

## Rise 69

### Chapter 69: The Cursed Candidate

The dim red curtains exude the fragrance of sandalwood, while the cloud-patterned satin weighs down the embroidered bed. The room is exquisitely decorated, showcasing an air of luxury while also brimming with the youthful charm of a girl's life, with scattered handkerchiefs used by the daughter throughout the room...

This is a young lady's fragrant boudoir.

In the boudoir, there is also a desk carved with peonies. The front of the desk has a large window, and next to the window sits a vase with a branch of winter plum blossoms, enhancing the youthful atmosphere even more. On the desk are ink, brushes, paper, and an inkstone, along with a few handmade books on the right side, which are titles like *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* and *The Smiling, Proud Wanderer*... a thick stack of them.

In the center of the desk lies an unfinished copy of *Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils*, where a young girl sits with a brush in hand. She is wearing a plush cloak over a plain white cotton jacket, adorned with embroidered plum blossoms, showcasing her slender figure. Although her face is youthful, it already displays an enchanting beauty.

The girl, with her delicate hands holding the brush, appears a bit restless, unable to put pen to paper.

"Ah, Miss, that bad person from the neighboring village really went to take the exam! So many people went to see him off!" chirped a girl with her hair tied in double buns as she hurriedly walked in.

"Let him go, it's just a toad going to take an exam!" The girl at the desk scrunched her face in disgust, seemingly uninterested in the news brought by the maid.

"But, but what if he passes?" the bun-haired girl hesitated to say, her round face slightly flushed, as if brushed with a hint of rouge.

What if he passes...

"There's no such 'what if.' A glutton, a rogue, someone with no backbone, who hides behind others to take advantage of the situation—how could that kind of toad ever pass?" The girl at the desk threw a small tantrum and stood up to reprimand the maid.

"Oh, but he's very clever; he's tricked us many times!" The bun-haired girl still sounded hesitant.

"Foolish Hua'er, he tricked you! I was never deceived!"

This statement seemed to light a fire in the girl at the desk, and she took her brush to doodle a little turtle on the maid's face.

"Miss..." the bun-haired maid said, feeling somewhat wronged.

"No talking! You're not allowed to wipe it off all day! If you do, I'll sell you to the Flower Lady!" The girl at the desk carelessly tossed the brush onto the desk and pointed her delicate finger at the maid, wearing a stern expression as she threatened her.

"Miss..." the bun-haired maid endured the little turtle drawing on her face, feeling quite pitiful.

The girl had drawn a little turtle on the maid's face, and her mood seemed to lighten a bit. However, she quickly remembered something, her pretty face drooping, biting her red lips, with her eyes filled with a mix of shame and anger.

It seemed that she too had once been drawn a little turtle on her face by some bad person. It seemed that from that moment on, she developed a habit of drawing turtles on others' faces.

How annoying, how annoying!

That seemingly silly little toad is the worst, the absolute worst little scoundrel in the world!

He absolutely must not pass the exam! What if that toad actually does pass—what would that change? No, I definitely don't want him to succeed!

Right, he's still so young, he's only studied for a few years; there's no way he could possibly pass. Why am I even worrying about this?

But when I think about that little toad drawing on my face, it makes me furious. It seems I've suffered quite a bit at his hands. Although I've played tricks on him many times, how could he dare to draw on my face? How could he be so cruel and enjoy it so much!

The girl couldn't help but recall past memories.

It was shortly after the bad person's family was split up when I was a child. I went to him during a break, bringing my drawings and asking him to tell me stories. But that bad person refused to share any stories, even rejecting the delicious food I offered. In my anger, I stubbornly brought up his father borrowing money at high interest.

Then that rascal, with his squinty eyes and silly grin, bet me, saying we should have a competition. If either I or my drawing won, he would tell us a story and grant us a request. If both of us lost, he would get a request.

I could tell he was grinning, but there was anger in his eyes. I thought that if either I or my drawing won, it would be fine. After all, I wasn't stupid; besides, if I didn't dare to bet, wouldn't he just laugh at me? So, I agreed.

I never expected... never expected... that this toad was just a rogue!

A contest to see who could urinate farther...

What the heck! How could he even suggest that? Both my drawing and I are girls! Such an embarrassing thing—how could I possibly do it? Even though I'm small, I still know better than to do something like that in front of boys!

Although I slapped him, it was still too embarrassing for my drawing and me to forfeit. In the end, we lost the contest.

That little toad's request was to draw a little turtle on my face and on my drawing's face with a brush...

That little rascal laughed so happily while drawing! I saw how joyful he was, and I wanted to try it myself. I never expected that drawing a little turtle on someone else's face would be so enjoyable, and then it spiraled out of control.

That little toad may look silly on the surface, but he's actually quite mischievous! So, the heavens must protect us and ensure that this kind of bad person does not pass the exam!

At Changting, not far from the villages of Xiahe and Shanghe, Zhu Ping'an was saying goodbye to his family and villagers when he suddenly sneezed.

"Strange, is someone talking bad about me behind my back?" Zhu Ping'an rubbed his nose and thought to himself. No, that's not right; everyone openly talks bad about me, like...

"Zhi'er, just consider this a chance to gain experience. It's normal to fail the first time," his first uncle, dressed in a loose-fitting round-collared robe that gave him a somewhat dashing appearance, stood in front of Zhu Ping'an, taking on a senior's tone as he gently advised him.

But they haven't even taken the exam yet, and Zhu Ping'an looked at his first uncle speechlessly.

Of course, it wasn't just his first uncle; the other villagers who had come to see him off shared the same opinion, all chattering to comfort Zhu Ping'an.

Even his mother, Chen, didn't have high hopes for him.

"Yes, Zhi'er, your first uncle has failed the exam for twenty or thirty years. If you don't pass this time, don't take it too hard."

Chen was quite displeased with her brother-in-law, not only because of his previous words but mainly because a few years ago, he had used Zhu Shouyi's name to borrow money at high interest, which got Zhu Shouyi beaten and driven out of the house. Moreover, just a few days ago, both Grandfather and First Uncle had come to borrow money, and the most infuriating part was that they had even borrowed a piece of wood from the house. It was truly a case of forgetting the pain after healing the scars.

Her words made First Uncle feel embarrassed.

"For me, this time, it will be as easy as taking something from a bag," First Uncle declared confidently, though it was unclear where he got such self-assurance from. He stroked his beard and laughed confidently, his robe billowing in the cold wind, presenting the demeanor of a well-respected scholar.

The villagers were also optimistic about First Uncle, showering him with compliments, eagerly saying they would wait for his return to host a banquet and such.

First Uncle graciously thanked them one by one.

Only Zhu Ping'an felt the coldness at the door; both Zhu Shouyi and his older brother, Zhu Pingchuan, were few with their words, their eyes generally reflecting the comfort of not passing being okay. Chen simply reminded Zhu Ping'an to eat well, drink well, and dress warmly, having no expectation that Zhu Ping'an would pass this time.