

## Rise 113

Chapter 113: Different Paths, Different Plans

"If life could only be like the first meeting"

The female scholar Mo'er, standing gracefully on the stage, felt her heart tremble violently upon hearing these words. In an instant, tears filled her eyes...

Before the crowd could recover from the first line, Feng Shanshui read out the second line of the poem:

"Why is the autumn wind so sorrowful for the painted fan?"

This line struck directly at one's past. The love was so deep, so intense at the time, but why did it ultimately lead to separation? The vows you made to me, why are you now telling someone else?

The female scholar, who had only a trace of tears in her eyes moments ago, now had tears sliding down her cheeks...

Zhu Ping'an's brush moved faster in his hand, writing rapidly.

"How easily a person's heart changes, yet they say a person's heart is easy to change."

Your heart has become fickle. You promised to love me forever, but now you treat me like dirt, and even worse, you scold me for changing my heart. As this line echoed, many people felt a resonance in their hearts. They listened quietly, but internally, emotions surged. Of course, many others furrowed their brows. How could such a poem, filled with deep reflections on life and love, come from a seemingly immature boy? This was hard to believe.

Zhu Ping'an had always kept a low profile, rarely interacting with others. While many scholars in Anqing Prefecture had left behind at least five or six poems, Zhu Ping'an had only presented two at the "Stunning Fairy Poetry Meeting," and those two were still full of doubts.

He had some talent, but was it true greatness? Many were still uncertain.

After all, such poems could live on for generations—how could a thirteen-year-old, without any fame, be capable of such work? Especially a poem that required deep emotional experience to write, coming from a boy who was yet to experience love? It was incredibly hard to believe.

Tongcheng's Xia Luo Ming stood quietly to one side, his usual arrogance gone. He stood with his mouth slightly open, gazing at Zhu Ping'an, unable to see through him...

The murmurs in the crowd grew louder, mostly filled with suspicion and fewer with admiration.

Zhu Ping'an seemed to hear nothing and see nothing. Unfazed by the crowd's reaction, he continued to stand there, writing furiously, completing the remaining lines of the poem:

"Li Mountain speaks, the clear night rain falls, the bell rings, no blame.

How about the ungrateful brocade-clad young man, once pledged to fly with me, now just a distant branch?"

When Zhu Ping'an's final stroke fell, Feng Shanshui beside him seemed deeply moved and read the entire poem again.

The female scholar, standing on the stage, gazed intently at Zhu Ping'an, her face now drenched in tears.

This poem was perfectly suited for a romantic setting like this one, written from the perspective of a heartbroken woman condemning a fickle lover. It was essentially an ancient, elevated, and artistic version of a love transaction. At first sight, you pledged your love to me, promising eternal devotion. Yet, in the blink of an eye, you embraced another, accusing me of changing my heart. I cried, I hurt, I loved my country, I hated, and in the end, all I could say was, "If life could only be like the first meeting."

After the poem was finished, everyone's emotions were complex. This was undoubtedly a poem that could live on for centuries. Yet, how could it come from a boy who had not even matured, who had no experience with love? It was hard to shake the suspicion: have you ever been in love? How could you write such a tender and passionate poem?

Moved and unable to control herself, the female scholar Mo'er had tears that soaked her veil. She gracefully bowed to Zhu Ping'an, thanking him for the poem.

Some in the audience noticed the female scholar's gesture, and before her words of gratitude could even leave her lips, someone hastily voiced their doubts towards Zhu Ping'an.

"Did you write this poem yourself?"

Zhu Ping'an put down the brush in his hand, glanced at the person, and smiled slightly. He then asked in return, "Could it be that you wrote it?"

The person was at a loss for words, stunned for a moment, then pressed on with certainty, "You're only a thirteen-year-old boy. How could you write such profound reflections on love, hate, and life?"

Many others who shared the same doubts couldn't help but agree.

Zhu Ping'an's smile remained, and he softly asked, "Do you want to hear the truth or a lie?"

Without hesitation, the person replied, "Naturally, the truth."

"The truth is," Zhu Ping'an said, "I've never eaten pork, but I've often seen a group of fat pigs running through the hills."

"Never eaten pork, but never seen a pig run?" he added. There have been many touching and deep stories of love and hatred in history, and stories of talented scholars and beautiful women are countless.

The person was momentarily taken aback, then asked, "What about the lie?"

"The lie is... I copied it from someone named Nalan Xingde, whose courtesy name was Rongruo, and who styled himself as Yinshui."

"Nalan Xingde? What a strange name. Where is he from? Why haven't I heard of him?"

As the crowd pondered in confusion, Zhu Ping'an had already turned and left. The bright lights and wine-soaked atmosphere of the Zui Jun Tower didn't make him linger for even a second.

"Young master, please wait..."

Even the female scholar, who had stood gracefully on the stage and was admired by many for years, and who had kept her face veiled, was now reaching for her veil. In the next moment, she would reveal her breathtaking beauty. But despite this, Zhu Ping'an didn't even glance back.

By the time the crowd reacted, Zhu Ping'an had already descended the stairs, without a trace of reluctance.

And soon after, the crowd could only see the figure of the boy, carrying a black wooden board, disappearing into the rain once more.

"Different paths, different plans!"

Zhu Ping'an, walking in the rain, softly murmured these words before striding toward the inn.

He wondered whether the unfinished meal would still be there at the inn, as he hadn't eaten much. He also wondered if the money he grabbed was too much or too little, since he had been hastily pulled away by the villager. All the commotion at the Zui Jun Tower had made him even hungrier. The rain seemed to be getting heavier, and the wind was picking up. His soaked clothes clung to his body, unable to block the chill of the wind and rain. He decided it was best to hurry back to the inn, have a bowl of ginger soup, take a hot bath, and change into clean clothes...