

## Rise 241

### Chapter 241: Entering My Heart's Gate

The Cang Mountain is white with age, and the falling snow looks weary.

After riding the horse all day, he finally arrived at the small town around 4 PM. He originally thought the small town was just an ordinary place, but as soon as he entered, his thoughts about it were completely overturned.

The small town after the snow was picturesque—gray stone slabs, black bricks, and the pure white snow scattered on the ground. The town looked like an ice and snow castle straight out of a fairytale. The colors complemented each other so perfectly, it was incredibly beautiful.

Although the small town was beautiful, for Zhu Ping'an, who had traveled all day through the snow, nothing was more appealing than a bowl of steaming noodle soup and a warm bed.

He dismounted and found an inn, paid for the room, and asked the shop assistant to take his black horse to the backyard and bring his belongings to the room.

"This young man, please bring me a bowl of lamb soup," Zhu Ping'an called out to the shop assistant who was about to leave, asking him to have the kitchen prepare a hot bowl of lamb soup.

"Lamb soup is ten wen a bowl. If you want some pancakes, they're one wen each," the shop assistant turned around and replied.

The lamb soup costs ten wen per bowl, which is about two wen more expensive than in his hometown, probably because of the snowstorm today, or perhaps because he's an outsider.

"One bowl of lamb soup will do, no need for the pancakes," Zhu Ping'an said, taking ten wen from his sleeve and handing it to the shop assistant. The reason he didn't want the pancakes was that he still had some left from home.

The shop assistant took the money, nodded, and left. By the time Zhu Ping'an was tidying up the bed, the shop assistant returned with a steaming bowl of lamb soup, placed it on the table, and left.

The rich aroma of the lamb soup steamed up, with chunks of tender lamb and lamb offals sinking like treasures in the soup, waiting to be discovered. Such treasures resting in the soup were irresistible.

Zhu Ping'an eagerly took two pancakes that his mother, Madam Chen, had made, broke them into pieces, and dropped them into the steaming lamb soup. He then grabbed a piece to eat, and the delicious flavor instantly spread throughout his body. It was incredibly tasty.

The rich, fragrant lamb soup, combined with the oily pancakes, was like the meeting of golden wind and jade dew—an encounter more beautiful than countless earthly delicacies. On a snowy winter day, with such a bowl of lamb soup and pancakes filled with maternal love, it was pure happiness.

Traveling through the snowstorm, cold and exhausted, especially after eating, made drowsiness set in. So, Zhu Ping'an decided to take off his clothes and lie down on the bed, putting aside his earlier thoughts of taking a hot bath. He was simply too tired.

People often say that a weak scholar is frail, but thinking about it now, if scholars were really weak and unable to carry a chicken, how could they endure the long journey to the capital for the imperial exams? In this era, traveling long distances to the capital was no easy feat; enduring the wind and rain was commonplace. Therefore, the idea that scholars were weak and feeble was completely wrong. He himself had only been traveling for a few days and already felt exhausted. Those scholars who walked all the way to the capital really had it tough.

Soon, Zhu Ping'an started snoring and drifted off to sleep.

In Shanghe Village, the Li family had passed the Laba Festival, and the red lanterns still hung high. The servants were busy with their work.

As evening approached, the sound of a horse neighing could be heard from the gate. Wang Xiao'er, who had gone to deliver a letter to Zhu Ping'an, entered the house.

In the bedroom of Miss Li, three braziers were burning, and a basin of water sat in the corner to provide humidity. Even in the cold, snowy winter, the room was as warm and comfortable as spring.

Miss Li sat at the table near the window, lost in thought, staring outside, as if waiting for someone. On her desk were brushes, ink, paper, and inkstones. There were also a few small booklets of official documents she

had copied, and beneath her hand was a sheet of rice paper, upon which was a line of poetry written in small, delicate characters, the ink still wet:

"Enter my gate of longing, know the pain of my love. Longing forever, remembering forever, brief longing, endless as can be. Had I known this would entangle the heart, I would never have met you."

