

Rise 73

Chapter 73: The Secret Revealed

Although the mountain god temple was simple and the food and drink were modest, everything seemed so beautiful in the presence of the girl. The students raised their cups and enjoyed each other's company, the atmosphere lively and cheerful.

"Here's to you, a toast!" "Let's drink first out of respect!" The mood was excellent.

Zhu Ping'an continued to sit in the corner, one hand holding the egg pancake while the other played with a small triangular white paper package in his palm. He unobtrusively observed the lively crowd at the center of the temple.

About ten minutes after the girl had toasted, the students suddenly noticed a larger flower spider than the one that had startled the girl earlier, boldly crawling among the bowls and dishes of food and drink.

Another opportunity to show off in front of the girl had come. The crowd prepared to deal with the audacious spider that had dared to climb among the dishes.

Just as everyone was about to reach out, a flash of white light zipped by. The audacious spider was precisely pinned to the ground by a delicate dagger, which buzzed and shook as the spider struggled for a moment before going still.

The crowd swallowed hard, staring in disbelief at the source of the white light. They saw that the once fragile and gentle girl was now smiling at them, her delicate hand still in the position of having thrown the dagger.

What was going on?

The students shook their heads and rubbed their eyes. Could it be that they were drunk and imagining things? No way, absolutely not.

The once frail girl now seemed like a completely different person. Outside the mountain god temple, she had resembled a delicate little white rabbit, but now she resembled a cobra with its forked tongue flicking.

"Giggle, giggle... What's wrong, esteemed benefactors? Oh dear, don't look at me like that, giggle, giggle... Oh, it's about time, isn't it?"

The girl tore off her facade of weakness, efficiently taking care of the spider, and smiled at everyone, her eyes filled with contempt and disdain.

"You, uh... the wine has..." One of the students, pale-faced, stammered while pointing at the girl.

The wine has some kind of drug, Zhu Ping'an silently supplemented in his mind. Just as the student finished speaking, he slumped against the wall, producing a faint sound.

The girl glanced at Zhu Ping'an and then turned her attention back to the others, her expression a mix of disdain and disgust as she said,

"Yes, I put a relaxant in the wine. You must feel utterly weak now, how ridiculous. At your age, you still think you can play the hero saving the beauty? A bunch of pathetic scholars, wake up, the stories in books are all lies."

A relaxant? Zhu Ping'an, pretending to be asleep in the corner, felt powerless to complain. He opened his eyes, leaning against the wall to mimic the same sense of helplessness as the other students. Damn it, it was his lack of experience in the world. Didn't novels always depict the use of knock-out drugs for robbery? Why was it a relaxant this time? Fortunately, the girl only glanced at him without much suspicion; a relaxant could make one feel weak and perhaps fall over.

As the girl's voice faded, a burst of laughter erupted from outside the temple, and the five ruffians who had previously left now strode back in.

"Young master is truly astute; these fat sheep are being toyed with by her. When we return, the old master will definitely commend her."

The ruffians, having shed their earlier flippancy, now stood respectfully beside the girl, their deference enough to reveal her extraordinary status.

The girl ignored them, walking over to the bowls and dishes to retrieve her dagger from the ground. With a teasing smile, she approached a wealthy student and flicked the spider impaled on her dagger into his mouth.

The student was furious but felt utterly powerless, unable to curse her out of fear of choking on the spider. All he could do was glare at her in anger.

The girl laughed at his predicament, then stepped on his hand, her smile widening as she pressed down hard, causing blood to flow.

"Ah..." the wealthy student let out a pained scream, followed by a fit of coughs as the spider lodged in his throat.

"Oh, hehe, excuse me, let me think... who was it that just touched my hand? Oh, it was you, wasn't it?"

The girl spoke to herself, maintaining her smile as she walked to another student, her grin as sweet as it was sinister.

In the eyes of the onlooking students, her smile resembled that of a man-eating demoness described in stories.

