

Love Like Pink Blossom

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Rui Xin

Writer: Rui Xin
Cover Design: Rui Xin
Illustration: Lin Zheng
ISBN: 9789465017242

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To the ones who love.

Lose all glory but with no regret.
When I reminisce,
tears fill my eyes,
as my humble soul ponders upon it.
When the clouds gather from disparate realms,
let us be sparing,
with our deep affections.

Chapter 1

Suyu City

In ancient times, there was once a Kingdom called Ziyu Kingdom. The Ziyu Kingdom had stood profoundly for centuries. In the south of the Kingdom was the magnificent Suyu City. The city was nestled in a valley of a long flowing river and an enchanted peach blossom forest that stretched beyond the eye could see. Suyu City was abundant with life. The denizens of the city, known as the Suyu Clan, built elegant buildings adorned with black tiles and bricks, with long white sheets fluttering from the lofty windows.

The owner of Suyu City was Sumo, also known as Sugu Taoist. As time passed, Suyu City prospered, attracting an influx of Suyu Clan members. Sumo chose six disciples among the Clan. Nan, one of the disciples, found love in the arms of Wu Nisan, the daughter of Wu Min, a servant in the Ministry of War of the Central Court for the Ziyu Kingdom. The marriage of Nan and Wu Nisan solidified the long-standing bond between the Suyu Clan and the Wu family, whom had been close friends for years. Together, they welcomed a daughter into the world, they called her Benin. On the day she was born, Sumo proclaimed Benin to have an extraordinary spiritual aptitude, designating her as the future heiress of the Suyu City.

Sumo had always been strict with his disciples, but his love for little Benin knew no bounds. Sumo nurtured Benin from a young age, teaching her the ways of Taoism, immortality, musical instruments, and poetry. By the age of seven, Benin possessed a charming countenance with thick eyebrows, large eyes, and a lovely face, endearing her to everyone. Since childhood, Benin delighted in pestering Sumo, forging a deep bond between the old Grandmaster and his youngest disciple—a companionship that others found incredibly intriguing.

One day, Sumo and Benin sat together, engrossed in their musical instruments.

"Grandmaster, would you play that flute Xiao again for me? I love your Xiao the most." Benin nestled closely to her Grandmaster, with a mischievous glint in her eyes.

"Very well," Sumo laughed lightly, "but didn't I play it just this morning?"

"Hmm...but I still want to hear the one...what was the name again..." Benin pursed her lips, contemplating earnestly.

Sumo smiled. "Could it be... the 'Green Water Lake'?"

"Yes! That's the one!"

"Okay, as you wish."

Sumo picked up the Xiao once more, its gentle and ethereal sound filling the air. Amidst the lingering melodies, Benin could envision misty clouds, emerald hills, crystal-clear waters, and the fleeting shadows of blossoms. Throughout the performance, Benin watched intently, her gaze fixated on Xiao. At just seven years old, she recognized that although her Grandmaster appeared much older than her, his kindness and affection knew no bounds. She cherished their time together and revelled in his company.

After Sumo finished playing, he turned to Benin and inquired, "Have you heard enough this time?"

"Yes!" Benin responded, a contented smile gracing her face. Deep in her heart, she wanted to hear Sumo playing Xiao forever. She knew Sumo used to be a God from Gods Realm, where all the immortals live. However, she shifted her gaze to Sumo's long white beard and doubted, "Grandmaster, if everyone says that gods do not age, why has your beard turned white?"

Sumo smiled. "I have lived for over five thousand years. Naturally, I should soon return to the earth..."

Benin grew visibly concerned. "Huh? Grandmaster, are you going to die?"

"That is the natural order of things—everyone must face death," Sumo responded with a calm tone.

"No, no, Grandmaster cannot die. You must always stay with me..." Benin's words trailed off as tears welled in her eyes. She leaned over and embraced Sumo tightly.

Moved and anxious, Sumo patted Benin's back. "Benin, my dear, do not be saddened. Another will accompany you in place of me."

