

## Rise 228

### Chapter 228: When Will the Imperial Examination Be Held

"What kind of wife do you want to find in the future?"

Hearing this question, Zhu Ping'an shifted his gaze to the scheming young lady Li Shu, who was staring at him intently. His eyes lingered on her for about two or three seconds.

Dressed in a sable coat and a long skirt, she was charming and captivating.

Just as Li Shu began to feel bashful under Zhu Ping'an's gaze, he looked at her and spoke teasingly, curling his lips:

"She doesn't need to be too beautiful, doesn't need to be too smart, must not be spoiled and willful, must not be unreasonable. She should be gentle and virtuous, considerate and caring, and..."

With each line Zhu Ping'an said, Li Shu's charming face turned a degree colder.

"With so many requirements, you might as well become a monk!"

Li Shu's face darkened, and she suddenly scattered all the chess pieces on the board in a mess, inexplicably losing her temper.

Zhu Ping'an looked at her curiously—he was just rambling, so why was this girl so emotional?

"Ahem, ahem, I was originally planning to introduce, um, one of my family's maidservants to you, but it seems you're still so picky. Hmph, take a look in the mirror! Complaining about this and that, you don't even recognize good intentions!"

Noticing Zhu Ping'an's curious gaze, Li Shu realized she had lost control of her emotions. Her cheeks flushed slightly, but she boldly shifted all the blame to Zhu Ping'an and used it as a pretext to vent.

"Save it. I'll find my own wife. No need for you to bother, Elder."

Zhu Ping'an shook his head, politely declining.

"You're the one who's old!" the scheming young lady Li Shu glared at Zhu Ping'an angrily, her face turning even more unpleasant.

This girl must've forgotten to take her medicine.

"Those three rounds just now... hmm, let's say I won two. As we agreed, I'll go find my two books."

Zhu Ping'an stood up, spoke indifferently, and headed toward the bookshelf.

"What do you mean 'let's say'? You did win two." Li Shu pouted unhappily.

Zhu Ping'an merely glanced at her with the same expression one would give to a kitten batting at a ball of yarn—childish. Then he shook his head slightly and turned to walk to the bookshelf.

Just as he reached the bookshelf, he heard the scheming young lady losing her temper again, seemingly scolding a little maid. Truly the privilege of the feudal class...

"Come here! Are you blind? Didn't you see the chess piece fall to the ground? Don't you know that piece was made of ivory by my father? Even selling you wouldn't be enough to buy one!"

Then came the timid and apologetic voice of a maid—it was unfamiliar, not the bun-faced maid, probably a lower-ranked one. She was nearly reduced to tears by Li Shu's scolding.

"Hey, why are you crying? Did I falsely accuse you?" The scheming young lady pressed further.

"No, I'm sorry, Miss." The little maid was so frightened she dropped to her knees, terrified that her young mistress would get even angrier.

What a spoiled brat. Just as unlovable as when she was a child.

Zhu Ping'an curled his lips, selected a book he needed from the bookshelf, and continued browsing. He eventually found six books, all focused on the Eight-legged Essay and policy essays. The Li family had a vast collection of books, more than ninety percent of which were related to the imperial examinations. Zhu Ping'an had become the greatest beneficiary of the Li family's study. In many ways, he still felt grateful to them.

"Hey, Zhu Ping'an, when are you going to take the imperial exam?"

Over there, Li Shu was scolding a little maid. Seeing Zhu Ping'an had chosen his books, she asked with a sullen face.

"Probably in a few days. I originally planned to leave after my brother's wedding, but after reading the experiences of those who came before, there isn't enough time. It's a thousand li to the capital. I'll have to set off in a few days."

Zhu Ping'an placed the books on the desk, bent down to register them, and replied calmly.

The provincial exam of the Imperial year would begin in early March. It was already late December—about three months left. There really wasn't much time.

Ancient times couldn't be compared with the modern day. Back then, travel depended on walking, animals, or carts. Boats were available at rivers, but now that it was the depth of winter, rivers and lakes were frozen—boats couldn't run. That left walking, animals, and carts. A few days ago, Zhu Ping'an had asked someone to find out if there were any caravans going from Kaoshan Town or Huaining County to the capital. But since it had snowed, most caravans had stopped.

So most likely, he would have to go on foot.

From his home to the capital was over 1,200 li—not in a straight line either, so it could be even longer. Fortunately, building roads and bridges was considered an achievement for local officials, so every administration had worked on it. From home to the capital, there were quite a few large roads, though few official ones; many parts of the journey would pass through remote, wild mountain paths.

There were several things to pay attention to when traveling to the capital for the imperial exam. First, food—mostly dry rations. The more you carried, the slower you traveled. Second, wild beasts and highway robbers—even though it was a peaceful time, one couldn't be careless. Third, stopping at nightfall—you needed to find a good place to rest. As a juren heading to the capital for the huishi (metropolitan exam), he could probably stay at courier stations. But these were government-run, with only a few rooms, usually found in cities, ports, or major crossroads. In counties and prefectures, they were rare. So when there were no courier stations, he'd have to consider staying in private homes, temples, inns, and so on.

As the saying goes: Everything's fine at home; traveling is hard in every way!

Taking all this into account, if he could cover 30 li a day, that would already be good. If he could catch a ride on a cart, he might make 50 li a day. But if something unexpected happened along the way, it would take even longer. After traveling for a month or more, he'd need a few days to rest in the capital, and a few more to review before the exam—he had to make time for all of that.

Because of the long journey and all the uncertainties, he had no choice but to leave early for the capital.

"So soon?" The black-bellied young lady Li Shu seemed a little surprised.

"What, is something the matter?" After registering the books, Zhu Ping'an looked at Li Shu.

"N-no, nothing." Li Shu pouted, her cheeks slightly flushed.

"Zhu Ping'an, what kind of exam are you taking? Are you going to become the zhuangyuan (top scholar)?" On the other side, the bun-faced little maid Hua'er couldn't help but ask, unable to contain her curiosity.

"Silly girl, he's taking the huishi (metropolitan exam). If he passes that, he becomes a gongshi (tribute scholar). Then gongshi go on to take the dianshi (palace exam). The top three scorers in the palace exam are awarded the jinshi (presented scholar) title with first-class honors: the top is zhuangyuan, second is bangyan (second place), third is tanhua (third place); the second class gets the jinshi title without ranking, and the top of that group is called chuanlu; the third class is awarded the title of tong jinshi chushen (equivalent to jinshi)."

As soon as bun-faced maid Hua'er finished asking, she got a knock on the forehead from the black-bellied young lady Li Shu beside her.

"Then isn't that the same as taking the zhuangyuan exam?" Hua'er held her forehead, looking at her mistress with a wronged expression, clearly confused.

"You're so hopelessly dumb." The black-bellied girl rolled her eyes.

"Miss, how am I dumb?" Hua'er asked again, still puzzled.