Unfazed, the girl continued her laughter, stepping on each of the previously ill-intentioned students, leaving them bloodied and battered.

Zhu Shouren, her uncle, was the last to receive her wrath. His right hand, which he used for writing, was also trampled until it bled, and he was left weeping.

Once she finished trampling each of them, the girl wiped her bloodied embroidered shoes on Zhu Shouren's blue robe, scrubbing off the evidence of her cruelty.

"Look at you, such a grown man, crying like this, aren't you ashamed?"

After cleaning her shoes, the girl turned to the five men standing respectfully to the side and waved her hand.

"Young master," they responded with respect.

"You, you, you," the girl pointed her delicate hand at three of them at random. "You go through their things, one by one. Check their bags first, then their bodies. Be thorough; these exam-takers are all fat sheep. Don't let a single coin slip through."

After issuing her commands, she gestured to the last two and motioned her lips towards Zhu Ping'an's direction.

"That little brother is quite disobedient. If it weren't for his slip-up at the end, I might have been fooled. Keep a close eye on him. I want to take him back and play with him properly." She pointed at Zhu Ping'an, her cherry lips curling into a sneer.

In the corner, Zhu Ping'an, feeling powerless, smiled wryly. It turned out that the girl had already begun to suspect him back then; she was just pretending to be unaffected to deceive herself into letting her guard down.

Two shifty-eyed men approached, standing by Zhu Ping'an's side, following the girl's orders, and keeping a close watch on him.

"This older sister is quite impressive."

Zhu Ping'an pretended to struggle on the ground, quickly hiding the opened small paper bag in the pile of grass, then got up with a bitter smile.

"Be obedient; don't even think about playing tricks in front of me. If you try your cunning and fail, I'll resort to knives. I don't want to get Xiao Bai stained with blood."

The girl looked at Zhu Ping'an with a smile that was not quite a smile, stepping closer to him. With her delicate hand holding a dagger, she lifted Zhu Ping'an's chin.

"Oh, and you two, coordinate a bit. The effect of the soft bone powder will wear off in two hours. If you don't cooperate, don't blame me for not warning you!" The girl cheerfully pointed the dagger at the crowd, watching as they all nodded in fear.

A total of two hundred and thirty taels of silver and six hundred and fifty-seven wen.

All the students, including Zhu Ping'an, had their entire fortunes taken away. These people were professionals; they left not a single coin behind. Even a ten-tael silver note hidden in one student's pants was confiscated.

Not only was Zhu Ping'an stripped of ten taels of silver, but he was also to be taken away by the girl.

"Ahem, this older sister, can I have a drink? Uh, the jar of wine that you didn't drug, I've been craving it for a long time. If possible, could you let me have a piece of meat? Even if I'm to be executed, I should at least get a last meal," Zhu Ping'an said, trying to look brave as he licked his dry lips, gazing at the girl.

"What nonsense!" One man, responsible for watching over Zhu Ping'an, slapped him hard on the head.

Damn it, that hurt. Zhu Ping'an silently cursed, looking innocently at the man.

The girl turned her gaze back to Zhu Ping'an for a moment. He was just a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old boy who looked scared. What if he was clever? He still had a small heart. If it were her, she would have pointed out her trick at the first opportunity, warning those smug scholars, so it wouldn't have ended like this.

Thinking of this, the girl spoke, "You two, go bring that jar of unopened wine as well; it should be worth quite a bit. Hmm, let him have a taste."

The man, receiving the girl's order, hurried off to bring the untouched jar of wine. They had been coveting these fine wines for a long time. Roughly, they opened it and handed it to Zhu Ping'an. He took the jar with both hands, took a sip, and immediately coughed, his face turning red, trembling as he held the jar, which wobbled. Embarrassed, he handed the jar back to the man.

"Pfft!"

The five men burst into laughter, shoving Zhu Ping'an out of the temple and leaving while laughing heartily.