Benin's sorrow seemed to subside, yet she still bore a mournful expression, tears streaming down her face. Observing her distress, Sumo regretted bringing up the topic. To console Benin, he suddenly remembered a few bottles of peach blossom wine—the very drink Benin adored.

"Well, don't be sad... Benin, my good girl. How about, just for today, I make an exception... and secretly share a drink with you?"

As soon as Benin heard the mention of wine, her interest was piqued. She slowly wiped off her tears and nodded.

"Hmm...That sounds wonderful..." Benin exclaimed.

In Sumo's heart, he found Benin's genuine nature endearing. He promptly fetched the wine, along with two bronze cups.

Benin looked curiously at her cup and noticed a bird with a cat's head intricately carved upon it.

"Grandmaster, what is the spirit depicted on this cup? A bird with a cat's head?"

"That is one of the ancient spirits, Bai Li, the goddess of war. Bai Li often took the form of an owl in battles. I spent a great deal of time crafting this cup," Sumo replied, a smile on his face.

Benin, however, did not take it seriously. She pouted, peered at her cup, and mumbled, "Well...but this bird with the cat's head looks rather dull... No, no, I want the cup with the phoenix from you!"

Sumo chuckled at her words, finding them oddly familiar. He exchanged his cup with Benin's and said, "Very well, as you like."

Thus, they secretly indulged in the wine within Sumo's chambers, sharing both laughter and tears.

A few months passed, and on this evening, Sumo gathered his disciples in the Main Hall and informed them of his intention to leave Suyu City. Everyone felt reluctant to see him go.

In the evening before his departure, Sumo visited Benin. She had just fallen asleep when he woke her up. Benin was delighted to see her Grandmaster and instantly lost all drowsiness.

"Benin, come, I have something fun to give you," Sumo said, smiling as he produced a round white jade spiritual stone, hanging from a brown string.

"Oh?" Benin looked over and exclaimed with surprise and curiosity, "A stone? It's so beautiful. Where did you get it from?"

Sumo couldn't help but smile inwardly, thinking how much she resembled Yunxi, his wife a long time ago. He then said, "This was left to me by my wife."

"Oh? Is it the token of affection between you and your wife?" Benin asked earnestly.

Sumo smiled and replied, "Well, you could say that."

"In that case, I don't want it," Benin firmly stated.

Sumo laughed again and asked, "And why is that?"

Benin's expression turned serious as she said, "Since it was given to you by your wife, you should keep it safe. I can't accept it."

Sumo chuckled, thinking how similar her nature was to Yunxi's. He then explained, "Keep it. I am over five thousand years old, and soon I will die. There won't be anyone to inherit this item. How about you keep it safe for me?"

Upon hearing this, Benin pondered for a moment and said thoughtfully, "Hmm... all right then." With that, she accepted the stone.

"Okay, I am leaving then," Sumo said, looking at Benin holding the stone, and smiling.

"Eh, don't leave yet, Grandmaster. Since you're here, spend more time with me! I'm afraid to sleep alone. How about you sleep with me tonight?"

Sumo felt a pang of sadness upon hearing that and indeed had a hard time letting go. So, he agreed. Later, he held Benin, watched her fall asleep, and quietly left.

Sumo walked out of Benin's room, tears welling in his eyes. That night, he embarked on his journey to Ling Mountain alone.

Chapter 2

The First Time We Met

The Ziyu Kingdom was in ruins; with corrupt officials dominating the imperial court, rampant decay, and people living in misery. The court had long relied on the military support of the Xiao Family Army, led by Xiao Bing, to maintain stability on the borders. Xiao Bing, who had been stationed at the border for years, remained unaware of the affairs within the court.

One day Xiao Bing received an urgent decree that threatened his family in the capital, commanding him to secretly return and eliminate the current Prime Minister Wu Yu along with more than fifty individuals in his residence. That night, Xiao Bing hurriedly made his way to the capital with several thousand soldiers from the Xiao Family Army. They surrounded the Prime Minister's residence and killed Wu Yu and everyone inside. Wu Yu's grandmother and Nan's wife, Wu Nisan, were relatives. Before his death, Wu Yu quietly ordered a trusted confidant to send his five-year-old son, Wu Qi, to Suyu City, together with a letter written in blood to entrust Wu Qi to Nan.

