

Rise 65

Chapter 65: Snow, Sweet Potatoes, and Music Go Well Together

Time flies, and the years pass like a shuttle; how many times have flowers bloomed and withered, and the fragrant grass turned green? How many times have snowflakes and plum blossoms graced the scene? ... Just like that, several years have passed, and winter has come again, blanketed in snow. The swirling snow covers everything, turning the world into a sea of white.

On the snow-covered path from Xiahe Village to Shanghe Village, a boy's figure slowly emerges in the midst of the blizzard, humming a strange tune.

"Wolf Fang Moon, the beloved one looks haggard, I raise my cup, drinking in the wind and snow... Who knocked over the cabinet of the past, stirring up dust and disputes? The character 'fate'—how many times have we reincarnated... You lock your brows and cry, but cannot call back the beautiful face..."

The boy is about thirteen or fourteen years old, with an honest face and a pair of bright, black eyes that shine even in this snowy weather. He wears a blue robe, with a black belt at his waist, black boots, and a rabbit fur hat on his head.

As he trudges through the snow, his footsteps make crunching sounds, and he holds a roasted sweet potato, blending into the swirling snow.

"I heard that snow and sweet potatoes pair well with music," he remarks randomly as he walks, then suddenly bursts into a nervous laugh.

If it weren't for the heavy snow, which left him alone, people would definitely think he was crazy.

Crossing the snow-covered wooden bridge and walking around the foot of the mountain, he arrives at the door of the wealthiest landlord, Li Da, in Shanghe Village. The courtyard is deep, and the threshold is high. The boy steps up and knocks on the door flanked by two large stone lions hanging red lanterns.

Knock, knock, knock—no response. The boy shows no signs of discouragement and knocks again.

After a long while, he finally hears the impatient sound of someone stepping on the snow, grumbling in annoyance from inside the yard.

The door opens, and a servant pokes his head out, wanting to see who the fool is that disturbed his peaceful dreams on such a snowy day.

It is said that those who serve the prime minister are of no small importance.

"Haha, good morning, Uncle Li! I've disturbed your sweet dreams again, and I apologize," the boy says with a silly smile on his face, handing over a roasted sweet potato as a gesture of goodwill.

"It's you again! What, have you finished reading so quickly?" The servant takes the sweet potato, but his impatience doesn't wane. He glances at the boy and replies irritably.

The boy is not bothered by the servant's bad temper and continues to smile, cupping his hands and saying, "I'm just being greedy and couldn't digest it all; I've only copied it down. This time, I hope Uncle Li can say a few good words, allowing me to borrow a few more books, so I won't disturb your sweet dreams as much in the future."

"Don't talk nonsense; who do I think I am to help you? Just go yourself, and make sure to close the door behind you. Don't disturb my sleep again," the servant, despite being flattered by the boy's words, says in a grumpy tone. The weather is so cold, and the snow is heavy, so after finishing his instructions, he hunches back into his quarters to catch up on sleep.

The boy loudly thanks the servant's retreating figure.

After closing the door, he walks familiar paths toward the study of Li Da, the wealthy landlord. Although it seems easy to borrow books now, when he first came here, he faced a lot of difficulty; if it weren't for the luck of encountering an old acquaintance, he wouldn't have been able to borrow any books at all.

Li Da, the wealthy landlord, is the type of person who likes to show off his sophistication. With a large estate and abundant wealth, he sought to embellish his façade. He bought numerous calligraphy and paintings from famous artists and filled a cart with poetry and books to create a study. However, Li Da has never actually stepped inside to read any of the books; they simply gather dust. After hearing this news, the boy wanted to help Li Da make better use of his study, but he was repeatedly turned away. It was only by chance that he encountered an old acquaintance that he was finally able to enter and borrow books. As he borrowed more books, the people in Li Da's household grew accustomed to having a boy come by occasionally to borrow more.

The boy is also quite perceptive; he always returns the books promptly and never soils the poetry or writings, which is why Li Da allows him to borrow books.

As the boy quickly approaches the study, a lively and excited voice suddenly breaks his train of thought.

"Oh, Zhu Ping'an, you're truly amazing! How did you know it would snow heavily today?"

A chubby girl with a blue ribbon tying her hair, wearing a nearly new cotton jacket, clutches a silk bag in her hand as she chirps happily while walking briskly towards him.

The boy turns his head and sees the silk bag in the girl's hand, causing his silly smile to grow even wider.

What an innocent silly girl! She actually believes it.

Before Zhu Ping'an could say anything, another voice, crisp and pleasant like a lark flying in on a snowy day, calls out.

"Foolish Hua'er, you've been fooled by him."

With the voice comes a girl who seems like a little fairy sent down by the Heavenly Emperor, wrapped in a fluffy cloak and wearing a pleated skirt, with a ribbon tied around her waist. The most striking feature is her pair of ink-black eyes, full of spirit...

Behind this girl follows a crowd, including an old nurse and several young maidservants, trailing behind her.

"Miss, I'm not a fool. Look, the note inside the silk bag says 'It will snow today.' This note was written by him the last time he borrowed books. How amazing! He even guessed it would snow today," the chubby maid Hua'er pouts, feeling wronged, and unfolds the note from the silk bag for her mistress to see.

"Oh dear, you really are a silly girl! You've been sold by him and are still helping him count the money!" The mistress helplessly taps the girl's forehead.

Zhu Ping'an can't help but laugh at the wronged expression on Hua'er's face, feeling a bit guilty inside. Maybe next time he shouldn't trick this silly girl.

The truth of the matter is:

The last time Zhu Ping'an came to borrow books, he saw the chubby maid Hua'er eagerly muttering about wanting it to snow, almost losing her mind over it. Unable to resist teasing her, Zhu Ping'an told her he had read the I Ching and studied the art of divination. While he couldn't call upon the wind or rain, he could predict when it would snow or rain. After that, he lit a stick of incense, pretended to calculate something, and then wrote a line on a piece of paper, sealing it in the silk bag belonging to Hua'er. He told her that she could only open the bag when it snowed, or else it wouldn't work.

Sure enough, this morning, Hua'er got up and saw the heavy snow falling outside, blanketing everything in silver. She couldn't wait to open the silk bag, only to find the note stating: It will snow today.

Hua'er immediately gasped in surprise, "Ah! Zhu Ping'an is so amazing!"

And that's how the current situation came about.

Zhu Ping'an looked at the wronged maid and then at the mistress who was scolding her, finding it quite amusing. How is it that the mistress is so intelligent, almost demonic, while the maid is adorably foolish?

Just then, the mistress, who had been reprimanding the maid, suddenly noticed Zhu Ping'an staring at her. She frowned and haughtily scolded him:

"What are you looking at, toad Zhu Ping'an! If you keep staring, do you believe I'll have someone gouge out your eyes?"

Uh-oh, indeed, even after growing from a little girl into a young lady, she remained just as proud, materialistic, cold-hearted, and dismissive of others!

If anything, she had just transformed from a cunning little girl into a cunning young woman.

Zhu Ping'an, feeling no different about the proud and arrogant young lady Li Shu, maintained his dislike. What good is being beautiful? Just like Daji, Yu Huai, and Zhao Feiyan—the prettier the woman, the more trouble she brings.