

Rise 173

Chapter 173: The Crowning

What is a "chū èr" (a person in the rebellious youth stage)? It's someone who is extremely self-absorbed and doesn't know what it means to give up.

The third son of the Li family was only briefly discouraged by his recent loss, but soon became full of energy again, continuing to challenge Zhu Ping'an. He began throwing out what he considered difficult questions to trouble him.

For example, a word riddle: "Go up to go down, go down to go up. Both ends go to the middle, the middle goes to both ends."

Zhu Ping'an had already seen this riddle online, so without thinking, he was able to answer it.

"It's 至 (zhi), because the top of 至 is the bottom of 去 (qu), and the bottom of 至 is the top of 去. The middle of 至 is the two ends of 去, and the two ends of 至 are the two ends of 去. The two ends of 至 are the middle of 去." Zhu Ping'an pretended to think for a moment before calmly giving the answer and explaining it.

This completely exceeded the third son's expectations, so he racked his brain to come up with more questions to trouble Zhu Ping'an. Unfortunately, none of his questions managed to stump Zhu Ping'an.

In the end, feeling helpless, the third son of the Li family came up with a nearly childish question: "If you jump into a deep pit, and there is no one inside, the walls of the pit are very smooth and sturdy, and you can't claw your way up with your hands, and you have no tools, no ropes, no knives, nothing. No one is outside, and there is nothing inside the pit, what would you do?"

The third son of the Li family took away every possible advantage he could think of and, after speaking, looked at Zhu Ping'an smugly.

"Can I swim?" Zhu Ping'an asked indifferently.

"There is no water in the pit. I just said there's nothing inside the pit." The third son of the Li family emphasized again.

"I can make a hole in my head with my hands and let the water flow out. Then I can swim and float up, and then I can get out of the pit." Zhu Ping'an said seriously.

The third son of the Li family shook his head vigorously. "How can there be that much water in your head!"

"If there's no water in my head, why would I jump in?" Zhu Ping'an glanced at the third son of the Li family and said indifferently.

In the end, it was the scheming girl Li Shu who used the name of the wealthy Li family to expel the third son from the study.

"Thank you, Miss Li, for helping me out." Zhu Ping'an cupped his hands and thanked the scheming girl. If it weren't for her sending her brother out of the study, her brother would likely have come up with more strange things to trouble him.

"Self-centered! Who helped you? I just didn't want my third brother to ruin my books. Hmph." The scheming girl looked up at the sky at a 45-degree angle and then snorted proudly.

She truly is a problematic girl.

Zhu Ping'an borrowed two more books from the Li family. Since the imperial examination was approaching, he put aside the idea of reading miscellaneous books for now. The two books he borrowed were both related to the provincial examination—one on policy debates and the other on the Eight-Legged Essay.

Everyone at home was excited about the news of the imperial examination, but whether Zhu Ping'an could pass was not something they were concerned about. They were simply excited about the examination.

The next morning, Zhu Ping'an put on the clothes made by his teacher's wife and set off from home towards Shanghe Village to visit his mentor.

The clothes made by his teacher's wife fit perfectly. The clothes were made from Zibo fabric and were a four-slit robe with crimson trim, loose and comfortable, making movement easy. The robe didn't have a belt. The two lapels had ties, which could be fastened.

His teacher's wife had also made a pair of shoes for him. The shoes were called "cai li" (colored shoes), which were colorful shoes. The pair of shoes Zhu Ping'an was wearing had red trim. They looked a bit like embroidered shoes, though they weren't embroidered. It felt a little odd.

On the way, the villagers he met looked at him with strange expressions when they greeted him, clearly confused. Zhu Ping'an explained that he was wearing this outfit to go to his teacher's house for the "guan li" (coming-of-age ceremony).

Coming-of-age ceremony?

The villagers didn't understand, as they didn't pay attention to such ceremonies in the village. Most villagers felt this way, and it was no surprise that Old Master Sun wanted to personally perform the coming-of-age ceremony for him.