Upon receiving the letter, Nan's wife burst into tears, and Nan himself was filled with deep resentment. Nan and Wu Yu had been close friends for many years, and Nan admired Wu Yu as a prime minister who worked for the country and the people. He was overwhelmed with grief and anger, grabbed his sword, and left the house to seek revenge on Xiao Bing.

Nan arrived at the territory of the Xiao Family Army in the north of the Ziyu Kingdom and waited for an opportunity. He intercepted Xiao Bing and his son, Xiao Hua, who were about to embark on a journey, at the Ferry outside the city.

"Xiao Bing, you killed my good friend Wu Yu, and I've come for revenge!" Nan confronted Xiao Bing with his sword.

At a glance, Xiao Bing recognized Nan as a member of the Suyu Clan. He also knew about the relationship between the Suyu Clan and the Wu family, so he quickly understood the situation. As Nan approached, Xiao Bing quickly lifted his sword, and the two engaged in a fight.

Unable to match Nan's immortal arts and swordsmanship, Xiao Bing was severely injured within a few moves. Xiao Hua, still young, rushed over and began crying as he hugged his father.

Nan said to Xiao Bing, "As a general, how could you listen to the orders of that tyrant ruler? My friend Wu Yu is a loyal prime minister... How could you wrongfully kill him?"

Xiao Bing heard this, and he started to recount the whole events. How could he not realize that he had been mistaken about the Wu family? While he thought, he was also threatened by the emperor, how could he protect his family? Trembling, he used his last breath to plead with Nan, "Nan, I was blind before and believed in that tyrant ruler. Now I deeply regret it. But... may I ask you to spare my nine-year-old child..."

Moved by the sight of little Xiao Hua, Nan couldn't bear to harm him either. He signed and then decided to spare Xiao Bing's son.

He turned his head to the little Xiao Hua and said, "You're still very young, and... this matter has nothing to do with you. I won't kill you. But if you seek revenge in the future, come to Suyu City to find me." With that, Nan turned around and left.

After returning to Suyu City, Nan raised Wu Yu's son, Wu Qi, together with his daughter Benin. To avoid being pursued by the court, he hid Qi's real identity and took him as his foster son and top disciple, nurturing him as he grew up. Nisan took good care of this newly acquired foster son, showering him with love and care.

One day, Qi, curiously wandering around Suyu City alone, had reached the forest when Benin spotted him. Benin knew about the new brother in their family, but her mother had been taking care of

him diligently and hadn't allowed them to meet. When Benin saw Qi, she quickly guessed who he was and approached him with excitement.

She patted Qi's shoulder and asked mischievously, "Hey, little kid, what are you doing here all by yourself?"

Qi slowly turned his head and looked at Benin curiously. He was a bit dumbfounded by observing Benin's beauty, though very young. She had such a cute look and enchanting voice. After a few seconds, he started to realize the question Benin asked.

However, what was in his mind at first was that the girl was only around ten centimetres taller than him, and he would not be willing to be called a kid. So, Qi lifted his head a bit higher and challenged back, "You're only a little taller than me, why do you call me a kid?"

"Well... that's true." Benin nodded seriously and continued, "So, what's your name?"

"Qi. And yours?" Qi answered.

"Benin. Now that I've told you my name, we are friends now. Will you play with me?" Benin asked, tilting her head with earnestness.

Though young, Qi felt a sense of familiarity and closeness to Benin as he looked at her serious, tilted-head expression. He responded, "Sure, well then. What do you want to do?"

Delighted by his agreement, Benin said, "You'll see when you come with me."

With that, she took Qi's hand and led him towards Li's place. Li is Benin's third uncle, he was known as a drinker and he always had beautiful wine at his place. But Li normally doesn't like to share them.

