

## Rise 223

### Chapter 223: Don't Bully the Poor Youngsters

For some reason, after Zhu Ping'an praised the Li family's cook, the atmosphere in the study seemed to improve, and the scheming young lady also became much quieter.

After the atmosphere improved, she began to occasionally ask Zhu Ping'an some curious questions, such as: "Is a juren (successful candidate in the imperial exam) an official?", "Do juren not need to pay taxes?", "Can juren eat for free at restaurants?", and so on.

"You think passing the juren exam means you can become an official? You think passing the juren exam means you don't have to pay taxes or do corvée labor? You think passing the juren exam means you'll never have to worry about food or clothing? You think passing the juren exam..."

Zhu Ping'an put down the book in his hand, turned to the round-faced little maid, and said several rhetorical questions in a row with a slight smirk.

The round-faced little maid covered her small mouth in shock after Zhu Ping'an finished asking, "Isn't that all true?"

"Let me tell you, all of it is true." Zhu Ping'an curved his lips and continued in a teasing tone.

"Silly girl, don't listen to his nonsense. A juren only has the qualification to become an official. Passing the exam doesn't mean you get a position right away. Those who don't pass the jinshi (advanced level) exam have to register at the Ministry of Personnel to wait as candidates. For every vacancy, there are hundreds lining up. Without connections, you could wait your whole life and still not get in."

The scheming young lady, Li Shu, curled her lips in disdain, dragging out the last syllables of "not get in."

"Then... if you do get in line, does that mean you become an official?"

She puffed out her cheeks, looking utterly incredulous. The Zhu Ping'an before her used to be nothing more than a little cowherd kid who was all about "long-winded essays and literature." His clothes and food weren't even as good as hers. And now, in just a few years, a cowherd could become an official?

That's not the point, okay?!

The scheming young lady glared at her with a look of bitter disappointment, as if hating the iron for not becoming steel. The little maid looked confused and instinctively shrank back, not understanding why her mistress glared at her.

Zhu Ping'an saw this and gave a light smile. Then he lowered his head again to continue reading.

Time passed peacefully, and the study remained quiet. Aside from the occasional bell-like laughter from the scheming young lady while she read *The Heaven Sword and the Dragon Saber*.

Time left behind an indelible fragrance of ink on the pages. Zhu Ping'an focused intently on his book at the desk, while the scheming young lady quietly read hers. The sunlight streamed through the window, casting a golden hue on both of them, making them look like a perfect, celestial couple.

Off to the side, Hua'er, who was bored and snacking, began to doze off. Her chubby little hand propped up her chin, and her small head bobbed up and down like a pendulum. Finally, in one bob, her chubby hand slipped, and her little head dropped straight onto the table with a loud "thud," breaking the stillness of the study.

Zhu Ping'an, who was completely immersed in reading, was startled by the sound. He looked over at the pitiful girl holding her chin in pain, and then turned his gaze to the window—sometime during all this, the red clouds outside had already painted half the sky.

It was getting late. Time to go home.

Zhu Ping'an stood up and began to pack his books into his bag.

Meanwhile, the scheming young lady gave a fierce glare at the pitiful little one.

After packing his books, Zhu Ping'an bid farewell to the scheming young lady and the others. Slinging his bookbag over one shoulder, he left the Li residence bathed in the golden glow of the setting sun.

Shortly after Zhu Ping'an left, the scheming young lady, Li Shu, went behind the bookshelf and casually browsed the books there. She slowly strolled to a shelf containing biographies of famous figures and randomly pulled out a few biographies written by contemporary authors.

The books she selected—she hugged them all—totaled six. They were all thin volumes, namely: Biography of Gan Luo, Biography of Huo Xiu, Biography of Kong Rong, Biography of Wang Rong, Biography of Sima Guang, and Biography of Yang Tinghe.

"Go call Wang Xiao'er, then head to the kitchen and arrange dinner. I want something light tonight. You decide what they should make," the scheming young lady said after picking out the six books.

"Yes, Miss."

She placed the book on the desk and then, holding up her skirt, ran out of the study.

"Brother Wang!" She jogged to the front yard stable, calling out.

Soon, Wang Xiao'er arrived at the study, bowing at the door, waiting for the scheming young lady's instructions.

"Here, take these biographies and hurry to send them to my father. Even in business, one must read more books. Hmm, if my father doesn't read them, have someone read them to him at night," the scheming young lady Li Shu casually instructed, pointing at the six biographies on the desk. However, the cold light in her eyes made Wang Xiao'er realize that this order was of great importance.

"Yes, Miss, I will go and prepare the horse right away," Wang Xiao'er replied respectfully, preparing to go to the desk to collect the books.

"Wait a moment," the scheming young lady waved her hand.

Wang Xiao'er stopped in his tracks, bending his body and standing motionless at the door.

The scheming young lady took the pen and ink from the desk, dipped a fine brush into the ink, and opened one of the biographies. On the blank space on the back of the first page, she began to write.

The characters written by the scheming young lady were almost identical to the ones in the biography. If it weren't for the ink being wet, one would think these words were originally part of the text.

What she wrote on the back cover of the biography was a proverb:

"Better to deceive an old man with a white beard, Than to deceive a poor young man; One day, a dragon will fly through a phoenix, Don't believe in a lifetime with trousers full of holes."

After writing this proverb, the scheming young lady nodded and casually said, "This looks much better now."

Afterward, the scheming young lady took another book and wrote a phrase at the back as well. The characters were also identical to those in the biography. The placement was just right, not out of place at all:

"Thirty years in the east of the river, thirty years in the west of the river; The rise of Wu and Bai, heaven's mysterious design."

Then, for the other four biographies, the scheming young lady also wrote a phrase on the back cover of each one, in the same style as the main text. The phrases were as follows:

"Morning a farmer, evening in the emperor's hall; Generals are not born with it, a man must strive for himself."

"Young ones must study diligently, their writings can secure their position; All the noble in court, are those who read books."

"From a young age, full of talent and knowledge, with high ambitions; While others carry swords, I have a pen as sharp as a blade."

"Don't say Confucian scholars are mistaken, poetry and books never betray a person; Whether in success or poverty, one must improve oneself."

After writing all six biographies, the scheming young lady Li Shu placed the brush down, then called Wang Xiao'er, who had been standing at the door, over to the desk. She casually asked while pointing at one of the biography covers:

"Look, do you think the writing I just did is exactly the same as the main text?"

"If you hadn't reminded me, I would have thought these words were already there," Wang Xiao'er replied with a bow.

"Hmm, I trust you to get the work done. Go now, remember, work more and talk less with my father," the scheming young lady waved her hand.

"I understand," Wang Xiao'er nodded vigorously, took the biography, and bowed as he left the study.

"We should go back too."

After Wang Xiao'er left, the scheming young lady Li Shu spoke to the old maid and the other young maids who were waiting in the study, then walked out of the study. The others followed her as she made her way to the back yard.