

Rise 189

Chapter 189: Miss, Please Do As You Wish

"Benefactor, please continue practicing your calligraphy. I will play the flute for you."

The young girl spoke in a sweet, delicate voice as she sat down on a stone opposite Zhu Ping'an. Her watery eyes blinked as she gazed at Zhu Ping'an, who held a brush in his hand. Her long eyelashes quivered slightly, her fair cheeks were tinged with a faint pink, and her thin lips, as delicate as rose petals, appeared soft and dewy.

After sitting down, the girl let out a gentle, lingering sound while reaching out her slender jade-like hand to take out a jade flute from inside her slightly open collar, still warm from her body heat. Her already low-cut collar slipped even lower due to this movement, revealing a large expanse of snow-white skin, making it difficult for anyone not to steal a glance.

Zhu Ping'an was no exception.

Seeing this, the girl's watery eyes became even more enchanting, like rippling autumn waves... Just as she was about to press forward and further captivate this gentle and refined young gentleman... she suddenly heard Zhu Ping'an, sitting opposite her, point at her exposed skin and speak.

"Miss, there's a spider on you..."

A spider?

The girl, whose eyes had just been overflowing with charm, let out a shriek and jumped up from the stone. She even dropped her jade flute on the ground as she frantically hopped left and right, scratching and grabbing at herself like a fast-forwarded film...

A few minutes later, the girl's resentful gaze landed on the young man, who had, at some point, returned to his desk and resumed practicing his calligraphy.

She bit her red lips slightly, took delicate steps to Zhu Ping'an's side, and playfully pouted, "Such a beautiful night, how can you waste it? It's just the two of us here, what is there to fear?"

"I'm not only good at playing the flute..."

The girl let out a charming giggle as she leaned against Zhu Ping'an, her body as soft and boneless as a snake.

"Heaven and earth know. How can you call it just two people? It was just a trivial effort before, Miss, you need not take it to heart. I still need to practice my calligraphy, please carry on at your leisure." Zhu Ping'an stretched out his hand to block the girl's approaching figure, his expression serious.

"Benefactor, why must you be like this? I do not ask for any status. I... I only wish that when you are tired and weary, you could glance at me occasionally."

"When you write, I grind the ink; when you recite poetry, I dance; when you read by the east window, I step gracefully like a lotus, warming plum wine..."

Her eyes were filled with moisture as she gazed at Zhu Ping'an, her delicate face glowing with soft allure, her voice sweet and tender.

"The imperial examination is approaching, I must continue practicing. Please excuse me, Miss."

Zhu Ping'an stood up from the stone, took two steps back, and cupped his hands in a polite gesture.

"Benefactor..." The girl looked at him with sorrowful eyes.

"Miss, please excuse me."

Zhu Ping'an cupped his hands once again.

The girl cast one last wistful glance at Zhu Ping'an, biting her lips in a mix of shyness and frustration, then turned and left the forest.

Your fragrance is so overwhelming that it even kills my appetite, let alone any other desires...

Zhu Ping'an watched the girl's departing figure and couldn't help but mutter inwardly.

Then, he sat back on the stone and continued copying and refining an argumentative essay he had revised the day before. As he practiced his calligraphy, time unknowingly slipped away with the clear flow of water from his brush.

The morning sun slowly rose from below the horizon. Though its outline was not yet visible, the eastern sky had already turned a rosy hue. Gradually, the moon faded, like a white pill dissolving in water. Then, the sun emerged from the forest, rising majestically—large and round like a carriage wheel, radiating a golden-yellow glow.

With the sunlight now illuminating the surroundings, Zhu Ping'an put away his black wooden board, took a scroll from his bag, and leaned against a giant rock to continue reading attentively.

Across the Qinhuai River, in a room on the opposite shore, a seventeen or eighteen-year-old girl gently pushed open the door, moving as quietly as she had come.

"Sister, why were you gone for so long?" A girl on the bed, her hair styled in a "falling horse" bun, groggily heard the door creak. She rubbed her eyes, propped herself up sleepily, and asked in a half-awake voice.

"Oh, oh, sister—sister had a stomachache, but it's better now. You can go back to sleep," the girl at the door replied. Her expression was slightly off, and her voice carried a trace of guilt.

But the girl on the bed was too sleepy to notice anything unusual. She simply nodded drowsily and nestled back into the covers, quickly falling asleep again.

The girl at the door let out a breath of relief, then tiptoed toward the dressing table and sat down. The next moment, her delicate hands covered the corners of her lips, and her shoulders trembled uncontrollably.

It is often said that actors are heartless, yet how can they stop their tears from falling, staining the rouge and turning cold?

Meanwhile, in the forest, Zhu Ping'an continued to absorb the warmth of the sun, engrossed in his book.

The sun is shining, and I am young—how could I waste such a beautiful day without reading?

He kept reading until his stomach signaled its protest. Reluctantly, he placed the book back in his bag, picked up his black wooden board, slung his satchel over his shoulder, and walked out of the forest.

Ahead, a white silk sash lay quietly among the fallen leaves. It must have been left behind by that girl earlier in the morning. The scene from before surfaced in his mind again. Zhu Ping'an shook his head slightly and

pressed down on a certain restless part of his body. You're still young—when you mature, you'll have your time on the battlefield. But for now, the nation is not yet strong, and it's not the time to lightly start a war.

Besides, such matters are best left between lovers and spouses. He was not the kind of person to act recklessly.

Zhu Ping'an shook his head again, stepped around the white sash, and walked past it from the side.

By now, the streets were bustling with people—vendors selling breakfast, servants buying groceries, wealthy young men strolling with their caged birds and pet dogs... The entire street was lively and full of energy.

As Zhu Ping'an walked through the crowd, he found himself reminiscing about the morning food in Yingtian. Scanning his surroundings, he noticed a long queue in front of what appeared to be a newly opened breakfast shop. Curious, he joined the line. As he waited, he overheard people talking about how delicious the food was.

The line was long, but the shop owner was efficient. Before long, it was Zhu Ping'an's turn.

"Young master, would you like a full set or just individual items?" the owner asked. "It's your first time here, isn't it? I recommend the full set—it's delicious and affordable, only eight wen."

"I'll take the full set," Zhu Ping'an agreed readily, counting out eight coins from his pocket and handing them over. Eight wen wasn't much, and given the long queue, the food was bound to be good.

The owner's hands moved swiftly, assembling the meal in a blur—egg yolk, sausage, braised pork slices, vegetables, pickled long beans... In just a few seconds, everything was neatly arranged on a steaming bowl of rice.

Zhu Ping'an carried the tray to a table, picked up a pair of chopsticks, and took a bite. The flavors were rich but not greasy—so delicious that he couldn't help but dig in enthusiastically.

The shop owner's wife, a plump woman in her forties, brought over a tea bowl and poured him a cup of water. Then, unexpectedly, she sprinkled some crushed leaves into the bowl.

Just as Zhu Ping'an was about to take a sip, he noticed the floating leaves and hesitated, looking up with a puzzled expression. "Why is there this in my water?"

"The water is hot—I was worried you might drink it too quickly and burn yourself," the woman explained with a smile. "These are stevia leaves. They have a natural sweetness."

Such thoughtfulness—no wonder this shop was thriving.