

Rise 145

Chapter 145: The Good Voice of Ming Dynasty

Night after night, the bright moon lingers; day after day, the white clouds fade away.

By the Qinhuai River, where carriages and horses bustled about in endless streams, the lively atmosphere drowned countless grand ambitions in intoxicated dreams. Zhu Ping'an shook his head and refused, unwilling to follow in their footsteps, and turned to leave.

"You..."

Upon hearing Zhu Ping'an's crisp and decisive refusal, the originally spirited seventeen or eighteen-year-old girl suddenly reddened her eyes, tears streaming down her face.

"What do you know? You know nothing! Do you even understand the life we lead? We're not those famous courtesans; we can only be manipulated by the madams. Just a few days ago, Sister Peach Blossom was beaten half to death!"

"Do you know why so many talented women are born in brothels? It's because those of us without talent are tortured to death early on... In ordinary families, lack of talent might be considered a virtue, but for us, lacking talent means death is near."

"For the beautiful ones, without talent, they're like cracked eggs—flies and mosquitoes swarm in, and they're quickly ruined and killed. For the not-so-beautiful ones, lacking talent is even more tragic. They're at the mercy of old men, widowers, sickly husbands, and ugly brutes, with no way out..."

"The talented and famous ones can control their fates and have a decent end."

"Now that Sister Peach Blossom has escaped her misery, we're going to suffer for it. Those widowers, sickly husbands, and ugly brutes have all paid the madam; there's no escaping the inevitable."

"Do you think I dared to come to you on a whim? Who knows if you truly have talent or are just an embroidered pillow? Who knows if you're good or bad? We have no fame and don't know any other scholars. You're just a desperate hope we're clinging to..."

The seventeen or eighteen-year-old girl was full of resentment, speaking hysterically, tears streaming down her face.

"Don't cry, sister. Let's go back. If we're late, the madam will seize the opportunity to act up again..." The fifteen or sixteen-year-old girl, with reddened eyes, clung to the older girl's arm, comforting her while eager to leave this place.

If all men in the world were like this young man, my sister and I wouldn't have to fear a short and tragic life.

"I'm always too soft-hearted," Zhu Ping'an curled his lips in self-mockery.

"Do you have brush and ink?" Zhu Ping'an sighed and asked.

Hearing this, the seventeen or eighteen-year-old girl looked up in disbelief, her tear-streaked face showing a trace of joy. The younger girl, with reddened eyes, also looked at Zhu Ping'an with brightened eyes.

Although they didn't know how skilled this young man was, at least there was a glimmer of hope.

"Yes, yes, yes! We hid them under the bridge," the older girl nodded repeatedly.

It seemed they had come prepared. Even without the misunderstanding earlier that morning, this girl likely would have found a way to approach him.

In truth, it wasn't her fault—just a matter of survival.

"Let's go, then," Zhu Ping'an said indifferently.

The two girls moved faster than Zhu Ping'an, lifting their skirts and jogging toward the bridge. By the time Zhu Ping'an arrived, they had already set up the brush, ink, paper, and inkstone on a large rock.

"Earlier, it was my rudeness. Please forgive me, young master," the older girl repeatedly apologized as she handed Zhu Ping'an the brush.

"Fortunately, it was me. If it had been someone else..." Zhu Ping'an casually replied as he took the brush.

"Because it's you, young master. Only then would I dare to act like that. If it were someone else, even if I had ten times the courage, I wouldn't dare..." The seventeen or eighteen-year-old girl spoke honestly.

Bullying honest people, huh? Zhu Ping'an was a little speechless.

"What kind of poem is the young master planning to write?" The red-eyed girl, seeing Zhu Ping'an looking as though he had swallowed a fly, quickly changed the subject.

"Who said I was going to write a poem?" Zhu Ping'an shrugged.

Hearing this, the seventeen or eighteen-year-old girl became visibly upset. Her chest heaved as she fumed, "You... you're toying with us?"

"I'm not writing a poem, but I didn't say I wouldn't write something else," Zhu Ping'an said calmly.

Upon hearing this, the girl's indignation subsided, and she broke into a smile through her tears. "Then you're writing a lyric? Lyrics are even better for us. Our courtesan queen became famous with a single lyric."

"Who said I was writing lyrics?" Zhu Ping'an shrugged again.

Immediately, the girl's tears began to flow once more. "Is it fun for you to toy with us?!"

