

{ CHAPTER 31 - White Night }

In today's Chinese class, our teacher asked us what the "meaning" behind each of our names were.

I found out then, that everyone's name has a "meaning".

Li MUYANG means "father loves mother", Yao Shanshan means "a beautiful appearance", Song Xiang means "flying like a bird". Although I don't understand how a person would fly up into the sky, but looking at our teacher's nodding and smiling expression, this is probably a name with a good "meaning".

So I began to wonder... the "meaning" behind my name.

My name is Ren Xiaojiu, with the same surname as my mother, but "Xiaojiu", the meaning of "Xiaojiu"... I really don't understand.

It was my turn. I stood up, looking down and fidgeting with the book edge, and said: "I... I don't know."

Everyone laughed, except for our teacher. She walked over, patted my head, told me to sit down and ask my mother about my name at home.

Will mother tell me? I doubt it, from that day on, she never talked to me.

Honestly, it was all my fault, it's me who upset my mother. I shouldn't have asked mother where father was. In fact, so what if I don't have a father? I only need my mother. Ugh... I'm so dumb.

On the way home, I met Mr. Xiao. He was walking on his own, slower than before.

As I watched his back, I remembered the first time I met him. It was at the school's New Year's party, he was wearing traditional clothes, holding a sword, and performing martial arts on stage.

Long hair, fluttering clothes, his every movement looked just like those heroes on TV! He can turn several somersaults and split several bricks with one palm, which is amazing! I don't think even Uncle Chengtian can beat him.

After that, he saved me, and treated me to some noodles. He told me that there's a place nearby where there are lots of fireflies in summer, and it's super pretty!

I wanted to go up to him and ask whether that promise still counts. Will you take me to that place with "starlight" everywhere?

But thinking about it, maybe not... ever since he sent me home that time, Mr. Xiao seemed to have... started hating me. Sometimes even when he saw me, he would look away.

But what on earth did I do wrong?

Passing by Grandma Zhao's house, I noticed its open door and saw her bending over, sorting out sacks in her yard. The sacks were filled with bottles and jars. Granny squashed them and put them in to later sell them.

"Oh my god!"

Every time she crushed a bottle, Grandma Zhao had to pause to catch her breath. With every breath, I felt her back curve even more.

She worked so hard, I was afraid that her back would break, so I hastily called out, "Grandma, I'm here!"

I walked in, took out three finished mineral water bottles from my schoolbag, and handed them to her: "...they didn't drink much water today."

"They" referred to Li MUYANG, Song Xiang and Yao Shanshan.

Grandma accepted the bottles and patted my head. Her eyes were red, and her hands were cracked in many places, just like mother. When she touched my head, it felt warm and hard.

Before leaving, Grandma Zhao stopped me and gave me another bag of steamed buns.

"Grandma made it herself, eat one and you'll be full."

"Thank you grandma! The instant noodles at home are all finished."

I smiled at her.

On the clothes drying pole in the small courtyard, there was only a single pair of trousers, swaying in the wind. I knew that grandma's son still hasn't come back.

Next to the clothes drying rod, there was a small flower pot with a small crack. It held a beautiful, small, red carnation. Yao Shanshan didn't want it, so I picked it up. I originally wanted to give it to mother, but didn't expect to meet grandma on the way.

Even if I had given it to my grandma, I don't think mother would be angry... because my mother is a kind and good mother.

When I was finally home, it was pitch black. Mother sat quietly by the window, looking out at the birds flying around, without saying a word.

I put the steamed buns in the refrigerator and boiled a pot of hot water for mother.

When mother wasn't at work, she went all day without eating or drinking. However, today was different.

I walked over to her with a glass of water and found that her eyes were empty. Her whole body also seemed empty.

"Mother..."

I whispered to her, but she didn't respond. She stayed as still as a sculpture and seemed as if she would disappear the next second, like water vapour.

The sun outside the window gradually setted, and the darkness drifted in, like a monster with its mouth wide open, trying to swallow my mother.

And mother was smiling, smiling!

At that moment, I was so scared. my whole body was shaking in terror.

I rushed to my mother's side, called her, begged her, please wake up! Don't... don't leave me!

But... why? Why did mother have this expression when she saw me?

Her eyes were wide open, her mouth too. She jumped up, pushed me away, pointed at me and shouted, "Li Guoxing!"

Who's "Li Guoxing"? Is it... dad?

Mother clinged to the wall, staring at me in horror, as if the "monster" about to eat her was me...

"Beast!" she yelled at me. "Get out of my way! Get out of here!"

Mother picked up a pillow from the bed, the water glass and the keys from the table... and threw them one by one until there was nothing left, and then withdrew a shiny knife from her chest.

"Take another step and I'll kill you!"

Mother held the knife with both hands and kept waving it around.

I got up off the ground, and used all my strength to run to turn on the lights.

As soon as the lights were on, the room was flooded with white light.

Mother finally recognized me, and with a clang, the knife fell from her hand. Her hair was messy, and her expression was so dazed.

"Mother..." I walked slowly towards her, "I'm Xiaojiu..."

"Why... why are you becoming... more and more like him?" Mother fell to her knees like a collapsing tower, and said softly, "That white hair... I can't stand it... I really can't take it anymore... no more..."

I don't understand... I don't understand what mother is saying...

I walked up to her and looked at her trembling hands. I just wanted to reach out and touch, feel my mother's temperature, is it cold or hot?

Mother's tears were so big, each one like a pearl, round and transparent, dripping on the ground in a puddle, like ripples on the water.

"...Why do you keep pestering me? No one wants you, so I'll leave you in the snowy mountains, at the gate of the orphanage... But no matter where I leave you... you always manage to come back... Why? Why?!"

I was stunned. No, no... it's not like this... In the snowy mountains, I must have got myself lost, and at the orphanage, mother must have gone to buy things... There's no way my mother wants to abandon me?

"Can't I get rid of you in this life... Can't I get rid of Li Guoxing in this life..." Mom knelt on the ground and suddenly hit the ground with her head, "Bam! Bam! Bam!" Every hit was like a hit on my heart, it hurt so much, I rushed over and cried: "Mother, what did I do wrong... you can beat me and scold me, don't be like this, don't be like this..."

I grabbed my mother's hand and smacked my face: "Hit me, hit me as hard as you want... as long as you're happy..."

"Ha...ppy?"

Mother suddenly stopped after hearing that word. She slowly raised her head, and then grabbed my arm.

I saw a strange light in her eyes of excitement, excitement, relief, and longing.

This time, I finally felt the warmth of my mother's palm, after she said "I'm going to strangle you".

