

THE PIANO GIRL

There once was a girl who lived in a Chinese village. She excelled and delighted in playing the piano. The villagers would sometimes go to her to request songs. The magic of her music was that she always managed to find just the right piece for you, at just the right moment. Little boys would describe her music like going to the market and eating candied bay berries. Young girls would say her song sounded like the feeling of their mother braiding their hair. Women would be able to experience the joy of holding their first child. All the men in the village were brought to tears when they heard her play. Everyone thought her to be born talented. With a father who was a brilliant violinist, and a mother with a passion for cello. Both had left her at the tender age of five. But the secret thing about the girl that the villagers did not know, was that she practiced diligently, day after day after day. When not serenading others, she could be found at home practicing her piano from sunrise till sunset. At school you would catch her mouthing notes to a new piece she was learning. During lunch and small breaks, she was on the side fingering notes. When the teacher announced reading time, without fail her nose was stuck in a music theory book.

But sometimes, great talent comes with great regrets. The girl had been given a name by her parents, but no one in the village knew it. The girl never talked to other children her age, unless they requested her to play a piece for them. She was either too busy practicing or playing for others. The villagers constantly wondered how a such a little girl who lived in a such a desolate place. Was able to produce music that sounded like love, war, joy, or hope, when the child had never experienced the emotions herself. One day, everyone in the village woke to a cold sunless morning, hearing the squeak of something being rolled down the cobbled road. They opened their windows to find the girl rolling her piano down the street, towards the village's graveyard. The villagers all sighed, knowing that today would be filled with gloom, and haunting melodies. Every year during the second month of winter, the girl would bring her piano to her parent's grave and play for the entire day to mourn her parent's death. Every year, she would come back with a wish that her parents had whispered to her through her music. One year it had been to play a song for every childbearing woman in the village. Another year it had been to go to the orphanage and play for all the children.

This year the villagers would wait for sundown, which was when the girl returned to preach her message. At 7:30 that night, they all gathered in town square, as they waited for the girl. The event had become more and more important every year. After all this was the one chance that the villagers got to hear her wispy voice and help her fulfill her parent's wishes. As they sat there they caught the image of her walking towards them. Soon she was close enough for everyone to see her face. They noticed that the girl seemed to have two silver streaks running down her face, and tangled hair like it had been pulled. A silenced hush fell over the villagers as they waited to hear her speak. She opened her mouth and a small tinkle of words floated out.

"This year my mother and father's wish, is that I make friends and travel to different places of china to play. Because that is their wish, I will begin by telling you my name. My name is Xin Yan. I didn't want to make friends because I wanted to practice hard and make my parents proud. I am afraid to leave the village because this is where my parents are. When I leave, will you please take good care of them while I'm gone?"

The villagers were overjoyed that the little girl had finally given her name and let them help carry her burdens. They all responded with enthusiasm. So, for the next few weeks, little Xin Yan prepared to begin traveling and playing her piano. On the day she left she gave just a few more words to everyone left behind.

"Take good care of my parents will you."

From then on, she traveled to every corner of china playing for the noble rich and entitled. But every year she goes back to her village and plays to her parents telling them of all her adventures. When she does come back you can hear the whisper of her parents as they talk back to her.