"Can you let me finish my sentence?" Zhu Ping'an spoke indifferently. "I'm not writing a poem or a lyric; I'll write you a song instead. Hmm, a song. It sounds odd, doesn't it? But actually, it's not strange at all. A 'poem matched with music' is called a poem-song. Lyrics also have fixed tunes, which are essentially the melodies for the lyrics. Lyrics were originally meant to be sung. I suppose you want a poem or lyric to sing as well, right? Hmm, for your courtesan competition, you probably need something to perform on stage, like singing, dancing, or playing an instrument, so that a bunch of idle scholars can score you. What I'm writing is this— a song, designed purely for singing."

"You're called Hu'er, right? Hmm, this song should suit you perfectly. Those scholars will probably enjoy it a lot. Afterward, there should be no shortage of scholars willing to write poems for you."

Zhu Ping'an held the writing brush, dipped it in ink, and began to write:

"I am a fox who has loved for a thousand years,

A thousand years of love, a thousand years of solitude.

In the long night, do you know for whom I mend my red makeup?

In the mortal world, do you know for whom I comb my silken hair?

I am a fox who has waited for a thousand years,

A thousand years of waiting, a thousand years of helplessness.

When love runs deep, watch me dance beautifully for you.

When love becomes pain, hear me sing my heart out for you.

Through bitter cold nights, you and I made vows of eternal love, engraved in our hearts.

But the imperial examination and wedding celebrations left us as strangers, paths forever diverged.

Can you let me cry for love?

I am still the white fox who loved you a thousand years ago.

Through countless springs and autumns, mornings and evenings,

Life after life, I remain your fox."

Though the two girls lacked literary talent, they had practiced diligently and read with genuine intent. As they watched Zhu Ping'an write each straightforward yet heart-piercing line, their eyes widened in amazement. It was their first time encountering such writing, and they felt as though a new door in their hearts had been opened.

In a trance, they seemed to see that cold study room, that scholar, and that beautiful fox spirit playing out a poignant and tragic love story before their very eyes.

How sorrowful, how moving.

By the time Zhu Ping'an finished writing and put down his brush, the two girls were already in tears.

"Yes, it would be best to learn a few dance moves. You could perform one song while dancing or even sing and dance at the same time. For accompaniment, something like a guqin or guzheng would work well to create the right atmosphere. As for that, I'm not an expert—you can decide what to use. As for the melody, it should go something like this." Zhu Ping'an spoke while attempting to sing two lines in a modern Chen Rui style. However, he quickly realized that it didn't suit him at all. Singing this as a man? No way. With a bitter smile, he abandoned the attempt.

"I am a fox who has cultivated for a thousand years..." Before Zhu Ping'an had finished two lines, the fifteen- or sixteen-year-old girl, with red eyes, followed his melody and sang the song White Fox. Her version was almost identical to the original and, in some parts, even better.

"Oh, not bad, just like that." Zhu Ping'an nodded in satisfaction.

"Alright, I'll gift you another song," he said after some thought, picking up his brush again. Singing and talent competitions—how could they be complete without his songs? The courtesan selection in the Ming Dynasty was probably just like modern talent shows.

"Existence"

How many people walk but are trapped in place?

How many live but are as good as dead?

How many love but seem to be apart?

How many smile but are filled with tears?

Who knows where we should go?

Who understands what life has become?

Should we find an excuse to muddle through,

Or spread our wings and soar, full of rage?

How should I exist?

After finishing, Zhu Ping'an hummed two lines casually but quickly discovered he still couldn't pull it off—he just lacked musical talent.

"That's about it. You can figure out how to sing it yourselves," Zhu Ping'an said, putting down the brush and chuckling self-deprecatingly.

The two girls, especially the seventeen- or eighteen-year-old, blushed while reading the new song Existence. Despite the flush, their gazes were firm.

"Young master's teachings—this humble girl will remember them always."

This statement from the older girl left Zhu Ping'an slightly startled. Hmm, did these two girls think he had deliberately written the song to educate them?

Maybe it was because Wang Feng's song always inspired people to improve themselves. Everyone interprets things differently. Forget it—they can think whatever they like.

"Take care of yourselves," Zhu Ping'an said with a casual wave of his hand as he left.

"Young master, please wait! May we ask your name?" the girl called out loudly behind him.

"My surname is Wang, my given name is Feng, and my courtesy name is Toutiao."

Zhu Ping'an paused briefly, then continued walking forward without looking back, answering with a mischievous smile.

From behind him came the voices of the two girls...

"Thank you, Wang Feng, Master Wang. Your great kindness will never be forgotten by this humble girl."