

Rise 102

Chapter 102: Can't You Just Stay Quiet for One Night?

The setting sun's blood-red glow faded, and the evening gradually enveloped the world. Zhu Pingan slowly walked toward the inn.

The street was filled with the tempting aromas of various snacks, as vendors made the most of the last bit of time before the night curfew. The night curfew in the Ming Dynasty was clear: the evening bell would ring at the first watch, signaling that travel was prohibited; the curfew would be lifted with the morning bell at the fifth watch. Those caught on the streets during the second, third, and fourth watches would receive forty lashes; if someone violated the curfew between the first and fifth watch, they would receive thirty lashes. However, there were exceptions for illness, childbirth, and funerals. Of course, there were ways to bypass these rules. For example, if the curfew restricted the roads, one could simply leave in the evening and return by morning, as some did, like Uncle and others. Alternatively, one could sneak away through the sewers or bushes, engaging in a guerrilla-style escape. Additionally, the curfew applied only to the inner city, with the outer city being much more relaxed.

Passing by a food stall, Zhu Pingan was drawn to the enticing smell wafting from it.

"Fried silver fish, delicious and affordable. Would the young master like to try some?" The vendor was a young couple, with the man calling out from the stall.

In front of their stall, there was a bucket of lively silver fish, their bodies semi-transparent. These small, soft fish had a cylindrical front and a flattened back. Their heads were long and flat, with thin and semi-transparent skulls, allowing one to see the shape of their brain. Zhu Pingan had heard of the silver fish many times when he first came to Anqing Prefecture. It was said that these fish lived for only a year and were also known as "broken mother fish" due to their gruesome reproductive method. During mating, the silver fish

would slam into rocks, intentionally hitting their bellies until they burst open, releasing their eggs. The fish would die shortly afterward as their bellies ruptured.

The silver fish were coated in flour and fried, along with other seasonings that were not immediately visible. The fried fish turned golden all over and emitted a mouth-watering fragrance.

"May I sample the flavor?" Zhu Pingan paused and asked.

The vendor responded with action, serving a plate of freshly fried silver fish along with a pair of chopsticks, smiling confidently.

Zhu Pingan picked up one with the chopsticks, blew on it slightly, and placed it in his mouth. The tender, crisp, refreshing taste, and delicate texture opened his appetite.

"Mm, it tastes excellent. Please give me one portion—no, make that two. Could you kindly pack them up?" Zhu Pingan set down the chopsticks, returned the plate to the vendor, and nodded in satisfaction. Originally, he had planned to buy one portion, but thinking of the gluttonous vixen at home, he decided to ask for two.

"Sure, young master, please wait a moment," the vendor cheerfully invited Zhu Pingan to sit for a while.

Soon, two portions of the fried silver fish were wrapped in rough paper and tied with string, handed over to Zhu Pingan.

Zhu Pingan took the two portions of fried silver fish, asked the vendor the price, and handed over twenty copper coins from his pocket.

The vendor took the money and said, "If the young master likes it, do come again next time. By the way, our shop also brews 'Taihu Sealed Barrel Wine,' which goes perfectly with the silver fish."

Zhu Pingan paused for a moment, then recalled that the gluttonous vixen at home had been whining for wine and meat for several days. Since the exam had gone well, he figured it would be a good idea to indulge her. So, he paid for the wine—locally brewed with glutinous rice—and also bought five meat buns, two bowls of porridge, and a plate of crispy vegetables, all packed in a food box to bring back to his room.

When he opened the door to the inn, he saw the vixen demoness lunging toward him like a wolf or tiger... She snatched the food box from his hands like a starving beggar.

Zhu Pingan froze for half a second before reacting. On the opposite table, the demoness had already sat down and was eating gracefully but quickly—one bite of fried silver fish, one little meat bun, with occasional sips of Taihu Sealed Barrel Wine. She devoured the food like a whirlwind...

"What's the matter? Didn't we have meat dishes every day before?" Zhu Pingan closed the door and said calmly.

"What? You're making it sound so easy." The demoness, with food in her mouth, spoke incomprehensibly. After swallowing a sip of wine, she repeated what she had just said, "Making it sound so easy, I haven't eaten

all day. Your damn uncle has been eating and drinking with a bunch of sour scholars in the lobby since dawn. It's daytime, and I can't sneak out through the windows! Try going a whole day without food or drink!"

Zhu Pingan also felt relieved.

The young girl ate a portion of fried silverfish, two meat buns, and most of a jar of wine. Accompanied by some side dishes, she only drank half a bowl of porridge before starting to hiccup. Her posture was impressive, but her appetite wasn't very large.

Zhu Pingan, unhurriedly, finished all the remaining food, except for the leftover jar of Taihu Fenggang wine. At this point, Zhu Pingan was not much better off than the young woman. The meals provided during the exam were hard to stomach, and he hadn't had dinner either, so a few meat buns and the rest of the food only made him feel about 90% full.

"Judging by all these delicious things you've bought, your exam must have gone pretty well, right?"

After the meal, the young woman propped her chin on her hand, smiling as she watched Zhu Pingan tidy up the dishes. She teased him with a charming laugh.

"I probably won't fail, at least," Zhu Pingan replied without looking up as he packed the dishes into the food box.

"You scholars are so annoying. If it went well, just say so. Why do you have to hedge with a 'probably won't fail'? Isn't that frustrating?" the young woman chuckled mockingly.

Hearing this, Zhu Pingan looked up at her and smiled faintly. "You're just biased against us scholars. If I had been brimming with confidence earlier, you'd have said we scholars are the most arrogant."

"And wouldn't I be right?" The young woman rested her cheek on her hand and countered with a playful smile.

This was the ancient version of a disgruntled youth, Zhu Pingan thought. He didn't bother continuing the debate with her. After packing up everything, he returned the food box to the inn. Back in his room, Zhu Pingan lit an oil lamp, adjusted the wick, and began carefully reading a hand-copied manuscript that had yellowed with age. Although he was confident in the Four Books and Five Classics questions on today's exam, he noticed that the questions on the Four Books were becoming increasingly tricky. Only by mastering the Four Books and Five Classics thoroughly could one handle them with ease and counter their challenges effectively.

"Can't you take a break for just one night? Don't you care whether others can keep up with you or not!"

The young woman, who was reclining on the bed, had thought Zhu Pingan would rest for at least one night after finishing this round of exams, allowing her to get a good night's sleep as well. To her surprise, he had already started reading under the lamp again as soon as he returned, prompting her to pout and complain.

But hearing these words come out of the young woman's mouth sounded oddly suggestive: "Take a break for one night, don't you care whether others can keep up with you..."

However, Zhu Pingan had long since become accustomed to the occasional flirtatious remarks she let slip.

"By the way, your injury should be almost healed by now, right? You're even starting to gain some weight," Zhu Pingan remarked casually while tidying his desk. His underlying meaning was clear: if your injury is healed and you're getting comfortable here, isn't it time for you to move on?

"Oh no, it hurts! It seems my internal injuries are acting up again. I'd better get some sleep to recover," the young woman moaned dramatically before pulling up the blanket to "rest and recover."

As the night grew quiet, the only sound in the room was the occasional rustling of pages. The young woman on the bed had long since fallen into a deep sleep, and the dagger that used to be under her blanket was no longer there.