

Rise 172

Chapter 172: Divination

"No, I haven't."

Faced with his precious little sister's anger, the third son of the Li family bent over in surrender.

In Zhu Ping'an's eyes, the Li family's household was truly an unusual one in the Ming Dynasty. The Ming Dynasty was a peak of feudal society, and one of the most prominent characteristics of feudal society was male dominance and female subservience. However, in the Li family, this scheming young girl could be so domineering and arrogant.

But thinking about it, no matter how feudal the society was, no matter how much men were prioritized over women, as long as a family was willing to dote on their daughter, she could still be raised like a princess, just like in modern times. It was their family matter—once the doors were closed, no one could say anything about it.

"When I got home, I kept hearing people say how smart you are. Everywhere I went, I heard things like 'the pride of Kaoshan Town' and 'a once-in-500-years talent of Kaoshan Town'... My ears are practically growing calluses from it. I don't believe you're that smart. A once-in-500-years genius, really..."

The third son of the Li family raised his nose high in the air, clearly having a... strong opinion of Zhu Ping'an.

Zhu Ping'an felt like he was completely caught in the crossfire. What did other people calling him smart have to do with him? And even more so, what did it have to do with this guy? Unless... unless it was out of envy, jealousy, and resentment. Judging from Li family's third son's attitude, it really seemed like that might be the case.

He probably went home and overheard his father, the wealthy Li patriarch, checking the family accounts. Maybe his father casually mentioned how Zhu Ping'an had played a role in the auditing process, and the other accountants had praised him highly. That might have irritated this hot-blooded young man. At this age, when competitiveness is at its peak, it wouldn't be surprising if he'd also been called some sort of "once-in-300-years talent" himself at some point.

"Just average, I just had a bit of good luck," Zhu Ping'an said lightly. He didn't like stirring up trouble, but he wasn't afraid of it either.

"Just average? I'd like to see just how smart you really are."

Hearing Zhu Ping'an's response, the third son of the Li family was even more displeased. He turned around and grabbed a small, still-living fish—no bigger than half a palm—from a water basin held by one of his attendants. Clutching it in his hand, he looked provocatively at Zhu Ping'an.

"Everyone says you're so smart. Ha! Then take a guess—is the fish in my hand alive or dead?"

The third son of the Li family smirked smugly as he challenged Zhu Ping'an.

The scheming young girl looked at her third brother in surprise. Since when did he get so clever? If Zhu Ping'an said the fish was alive, her brother would definitely crush it to death. But if Zhu Ping'an said it was

dead, then her brother wouldn't squeeze it and would simply open his hand, revealing the fish still flipping around.

Then, turning to Zhu Ping'an, the scheming young girl was also curious about how he would respond.

"Actually, guessing whether the fish in your hand is alive or dead is quite simple."

If even the scheming young girl could figure it out, Zhu Ping'an naturally could as well. Seeing the provocative look in Li family's third son's eyes and his triumphant smirk, Zhu Ping'an slowly curled his lips into a smile too.

"Simple? Ha! Then take a guess. But if you're wrong, stop letting people spread nonsense about you being some 'once-in-500-years genius.'"

The arrogant youth, the third son of the Li family, looked full of confidence.

Zhu Ping'an smiled and nodded. Teasing an arrogant young man like this was always amusing.

"You're probably thinking that if I say the fish is alive, you'll crush it to death. But if I say it's dead, you won't squeeze it, and when you open your hand, the fish will still be alive. That way, no matter what I say, you will always win, right?"

Zhu Ping'an glanced at Li family's third son and asked calmly.

Hearing this, Li family's third son's expression flickered for a brief moment, but he quickly retorted, "What does it matter what I'm thinking? Just hurry up and guess."

"Of course, what you said makes sense. A true scholar should be knowledgeable in astronomy above and geography below. In fact, a good scholar also has a unique understanding of divination. The Four Books and Five Classics that we often read, particularly the I Ching—also known as the Book of Changes—contain divination methods. As it says, 'A gentleman observes the images and plays with the words in a state of rest; in action, he observes the changes and plays with the divinations. Thus, he is blessed by heaven, and everything is auspicious...'"

Zhu Ping'an swayed his head and recited a long passage, leaving the third son of the Li family utterly confused and dizzy.

"Stop, stop, stop! I've hated it since I was little when people talk endlessly like that. If you have something to say, just say it!" Li family's third son impatiently interrupted Zhu Ping'an's long-winded speech. His mind was almost turned into mush from the endless babbling just now.

"I have some knowledge of divination. I can accurately tell if the fish in your hand is alive or dead." Zhu Ping'an, unfazed by Li family's third son's interruption, smirked and succinctly repeated his words.

"Oh? Then go ahead and tell me," Li family's third son extended the hand holding the fish. He was highly dismissive of Zhu Ping'an's talk of divination. I'm holding the fish's life and death in my hands, and you still claim you know divination! What a load of nonsense! Talking about being clever, a once-in-five-hundred-years kind of thing, it's all just absurd rambling from a bookworm whose head's been muddled by too many books.

"Of course, I need to perform the divination. But before I do, I need to ask a few questions. After all, fortune-tellers on the street need to know one's birthdate and time. Of course, I don't need to know the fish's birthdate, but there are still a few things I need to confirm before I can cast the divination for the fish in your hand." Zhu Ping'an pointed at the fish that Li family's third son was tightly holding and said casually.

"Stop wasting time, just ask already," Li family's third son's impatience was at its peak.

"What kind of fish are you holding?" Zhu Ping'an slowly asked.

"A little grass carp," Li family's third son answered unwillingly.

As soon as Li family's third son finished speaking, Zhu Ping'an went to a nearby table, found a brush, and a sheet of rice paper, then wrote the name of the fish on it.

"Where is this fish from?" After finishing writing, Zhu Ping'an asked slowly.

"From the water, of course. Where else would it come from, the stone?" Li family's third son said with visible impatience.

Zhu Ping'an dipped the brush in ink and wrote the words "from the water" on the rice paper.

Zhu Ping'an's serious actions sparked the curiosity of everyone present, and nearly everyone in the study turned their gaze to the paper under his hand, wondering, could he really divine?

Only the scheming young girl, with an expression of understanding, looked down on her third brother, who had already been led astray and didn't even realize it.

Zhu Ping'an then asked two more questions.

"Are you done yet?!" Li family's third son's impatience reached its breaking point.

"All done, no more questions. Just give me a moment, I'll use the Five Elements method for the divination." After speaking, Zhu Ping'an lowered his head, seriously and earnestly starting to calculate on the paper.

Just when Li family's third son's patience was about to run out!

Zhu Ping'an finally lifted his head from the paper, pondered for a moment, and spoke lightly, "The fish in your hand is dead."

Li family's third son opened his hand and looked at the fish, his face darkening as he said, "Damn, it was alive just half an hour ago!"

The scheming young girl couldn't help but laugh out loud. One hand pointing at her third brother, the other covering her cherry lips, she let out a series of silver bell-like giggles, her eyes curving like the crescent moon, brimming with laughter.

"Third brother, you've been led astray by him," the scheming young girl mocked her third brother, "What's all this about the Book of Changes and divination? Didn't you realize he was just stalling for time?"