Old Master Sun's house was the same as usual, with the door wide open at night. The door was never closed, and Zhu Ping'an walked straight in.

"Good morning, Master." As Zhu Ping'an entered the door, he saw Old Master Sun and immediately bowed in greeting from a distance.

"Hmm, not bad." Old Master Sun was arranging tables and chairs in the yard, placing them along with wine cups, hats, and headscarves. When he saw Zhu Ping'an had arrived early, he nodded with satisfaction.

Zhu Ping'an wanted to step forward to help, but was pulled inside the house by his teacher's wife, who didn't give him a chance to argue and began redoing his hairstyle. It was quite embarrassing, a traditional topknot style, with the sides of his forehead tied into two buns forming a ring, and his teacher's wife also used a red silk ribbon to tie it into a "ceremonial knot" shape.

While his teacher's wife was doing his hair, guests arrived at Old Master Sun's house. They were all old friends of Old Master Sun, including two students who had helped Zhu Ping'an during his examination. About seven or eight people had come, bringing gifts of paper, ink, and other items as a congratulatory token for Zhu Ping'an's crown ceremony.

They had all been invited by Old Master Sun to witness the ceremony.

Old Master Sun then called Zhu Ping'an to the front gate, instructing him to face east and welcome his friends. Old Master Sun greeted them with a smile, and Zhu Ping'an responded with a deep bow. Old Master Sun's friends looked at Zhu Ping'an and nodded in approval, before exchanging a few pleasantries with him at the gate and then followed him into the yard.

The teacher's wife made a pot of tea and placed the cups on a table outside in the yard before returning to the room. Zhu Ping'an picked up the teapot, poured tea into the cups, and placed them on the table.

The guests entered the yard, washed their hands at the water basin, and then took their seats to watch the ceremony.

Zhu Ping'an's crown ceremony officially began.

"My student, Zhu Ping'an, son of Zhu Shouyi from Xiahe Village, has grown into adulthood. Today, I shall place the crown upon his head," Old Master Sun said, bowing to the guests.

"Bravo," Old Master Sun's friends nodded in approval.

Then, Old Master Sun took the headscarf from the table, walked up to Zhu Ping'an, and solemnly advised, "On an auspicious day in the lunar calendar, you receive the first step in adulthood. Abandon your childish ways, follow the path of virtue, live a long and prosperous life, and enjoy all the blessings."

"Thank you, Master." Zhu Ping'an knelt and thanked him.

Old Master Sun placed the headscarf on Zhu Ping'an's head and then gently said, "Go to the room and seek your teacher's wife."

Zhu Ping'an nodded, stood up, bowed deeply to the guests, and then walked toward the room.

"Come here, change into these clothes in the bedroom," the teacher's wife said kindly, smiling as she handed Zhu Ping'an a bundle of clothes.

"Thank you, teacher's wife." Zhu Ping'an accepted them, smiling awkwardly in gratitude.

"Silly child, no need to be so polite with me," the teacher's wife laughed, urging Zhu Ping'an to quickly change into the clothes.

The crown ceremony was quite detailed, and the clothes had to be changed multiple times. Upon entering the bedroom, Zhu Ping'an looked at the clothes his teacher's wife had provided—a dark set of clothes with a silk belt and a pair of black cloth shoes. He took off the four-layer shirt he was wearing and put on the new set.

After changing, Zhu Ping'an thanked his teacher's wife and walked back to the yard.

Old Master Sun had Zhu Ping'an stand in the south of the yard for a while before beginning the next step. After a brief pause, Old Master Sun took a hat from the table, walked up to Zhu Ping'an, and once again offered advice: "On this auspicious day, you now enter adulthood. Be cautious of your appearance, cultivate your virtue, live a long and prosperous life, and enjoy great fortune."

Zhu Ping'an knelt to thank his master. Old Master Sun placed the hat on his head and then instructed him to go to the room to seek his teacher's wife.

The crown ceremony is so troublesome, Zhu Ping'an grumbled inwardly.

However, he still obeyed his master's orders and headed toward the room once again.