

Rise 99

Chapter 99: Walking in Brocade by Day

The morning water of Taihu Lake appeared particularly clear. Zhu Ping'an sat on a low stone in front of a large rock by the lake, unable to resist dipping his fingers into the jade-like surface of the water. A cool sensation spread from his fingertips to his heart, sweeping away the discomfort brought on by his uncle. He scooped up a handful of lake water to wash his face, feeling refreshed and invigorated. After washing his face, he laid a black wooden board on the large rock and poured bamboo tube water into a natural groove in the rock. He took out the ox-tail brush made by his father and soaked it in lake water, vigorously writing on the black wooden board.

To the east, the rising sun gradually ascended, casting warmth and light on the diligent boy practicing his calligraphy by Taihu Lake. As the sunlight brightened, Zhu Ping'an put away the brush, bamboo tube, and black wooden board, pulling out a roll of hand-copied books from his backpack, reading with great enjoyment.

In the distance, white sails appeared where the water met the sky, and shouts of fishermen could occasionally be heard as they caught fish.

The boy by the shore packed his things and slung his backpack over his shoulder, returning along the same path. Passing by the street, he bought two portions of tofu pudding and six "deep-fried pine" sticks—also known as youtiao. At this time, people still preferred to call them "deep-fried pine," expressing their indignation towards Qin Hui, who unjustly murdered Yue Fei and his son at the Fengbo Pavilion.

Zhu Ping'an carried the youtiao and tofu pudding back to the inn.

Zhu Ping'an's room in the inn was relatively secluded, and naturally, the price was cheaper. However, when he returned to the room, he heard what seemed to be quite a lively commotion inside.

As soon as he pushed the door open, he heard a surprised and joyful cheer:

"Ah, my husband is back, and he even brought back my favorite deep-fried pine!"

My husband?

What's going on?

What trick is this demoness up to now?

This was Zhu Ping'an's first thought, but as soon as he saw the scene in the room, he relaxed, realizing what was happening.

Standing in the room were three officials dressed similarly to yamen runners but somewhat more ornate. The leader wore a waist knife that resembled a Miao knife; the hilt was quite long, the spine was straight, and the blade had a slight curve.

Uh, could this be the infamous Xiuchun knife?

Has the situation been exposed?

Thinking of the seriousness of the matter, Zhu Ping'an paused in his steps, then caught a whiff of a fragrant aroma. The demoness, like a sparrow returning to its nest, flung herself into Zhu Ping'an's arms, smiling as she pulled him to sit in a chair. She took the youtiao and tofu pudding from his hands, attending to him like a little wife.

"My husband, these brothers from the Jinyiwei are here for a routine search. I heard they are looking for assassins or something—it's quite frightening," the demoness said, sitting beside Zhu Ping'an with a timid demeanor as if she were a delicate girl.

They were indeed Jinyiwei (Imperial Guards). Unlike the portrayals in television dramas with Donnie Yen, they were not wearing flying fish robes, and only the leader carried an Xiuchun knife; the others wielded ordinary swords.

"Thank you, gentlemen, for your hard work in ensuring our safety. There is still some breakfast here; if you don't mind, please help yourselves to warm yourselves up," Zhu Ping'an said as he rose from his chair, cupping his hands in a salute. He then discreetly slipped a small silver ingot into the hand of the leader, speaking politely.

Giving the officials some loose change was not out of guilt, but rather a matter of social etiquette. If these officials had good character, it would be fine; however, if they were of a worse nature, they could cause significant inconvenience during a search, damaging belongings or leaving a mess behind or even stealing something. Offering some silver, regardless of their character, would usually make them more courteous.

"Not at all, young master, you're too polite. We have yet to catch the assassin targeting the deputy magistrate; we're just conducting a routine inspection," the leader of the Jinyiwei replied, taking the silver and smoothly slipping it into his sleeve, speaking much more courteously. "With so many books, you must be here to prepare for an exam. We'll leave as soon as our routine check is complete and won't disturb your studies."

"Then I'll trouble you gentlemen," Zhu Ping'an bowed again and returned to his seat, leaning against the table.

The leader of the Jinyiwei began the search with his two subordinates, their movements surprisingly polite. After a brief search, finding no prohibited items like bloodied clothes or weapons, they prepared to leave.

Just as they were about to exit, one sharp-eyed Jinyiwei noticed something under the bed and walked over.

It was the medicinal herbs he had bought.

Zhu Ping'an felt a bit of sweat on his back, but his expression remained unchanged, as if nothing were happening at all.

The Jinyiwei crouched down under the bed, finding nothing else, just a few paper-wrapped packets of herbs, which he took out.

The leader of the Jinyiwei approached, opened one packet of herbs, then another, and turned his head to look at Zhu Ping'an.

At that moment, the demoness blushed slightly, appearing coy and bashful as she pinched her handkerchief, leaning on Zhu Ping'an's shoulder, and shyly spoke, "Ah, how embarrassing! Those jade butterflies, donkey-hide gelatin, aloe vera, pearl powder, and ginseng are all for a girl to nourish her body. I—I want to help my husband... bear a son..." As she spoke, the demoness playfully pinched Zhu Ping'an's waist.

The two packets of herbs the Jinyiwei leader opened happened to be those the demoness bought for beauty and health. The Jinyiwei were somewhat knowledgeable about herbs and, seeing that the opened packets contained items indeed meant for women's health, concluded there were no medicinal herbs for treating wounds from knives or swords.

Seeing the demoness's shy demeanor and hearing her flustered explanation, they relaxed, suppressing their laughter as the Jinyiwei clasped their fists and took their leave.

"Bear a son... but he's just a thirteen or fourteen-year-old boy, probably hasn't even fully developed yet. It's a bit unfair to him."

A boy who hasn't fully matured, and a young girl like a blooming peach—no wonder the boy looked somewhat pale; it seemed he had worked too hard at night.

The Jinyiwei stifled their laughter as they left the building.

Once the sound of the Jinyiwei had completely faded, Zhu Ping'an let out a sigh of relief. He sat in the chair, disregarding his image, poured a cup of cool tea, and gulped it down.

The demoness looked Zhu Ping'an up and down, covering her cherry-like lips as she chuckled, "My dear husband, look at your pale face and trembling legs. Are you still even a man? Hehe..."

"Damn it!"

Zhu Ping'an was too tired to retort; it was all because of this demoness. In both his lives, he had always been a bookish type with no strength to tie up a chicken; he had never encountered such a scene before. Being able to stay calm without wetting his pants was a sign of strong mental fortitude. Besides, his legs weren't even trembling!

"Hehe, I really doubt whether you're still a man," the demoness giggled, sitting at the table and teasing him again.

"Do you want me to take it out and show you?" Zhu Ping'an shot her a glance and said calmly.

The demoness looked at Zhu Ping'an with a smile, dismissing his words with a wave of her hand.

Zhu Ping'an's temper flared up, and he reached into his pocket...

Seeing this, the demoness's expression changed. She stepped back a bit, pulling out a glimmering dagger from who knows where. It seemed that if Zhu Ping'an made any inappropriate moves, she would swiftly stab him without hesitation.

Then, Zhu Ping'an pulled out a travel pass from his pocket and slapped it down on the table. Pointing at a line on the pass, he smirked, "See this? Zhu Ping'an, from Xiahe Village, male."