At this moment, Benin and Qi already sneaked into Li's place and walked to a cabinet beside the bed. When they opened it, they found two bottles of wine. Benin was ecstatic at the sight and

reached out to take them. Qi realized what Benin was up to—they were here to steal something—but he was also curious.

"Are those wines? Are you trying to steal them?" Qi whispered.

"Shh, keep your voice down," Benin replied, and they left with the two bottles of wine.

Benin was delighted and started drinking with great enthusiasm. Then she thought of Qi and asked, "Do you want to try?"

Qi was curious about the taste, as adults had always forbidden him from drinking. He replied, "Okay."

Benin became intrigued and said, "Let's have a competition, but... I doubt you can't outdrink me."

"I'm a man, how can I not outdrink you?" Qi said, slightly defiant. He lifted his head and grabbed one bottle from the floor without hesitation.

Benin laughed out loudly, finding it amusing, and said, "Then let's have a competition!"

Qi immediately agreed, "Very well!"

However, Qi had only taken a few sips before he fell to the side. Seeing this, Benin chuckled and said to Qi, "Look at you... Why are you trying to be tough?"

As she looked at him, smiled again and again, and couldn't help but feel a strong sense of familiarity and closeness to him.

In the following years, despite being far away from Ling Mountain, Sumo would occasionally return to visit Benin. One evening, as Benin had just settled down to rest, Sumo came to visit her again.

Benin was about to go to bed but heard the familiar steps from the door. She turned around quickly and saw her Grandmaster return to see her. She was immediately filled with immense joy.

"Grandmaster, you finally come to see me!" Benin said as she ran to Sumo and hugged him tightly in her little arms, she continued, "Last time, you left without a word, and I was heartbroken for a long time! This time, you must not leave again!"

Sumo smiled and said, "I find more peace in seclusion. But I promise you, I will come to see you frequently. By the way, today I came to tell you something."

"Well, okay then... So Grandmaster, what is it?"

Sumo said, "I forgot to tell you last time. The Qian Kun Stone I gave you last time is the key to the secret chamber I made. The chamber is located beneath the largest piece of iron stone in the Peach Forest. There are valuable things inside. When you have time, go and take a look."

"Oh, all right! I'll go tomorrow." Benin replied, with excitement in her voice.

Sumo smiled and said, "Very well."

Benin saw her Grandmaster seemed satisfied, so she asked in a spoiled voice with her lips pouting, "Grandmaster, would you sleep with me tonight?"

Sumo found Benin very cute, he laughed and said, "Well, as you wish."

"Yay!" Benin jumped up and down on the floor and happily dragged Sumo to her bed.

Therefore on that night, Sumo held little Benin in his arms and stayed with her until she fell asleep before reluctantly leaving.

After Xiao Bing died, the Xiao Family Army became leaderless. The soldiers scattered elsewhere, causing the family to decline and fade away. With few relatives and no one to care for little Xiao Hua, he was left to his own from an early age. He endured a destitute and

solitary existence, wandering from place to place. During his long travels, he suffered from mistreatment and humiliation at every turn.

One day, Xiao Hua was wandering around the street corner. He was hungry, desperate for food. He hasn't eaten for three days in a roll. He saw something on the ground, a pinkish bread. Xiao Hua was doubting, but he had no choice, he ran to it, picked it up, simply wiped away the dust on top of the bread, and then ate it...

Xiao Hua was enjoying a bit of peaceful feeling after the bread filled up his stomach. However, what he didn't know was the bread was poisonous. The bread was meant to kill the rats on the streets. Soon enough, Xiao Hua felt severe pain in his stomach, then his belly, and then the whole body...

Xiao Hua was in tears, thinking that he might die and had no time left for revenge. He slowly lay down in the corner and whispered, "No... this is unfair, I have to... I have to avenge my father..."

Thus Xiao Hua held the last breath and embarked on a journey alone to Suyu City, seeking to avenge his father's murderer.

As Xiao Hua entered the Peach Forest of Suyu City, he took a few steps but collapsed near a large piece of black iron stone in the woods.

