

Rise 121

Chapter 121: A Way of Showing Affection

Oh, come on, what is this? If modern-day innuendo jokes were told, they'd probably have her dragged off to the authorities.

The scheming young girl and the bun-haired maid, among others, were both embarrassed and shy, all chiding each other.

However, this also gave Zhu Ping'an a moment to select a book. He quickly scanned through the row of books and picked two: one was a collection of insights from Zhuzi Guan's readings of the Four Books and Five Classics, and the other was a compilation of standard Eight-Legged Essay examples. These Eight-Legged Essays, which were the classical writings of the current dynasty, had been passed down because, after the ancient imperial exams, the exam papers were returned to the candidates. Thus, these classic essays survived. Both of these books intrigued Zhu Ping'an, and he very much wanted to take one back to transcribe slowly. However, due to the rule of only being able to choose one, he was unsure of which to pick.

"If you want to choose both, you could, but you'd have to tell us the rest of Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils that you didn't finish earlier."

While Zhu Ping'an was uncertain about his choice, the bun-haired maid spoke up under the scheming girl's hint.

Zhu Ping'an naturally wouldn't refuse.

So they brought out peanuts, melon seeds, and other snacks and sat in a row. In particular, the scheming girl, Li Shu, had the little maid bring in the seafood that had been preserved in ice. Then they set up a small iron stove, placing expensive Silver Frost Charcoal in it, and started grilling the seafood right there. Once the Silver Frost Charcoal caught fire, it produced no smoke, and the grilled seafood, free of smoke and charring, had a pure, rich flavor. Zhu Ping'an, sitting not far away telling the Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils story, couldn't help but glance over repeatedly.

Of course, the scheming girl seized this opportunity to tease him for being unrefined.

"Really no shame, your voice even has the sound of drooling!" The scheming girl glanced at Zhu Ping'an, laughing in mock annoyance. Then, as if granting a favor, she waved her little hand, signaling the bun-haired maid to bring a plate of the grilled seafood to Zhu Ping'an.

The bun-haired maid brought a small plate to Zhu Ping'an's table. It seemed like she was still holding a grudge from the earlier Mulan joke. She glared at him and forcefully placed the seafood in front of him, speaking with a bit of false grandeur, "You're lucky! These Silver Frost Charcoal and seafood were just delivered by the master's people today, and they're freshly arrived. You're really lucky to have this."

"Watch your mouth!" The scheming girl scolded, stopping the bun-haired maid's chatter and not letting her speak further. She looked at Zhu Ping'an proudly and said, "Wipe your mouth, the sound of you drooling is disgusting."

Zhu Ping'an looked at the fragrant seafood in front of him, a bit surprised. These were all fresh seafood preserved with ice, and he hadn't expected to have seafood in a mountain village. It seemed that the black-bellied girl's constant pride wasn't without reason. He had heard that Lord Li, her father, had been involved in the salt, rice, and silk tea trade with some merchants from Huizhou, making a lot of money. He hadn't realized they were so wealthy. To satisfy his daughter's appetite, they were willing to ship seafood from the coast using ice, regardless of the cost.

He had thought her family was just a local rich man, but now it seemed he had underestimated them. In this era, the profits from salt and iron were beyond what he could imagine.

The Ming Dynasty was a significant period for the formation and development of salt merchants' capital. According to historical records, with the help of the policy in the third year of the Hongwu reign (1370), where merchants were summoned to deliver grain in exchange for salt, salt merchants flourished. One of the most important groups of salt merchants were the Huizhou merchants, particularly the "big merchants" and "upper merchants," who were mostly salt traders. The activities of the ancient Huizhou merchants coincidentally included this region, so it seemed that the Li family's wealth was likely tied to this.

Who would have thought that the plump local rich man was actually a big salt merchant, though still quite low-key, hiding in the mountain village. It seemed like he had learned a lesson from the experience of Shen Wansan.

But that was irrelevant to Zhu Ping'an.

Zhu Ping'an picked up a grilled squid dipped in seasoning. There was no smoke or charring, so the seafood retained its fresh taste. The texture was perfect, and paired with the sauce, the flavor was simply exceptional.

"Are you done? If you don't continue, I'll throw you out. Don't even think about coming back." The scheming girl saw Zhu Ping'an savoring the grilled squid, and because he wasn't finishing up quickly enough, she spoke with disdain.

She really had no patience. Good food requires patience; every piece of meat has its own temperament.

Under the scheming girl's urging, Zhu Ping'an began again.

Every character in Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils was exceptional, and the plot was a series of peaks. This time, Zhu Ping'an finished narrating the battle at Shaolin Temple, where Qiao Feng faced three enemies and fully displayed his supreme martial arts.

After hearing this, the scheming girl was filled with excitement, unable to settle down.

"That's enough for today. I need to go back and study." Zhu Ping'an stood up and walked toward the door to sign out, then bid his farewell and left.

"Don't go! What happens next?"

"Yeah, it's still early! Tell us more!"

The maids, who had been listening intently, all spoke up to try and keep him. Zhu Ping'an simply turned around, smiled, and said he'd continue next time, then left.

When he returned home, it wasn't long before it was time to prepare dinner. His mother, Chen, had already started, and his older brother, Zhu Pingchuan, had returned from the mountains, bringing with him two wild rabbits and half a basket of mountain delicacies such as wood ear mushrooms and bamboo shoots.

Back in his room, Zhu Ping'an spread out the borrowed books on the table by the window and prepared the ink, brush, paper, and inkstone. He then began to carefully transcribe, one word at a time.

The first thing he copied was the classic Eight-Legged Essay (a traditional form of Chinese essay writing) that had been passed down from the current era. As he copied, he could feel that the Eight-Legged Essay from the Ming Dynasty was slightly inferior compared to that of the Qing Dynasty. After all, the Eight-Legged Essay had been practiced for hundreds of years in the Qing Dynasty, whereas it had only been around for a little over a hundred years in the Ming Dynasty. The Ming Dynasty was full of vigor, while the Qing Dynasty appeared more mature.

By the time he finished copying the third essay, he heard the sound of bells outside, signaling the return of his father, who was driving a cow-drawn cart.

As if by some kind of tacit understanding, his mother, Chen, had also just finished preparing dinner.

Dinner was very hearty, and his mother seemed to be trying to feed Zhu Ping'an so much that it felt as though she wanted to fatten him up with a single meal. Chicken, rabbit meat, and fish piled up in his bowl until it was full to the brim.

After dinner, Zhu Ping'an was about to help his mother wash the dishes, but Chen sent him out, using the excuse that a gentleman should stay away from the kitchen.

Just as she had sent Zhu Ping'an out, his father, who was having a late-night snack in the courtyard, was called in to scrub the pots.

"Isn't a gentleman supposed to stay away from the kitchen?" His father's voice, filled with grievance, came from the kitchen.

"Stop pretending! Who do you think you are as a gentleman? Just answer me: Are you going to scrub the pots, Zhu Shouyi?" Chen began her loud scolding in the kitchen.

"Yes." Zhu Ping'an's father replied quickly and succinctly.

Then, the sound of Madam Chen's soft laughter could be heard.

Zhu Ping'an, listening from outside the kitchen, couldn't help but weakly complain: This is really just another way of showing off affection!

Returning to his room, Zhu Ping'an lit the oil lamp and began to focus on his book copying again. Each neatly written small character seemed to come alive under his brush, neatly arranged on the rice paper, creating a pleasing sight.

When the moon reached its zenith and the night grew deep, the world outside fell silent. Zhu Ping'an tidied up his desk, blew out the oil lamp, and fell into a deep sleep.