Suddenly, the sound of small footsteps could be heard outside. Miss Li's eyes brightened. She looked up and saw her little maid, Hua'er, running toward the room with her skirts held high.

"Miss, Miss, Brother Wang is here."

A few seconds later, the bun-faced maid, Hua'er, rushed in, panting heavily. As soon as she entered, she started shouting and reporting to her young mistress.

"Just go if you're going. I'm a little hungry, so go to the kitchen and tell the cook to make me a bowl of tofu and crucian carp soup, but it should be a bit lighter in taste today. I don't trust anyone else. Oh, and on your way to the kitchen, call Wang Xiao'er to come here."

Li Shu, calm and composed, continued writing the poem she hadn't finished, not even raising her head when she gave the orders to the bun-faced maid, Hua'er.

"Yes, I'll go right now." Hua'er, feeling trusted by her mistress, had a red, happy face. She nodded repeatedly and, holding up her skirt, skipped out of the room.

About five minutes later, an old woman entered, leading Wang Xiao'er. After the old woman brought him in, she stood by the door. Wang Xiao'er walked with his head down, not daring to look at anything in the young mistress's room. He only looked at his own toes and stopped after taking three steps.

"Wang Xiao'er, what was his reaction?"

Li Shu put down her brush after Wang Xiao'er and the old woman entered, asking indifferently, as if not particularly concerned, though her ears were attentive.

"Young Master was a bit surprised after hearing about the marriage contract and seemed quite skeptical," Wang Xiao'er answered, keeping his head lowered.

Hearing this, Li Shu, holding the brush in her slender hand, unconsciously stained the rice paper with a large blot of ink.

"But after I handed him the marriage certificate, he read it, nodded, and then kept it close to him," Wang Xiao'er continued to answer.

Upon hearing that Zhu Ping'an nodded and kept the marriage certificate close to him, Li Shu relaxed her brows. She hadn't expected that fool to keep it close, thinking he would impulsively come back and cancel the engagement.

"Did he say anything?" Li Shu slightly squinted her eyes, asking with interest.

Wang Xiao'er lowered his head and recounted the conversation he had with Zhu Ping'an exactly as it happened. After listening, Li Shu pursed her lips, thinking that fool wasn't afraid of exhausting himself. There were horses, so why hurry on foot?

"When I first met Young Master, he was facing a wild wolf." Wang Xiao'er paused and then mentioned the incident with the wolf.

"Ah? What happened to him?"

Upon hearing this, Li Shu, who had been calm and composed, immediately pressed her brush onto the paper in surprise, her face full of concern.

After asking, Li Shu quickly realized that her reaction had been over the top. Moreover, since Wang Xiao'er was here reporting to her, it must mean that fool was fine.

"How unlucky, trouble started just after the engagement. If others find out, they will say I bring misfortune to my husband."

Li Shu cleared her throat, then regained her calm demeanor and made an excuse to herself.

"Young Master is fine. Thanks to the young mistress sending me to deliver the message, I arrived in time and killed the wild wolf with one shot. Young Master wasn't harmed at all," Wang Xiao'er gave all the credit to Li Shu.

"Oh."

Li Shu simply responded with a faint "oh."

The room fell silent for a moment, and Wang Xiao'er lowered his head, staring at his feet. Then, he heard his mistress's instructions.

"Forget it. I don't want others to say I'm fated to bring misfortune to my husband. You don't need to go to my father this time. Just pack up and head north. Hmm, since that person wants to travel far, you can secretly protect him. If nothing happens, don't reveal yourself. As for my father, I'll handle it."

Li Shu casually crumpled the rice paper, which was stained with ink, and tossed it into the nearby wastebasket. She gave a quick command.

"I'll go pack now," Wang Xiao'er replied, bowing and retreating towards the door.

"Wait, did you buy the medicine I asked for?"

Just as Wang Xiao'er was about to push open the door, he suddenly heard the young mistress's voice asking.