On that very day, Benin happened to be in the Peach Forest when she noticed the collapsed Xiao Hua. She looked at the person before her, who appeared to be a few years older. It was early spring, air was still cold. He only wore a thin tattered attire, which was too large for his small frame. He carried nothing else, and most severely, he looked so pale that he seemed dying.

Benin approached him and began examining his pulse. Benin now observed Xiao Hua, she suddenly felt a sense of familiarity in his elegant and distinct countenance. After a few minutes, Benin seemed to understand what had happened to Xiao Hua.

"This is... the snake venom grass?" Benin sighed after speaking, then continued, "This person is truly pitiful. I must help him."

Having learned how to make herbal medicines from Sumo during her childhood, Benin took a few steps here and there in the Peach forest, gathered some spiritual herbs, and mixed them using her hands. She quickly turned to Xiao Hua and slowly fed Xiao Hua the medicines.

Half an hour later, Xiao Hua regained consciousness and saw Benin. Observing her fair complexion, graceful appearance, neat hair tied simply, and dressed in white garments, he found her remarkably charming and couldn't help but be curious about her identity.

Seeing Xiao Hua awake, Benin asked, "Hey, little fellow, you don't appear to be Suyu people. What brings you here?"

Thinking of his vengeance for his father's murder, Xiao Hua responded angrily, "I've come to avenge my father. He was killed by one member of your Clan."

Benin felt perplexed, so she tilted a bit her head and showed a confused complexion on her face... Xiao Hua's story only fueled Benin's sympathy for him. But she knew her people in the Suyu Clan, nobody would dare to do such a thing, so she asked, "Was your father an evil person?"

"No, my father was a great hero on the battlefield, defending the borders and caring for the people of the country. He was a renowned general!" Xiao Hua replied with deep pride.

Indignant upon hearing this, Benin stood up, and almost shouted, "How could we have such a vile individual among our Clan? I will take you to see my father and uncover the truth. We will ensure justice is served."

"No! I want to take revenge myself!" Xiao Hua firmly declared.

Looking at Xiao Hua, Benin admired his courageous spirit as a true man. However, she also grew concerned about his well-being and immediately thought of her Grandmaster.

"Very well, shouldn't you first learn how to fight? Look at yourself now, even your own life is at stake," Benin said, taking out the Qian

Kun Stone given to her by Sumo. She continued, "This stone was bestowed upon me by my Grandmaster, Sugu. Take it and go to Ling Mountain to seek his tutelage. Tell him I sent you."

Xiao Hua, considering the person before him, was also from the Suyu Clan, responded, "Leave me alone. I won't take your belongings so easily."

Anxious upon hearing this, Benin frowned, she walked closer to Xiao Hua again, and pleaded, "Please don't refuse. Although our Suyu Clan is small, we have many people, and no one can say for certain what each individual may do. You should take it and, when you grow stronger, you can seek revenge again. I must leave now." With those words, Benin put the stone in Xiao Hua's hand and walked away.

Watching Benin leave, Xiao Hua's heart was filled with a mixture of gratitude and resentment. He couldn't quite explain his emotions. He looked at the white jade stone in his hand, doubting more and more... He cried, and then after he realized what the little girl had done for him, he regretted so much not asking the girl's name...

Afterwards, Xiao Hua endured great hardships as he carried the Qian Kun stone to find Sugu. After eleven days of struggle to climb the mysterious Ling Mountain, he finally reached Ling Mountain and found Sugu.

Sugu sensed Xiao Hua's presence from afar and the Qian Kun stone was taken aback. He then exclaimed, "It must be fate."

Sugu marvelled at how fate played its part and returned the Qian Kun Stone to Xiao Hua, instructing him to return it when the opportunity arose.

From then on, Sugu taught Xiao Hua the ways of Taoism, martial arts, herbalism, the principles of the five elements, as well as the art of playing the Xiao music instrument. Xiao Hua's extraordinary talent allowed him to progress rapidly.