

Rise 61

Chapter 61: Loan Shark Disturbance

In the Water Battle, Xiahe Village achieved an unprecedented victory, winning ten flags, each representing five days of water access, totaling fifty days of water assurance for next year's harvest.

With the great victory in the water dispute, the entire Xiahe Village was abuzz with excitement, with men, women, and children animatedly discussing the events until they returned home from the meeting, gossiping about how someone's child, like Grandpa Zhu's kid, had performed. Xiahe Village had triumphed, and the village elders and leaders hurried to the ancestral hall to pay their respects to their ancestors, feeling greatly comforted.

While Grandpa Zhu's family was preparing for dinner, the village leader, along with a few young men, entered Grandpa Zhu's house carrying a jar of old wine, a pig leg, and a bag of rice.

"Uncle Zhu, you've raised two good grandsons, especially your little Zhu. He did great today. This is something I arranged with the village elders, so please don't decline," said the village leader, a man in his forties who was quite adept in social situations, speaking politely to the grandfather.

With the victory in the water dispute, the whole village celebrated together. The grandfather only hesitated briefly before accepting the gifts, then invited the village leader and the young men to sit down for tea and drinks. The village leader declined, saying he had other young families to visit, thanked the grandfather for his kindness, and soon led the young men away.

That evening, Zhu Shouyi unusually drank a few extra cups of wine and felt tipsy.

First uncle also returned home from the ancestral hall, acting nonchalantly, with the usual pride of a scholar.

Time passed slowly over the next month. Zhu Ping'an rode his old yellow ox to school, spending his breaks telling stories about "The Legend of the Condor Heroes" and "The Smiling, Proud Wanderer" to the two little girls. Aside from learning more from the teacher, not much else changed.

Oh, it wasn't entirely unchanged. Before telling the stories to the little girls, a new activity was added: watching them dance the rabbit dance and sing the "Clap, Clap, Clap" song, and of course, food was inevitably involved.

Regarding his luck, a somewhat useless ability, Zhu Ping'an conducted several experiments and figured out a portion of it. The key phrase was "glorifying the ancestors." He could generally check his luck once every ten days for about three seconds, which was indeed quite useless.

Aside from that, Zhu Ping'an, under the Chen, offered the local women free materials to make pouches, which he would then buy back from them at the town price of 10 wen each. The women went to confirm this with Chen, who was savvy enough to realize Zhu Ping'an was using her name but calculated it was a profitable deal, so she assured the women it was genuine. In total, except for some given to first aunt and the third and fourth aunts, the entire batch was given to the local women. After deducting the labor costs, Chen sold the pouches in town, making over a tael of silver in profit. Unfortunately, when she went to buy some scrap cloth later, it had already been sold, which made Chen, who had just earned over a tael of silver, feel quite upset.

Time continued to pass slowly. One evening, over a month later, Zhu Ping'an rode his old yellow ox home as usual, but this time, many people had gathered at Old Zhu's house. When they saw Zhu Ping'an returning on his old yellow ox, they looked at him with sympathetic eyes.

What had happened? Zhu Ping'an felt a new wave of unease.

Pushing open the door, the house was in complete disarray. His mother, Chen, was slumped on the ground, crying like a weeping statue, while his older brother, Zhu Pingchuan, had red eyes and was also in tears.

Father Zhu Shouyi lay on a stretcher, his expression pained as he tried to comfort the weeping Chen. One leg was intact, but the other was wrapped in white cloth, which was soaked with blood...

Seeing this scene, Zhu Ping'an felt utterly dazed.

In Zhu Ping'an's eyes, his father was a strong, ox-like man. Although not good at expressing himself, the love he gave was no less than that of Chen. He was also the pillar of their small family, using his body to shield them from the storms of life. It was because of such a tough man that he could cross over and live carefreely like a child. Just that morning, before going to town to sell rabbit skins, his father had asked with a smile if Zhu Ping'an still wanted the rice paper from last time.

Yet, this iron-like man was now lying on a stretcher with a pained expression.

His father was so simple and honest, always righteous, and had never made enemies. This time, he had gone to town, so there shouldn't have been any danger; it could only be that someone had attacked him.

"Who? Who hurt my father?"

Zhu Ping'an felt as if a fire was burning in his heart. He quickly climbed down from the ox, his eyes red as he ran to his father's side, tears sliding down his angry chubby face.

"Don't cry; I'm fine. The doctor said I didn't injure any bones. Just rest for a month, and I'll be okay." Father Zhu lay on the stretcher, enduring the pain while trying to comfort everyone.

The other members of the Zhu family were also present. The women were all in a state of panic, unsure of what to do, and Fourth Uncle looked equally terrified; he had gone to town with Zhu Shouyi. Only First Uncle's gaze seemed a bit evasive.

"I went to town with my second brother. We had just sold the rabbit skins and exchanged them for money when five or six people surrounded us. Those people asked my second brother if he was Zhu Shouyi. When he said yes, they asked what he was there for. Then they demanded my second brother pay back the money, claiming he had borrowed ten taels of silver for interest over a month ago, and now it had grown to fifteen taels."

"My second brother was dumbfounded; he hadn't borrowed any money..."

"Then the man took out the IOU my second brother had signed himself, saying it was black and white and couldn't be denied. They robbed us of more than a hundred coins we made selling the rabbit skins and,

without further discussion, started beating us. They said this time it was just a light beating, and they would leave his legs intact. But if the money wasn't paid back in three days, they would really break his legs..."

Fourth Uncle recounted the events from town, still looking frightened; he had also been kicked a couple of times.

"Second, why did you borrow money? Were you doing something illegal outside?" Their grandfather, almost fainting with anger, stood in front of Zhu Shouyi, brandishing a thick stick, glaring and shouting.

"Dad, how could my family's Shouyi borrow money?" Chen cried as she protected Zhu Shouyi.

"No, Dad, I don't use money; why would I borrow it? Besides, I can't even read; how would I write an IOU?"

Zhu Shouyi looked wronged, feeling bitter. It was utterly nonsensical to be beaten and then suspected upon returning home; his heart felt extremely bitter.

"It definitely wasn't my dad who borrowed the money!" Zhu Ping'an shouted, his eyes red.

"But the IOU has your dad's name on it, and it has his fingerprint." Fourth Aunt, standing nearby, also seemed to find it hard to believe.

"My dad can't write!" Zhu Ping'an angrily retorted, his chubby face flushed.

The situation seemed to have reached a dead end. Loan sharks wouldn't randomly come to demand money; loans were secured with signatures, and only after that would they come to collect based on the IOU. Fabricating a story wouldn't spare them from the county magistrate's wrath. Yet, Zhu Shouyi clearly had never borrowed money from a loan shark, let alone signed anything.

So, where did this loan shark debt come from?