

Rise 98

Chapter 98: Last Night's Peach Blossom, The Singing Is Good and the Life Is Good

Whenever the demoness made noise in bed and couldn't be quiet, Zhu Ping'an would throw out a riddle, causing the demoness's laughter to be absent for the rest of the day, as if something was wrong with her entire being.

Why can't she solve a single problem, yet every time that kid provides an answer, it makes people feel enlightened? After several riddles, one might even start questioning life itself.

The demoness in bed leaned back, watching the boy, who was furiously writing under the glow of the setting sun, with an indescribable feeling.

As the sun set, Zhu Ping'an finally finished a policy essay and a classical text, blowing dry the ink before placing them at the corner of the table alongside a similar Qing dynasty imperial examination essay he had copied. He intended to compare and study them thoroughly in the evening, analyzing the strengths of the Qing dynasty's essays while carefully examining his own shortcomings, hoping to improve his writing skills in classical prose. With his current level, passing the elementary scholar's examination was not a problem, but it would be challenging to achieve success in the provincial examination, so he needed to continue improving.

In the evening, Zhu Ping'an left his room and brought back some stir-fried dishes and pancakes. After returning, he divided the food into two portions: one for himself and the other for the demoness.

"Why is there no wine?" The girl looked at the dishes Zhu Ping'an handed her, pouting as she casually stirred the stir-fry with her chopsticks but found no meat. Her pout deepened, and she looked up at Zhu Ping'an, complaining, "How can there be no meat at all? Is this how you treat a sick person?"

"Just having something to eat is already good. Your medicine has nearly drained my wallet," Zhu Ping'an glanced at her and replied lightly before lowering his head to continue enjoying his meal.

A female thief still found things to complain about, acting as if she were a young lady from a wealthy family.

Zhu Ping'an relished his stir-fried dishes, finishing all three pancakes, while the girl ate for a long time, still leaving behind one pancake and a large portion of stir-fry.

Since he had bought the pancakes and dishes with his own money, adhering to the principle of not wasting, Zhu Ping'an finished the demoness's remaining pancake along with the leftover stir-fry, eating it all cleanly. After finishing, he let out a satisfied burp and poured himself a cup of hot tea, sipping it slowly along the rim.

"Haha, you really can eat; you must be a pig," the girl said, resting her chin on her hand, looking at Zhu Ping'an with a smile.

"I wouldn't dare to share the same zodiac with you," Zhu Ping'an replied demoness.

Ignoring the girl's next reaction, Zhu Ping'an cleaned up the plates on the table and put them back into the food box before heading to the hall. When he returned, he brought back a bedding set.

Seeing this, the girl's face turned slightly red. Although she had wandered the martial world for many years, it was her first time sleeping in the same room as a man. Even if the person was just a boy who hadn't fully matured yet, it still made her feel a bit shy.

"You... you sleep on the floor," she said, taking a seat on the bed first.

"What did you think I brought the bedding for?" Zhu Ping'an responded.

Zhu Ping'an didn't even glance at the girl who had rushed for the bed. He busily laid the bedding on the wooden floor. Fortunately, this was the second floor, with wooden flooring; otherwise, he would have struggled against the dampness of early spring.

After setting up the bedding, Zhu Ping'an sat down at the desk by the window, lit the oil lamp, and adjusted the wick with a needle, placing it at the corner of the table. Then, he laid out the policy essay and classical text he had written, and picked up a copied Qing dynasty imperial examination essay to compare and study with interest under the lamp.

After comparing for a while, he made notes and highlighted key points on his own essay and classical text, leaving insights for future reference.

The girl on the bed was sleeping fully clothed, occasionally opening her eyes to glance at the boy studying late into the night, her hand hidden under the cup, tightly gripping a dagger...

Still feeling somewhat weak after taking medicine, she soon fell asleep again.

When she was startled awake by the sound of rustling clothes, the girl opened her dark eyes cautiously, thinking someone might take advantage of her slumber. She gripped the dagger tightly, ready to strike, secretly blaming herself for being blinded by the boy's courteousness in laying out the bedding and his diligent studying, not realizing his seemingly virtuous facade.

What met her eyes was Zhu Ping'an, neatly dressed, putting on a messenger bag and methodically stuffing the books and a simple brush from the desk into it, with a piece of worn black wood tucked under his arm. He seemed to have done this countless times before.

Outside the window, dawn was just breaking, and through the window, the inky sky was still speckled with a few scattered stars.

"What are you doing?" The girl's voice was hoarse from just waking, even more alluring.

"Morning practice," Zhu Ping'an replied, not lifting his head, focused on checking his bag to ensure nothing was left behind.

This person didn't even look back; he was such a blockhead, making her tense all night for nothing.

Watching Zhu Ping'an, who had slung the bag over his shoulder and was clutching the black wood as he disappeared from the room, the girl pouted at the closed door and then closed her eyes to sleep again.

On an early spring morning, the air was still a bit chilly. The sky in the east was just beginning to lighten, and the air was filled with the scent of dawn. Everything felt so pure and refreshing, as if it were a faint ink wash painting, suffused with the pleasant aroma of morning light.

Not far from the inn, Zhu Ping'an saw three or five people supporting each other as they staggered in from a distance, a strong smell of alcohol wafting toward him even from afar.

What the hell, he thought, no wonder there's a fragrance in the street; it turns out to be the smell of wine! Zhu Ping'an's expression darkened.

"Last night, that little waist of Xiao Cui Hong..."

"Good singing and good living."

A few drunk men were shuffling along like crabs, mumbling some flirtatious remarks.

As the group approached, Zhu Ping'an was slightly surprised to recognize them; among the staggering figures was his uncle Zhu Shouren. Another one was a fat friend of his uncle, who seemed utterly drunk and nearly collapsed on the ground, while the other three were also local students, all looking tipsy and unsteady.

"Good morning, Uncle, good morning, everyone," Zhu Ping'an greeted, cupping his hands in a salute.

"Hey, this... isn't that Zhi'er? Where are you off to?" Uncle Zhu Shouren asked, slurring his words.

Before Zhu Ping'an could respond, another local laughed loudly, "I know! Hehe, I saw Young Master Ping'an leave the house the day before yesterday. When I got up to find something to eat, I saw him enjoying some food at a stall. Hehe, Young Master Ping'an must be hungry again."

"Haha..." The other drunk men burst into hearty laughter.

The pungent smell of alcohol, mixed with cheap perfume, was extremely unpleasant, causing Zhu Ping'an to instinctively take a couple of steps back.

"Ah, little An has gotten shy, haha..."

The group of drunk men shuffled around Zhu Ping'an, wobbling and laughing as they headed toward the inn.

Zhu Ping'an watched their swaying figures, feeling a mix of frustration and melancholy, pitying his family for having to deal with such behavior.