zhu Ping'an urged as he got down from the yellow ox.

"Alright, alright, I got it. You little brat are already bossing your mother around," Chen said, scolding Zhu Ping'an, but the joy on her face was impossible to conceal. How proud she was to have a child like him.

As Chen spoke, she got up to hurry into the room to make a school bag for Zhu Ping'an. As she stood up, she deliberately shot a glance at First Aunt and raised her voice to ask Grandmother, "Mother, since the teacher isn't charging Zhu'er any tuition, he should be able to go to school, right?"