

Rise 109

Chapter 109: The Enchanting Woman Ruo nan

The letter was folded by the demoness into the shape of a pair of koi fish, which looked rather unique. Zhu Ping'an moved the wine jar aside, took out the letter, and opened it. The handwriting inside was far from impressive, in fact, it was worse than what he had written as a child.

"When you read this letter, this young lady will already be far gone. Surprised, huh, bookworm?"

Seeing this, Zhu Ping'an curled his lip. Surprised? He had known she would leave; the cuckoo bird had already been calling all spring...

He continued reading...

"First of all, congratulations. This bookworm actually managed to top the provincial exam, I didn't expect that. Considering you're the top scholar, I'll forgive you for disturbing my sleep with your early mornings and late nights."

At this point, Zhu Ping'an recalled the fleeting figure he had seen when he looked at the ranking board. It must have been this demoness.

"By the way, the fifty taels of silver are to be seen as this young lady robbing the rich to aid the poor, or rather, helping you out of your poverty. Honestly, you're too stingy even for a meal. Don't worry, that person is definitely bad news, and far away too. I figure, even though you're a little arrogant, you're not the type to starve yourself, right?"

Reading this, Zhu Ping'an took out the fifty-tael silver note, looked at it, and found no special markings on it. It seemed safe to spend, and he could exchange it for loose silver at the bank. He casually put it into his pocket—he would need it for the upcoming academy exams. Besides, the demoness's reasoning made sense; he wouldn't let this vixen demoness eat him out of house and home. After all, he was someone in need of aid.

"Another word of advice, don't believe everything you read. Those things are meant to fool bookworms like you. Don't even think of having any weird thoughts about me. If I find out, you'll regret it."

Zhu Ping'an raised an eyebrow and couldn't help but smile bitterly. What a joke. Who would have any thoughts about a demoness like her? And weird thoughts? He was only thirteen, for heaven's sake!

"At the announcement of the results, I heard many people say you're smart and all that, even encouraging their children to learn from you. Don't take it to heart. Others may not know, but I do. You're just a bit hard-working, but far from being smart."

Uh, this line actually made some sense. The previous ones were all nonsense. "Mastery comes from diligence, while neglect brings ruin; actions are formed through thought and destroyed by carelessness," this was a principle he had always remembered.

"Lastly, if you somehow pass and become an official, don't do anything disgraceful. Otherwise, my knife won't show mercy. Take care, my little benefactor."

"Won't show mercy?" Who is your kin? Stop making up relationships, Zhu Ping'an thought, feeling speechless about the letter.

That was the whole letter. The signature at the end read, Ruo Nan respectfully.

Ruo Nan—an unusual name. But what's her family name? Never mind, it's not important. Zhu Ping'an folded the letter back up and placed it on the table.

He had bought too much food again, and he didn't even like alcohol. Looking at the double portions of food on the table, Zhu Ping'an felt a little helpless.

He ate everything on the table, let out a big burp, cleaned up, and then read a bit of his book. Perhaps he had eaten too much, as he soon felt sleepy after only a short time.

Rather than forcing himself to stay awake and be ineffective, it was better to take a nap and recharge his energy.

Finally, he could sleep in a proper bed.

Zhu Ping'an lay down on the bed, fully dressed, and fell asleep. Because it had been a while since anyone had taken a midday rest, his sleep was especially sound. When he woke up, the sun had already begun to set, and the golden rays were streaming through the window.

Zhu Ping'an got up, feeling refreshed and full of energy.

He didn't feel hungry despite eating so much before sleeping, but just to be safe, he decided to go downstairs and buy some fruit and snacks, in case he got hungry again while reading.

As he made his way downstairs, he was stopped by someone—someone who seemed vaguely familiar.

"Young Master Zhu, I finally found you. I've been looking for you for three days."

Before Zhu Ping'an could speak, the man handed him a twenty-tael silver note, saying, "Young Master Zhu, this was entrusted to me to personally deliver to you."

Ah, he finally remembered, this was the man who had asked him in Huaining County if he was Zhu Ping'an, and then handed him a twenty-tael silver note.

The man placed the money in Zhu Ping'an's hand and turned to leave.

"Hey, wait! Who sent this?" Zhu Ping'an called after the man and asked.

He was really curious, who would keep sending him money like this? He couldn't just accept money from someone without reason.

"Young Master, I'm just following orders and can't say. Please don't make it difficult for me," the man replied.

Zhu Ping'an was even more curious now. Was there really such a thing as a "good deed without leaving a name" in this age? Though no one would turn down money, he couldn't just accept this stranger's kindness without knowing the reason behind it.

"Uh, please go back and tell that person that my expenses are already covered, and I really don't need it. Thank you very much. Oh, wait, please wait a moment. Let me exchange the silver note, and please take the previous twenty taels back as well. Uh, don't run off..."

Before Zhu Ping'an could finish speaking, the man seemed to be bitten by a dog, as he suddenly dashed off in a hurry, shouting while running, "Young Master, please don't make it difficult for me, and I'm also under orders not to talk much. Please forgive me."

He delivered the money and ran off, not allowing him to say anything more. Why did he make it seem like Zhu Ping'an was a dangerous person?

Zhu Ping'an stared at the man's retreating figure, feeling quite frustrated. After thinking for a long time without any answers, he decided not to waste any more brainpower on it. He put the silver note into his pocket and thought he would return it next time.

Could it be that today was his lucky day? Why else would two people give him money without him asking for it?

After the provincial exam comes the imperial exam. It's already mid-April, and the exam will be in August. He might as well pack up tonight and head home tomorrow. He hadn't been home since the end of the lunar year, and now it was already mid-April—almost three months without returning home. He missed home.

He would go find his uncle later, but he guessed his uncle wouldn't be coming back. He didn't have to attend the county or provincial exams, so he would likely stay out to prepare for the imperial exam. If his uncle and the others weren't coming back, he would stay home until July and then go for the imperial exam.

In the evening, the streets were bustling with people, and Zhu Ping'an bought some fruits and snacks from the street vendors. He packed them up and headed back to the inn.

After putting his things down, he went to his uncle's room and knocked on the door. No one responded. He knocked on the neighboring villager's door, but still no answer. It seemed like they were probably hungover again.

He would have to ask them tomorrow morning.

Zhu Ping'an returned to his room, lit the oil lamp, and sat at the desk, enjoying his book. He occasionally pondered, occasionally took up his brush and ground ink, content and absorbed in his task.

As the night grew late and the surroundings quieted down, the cuckoo's calls ceased to echo.