

“Not at all.”

“But she fell in love with him in the hospital.”

“She had no choice. She was ill and needed support. He was fleeing a dangerous past and needed cover, so he took advantage of her weakness. Their marriage was based on lies. Learn her lesson. Don’t be weak.”

I couldn’t believe that. “She risked her life to stay with him through the toughest time.”

“To survive. He provided for the family. If she denounced him and married one of her other suitors, she would’ve been a second-class citizen her whole life. She took the risk that he would be rehabilitated, and she was right.”

It was like the Little Mermaid had pursued the prince only for an immortal human soul and love was just her excuse, I suppose. But it seemed to me all my grandmother wanted was love, and my grandfather was the only person who ever gave her any.

“She didn’t have to stay with him,” I said. “She could’ve drawn a demarcation line.”

“No.” My mother started stacking the bowls and plates. Our food had turned cold by then. “If she did that, she’d be admitting their marriage wasn’t legitimate. Your aunts, uncles, and I would all be bastards. And she wouldn’t be able to feed us by herself.”

I still didn’t believe it, but I didn’t argue. From what I could see, my grandparents loved each other from the beginning to the end.



“The only person who can love you is your mother.” My mother repeated, like hammering nails into wood.

Maybe she had forgotten that her grandmother offloaded her mother to an orphanage. Maybe she had forgotten that, when I was a little girl, she sent me away, too.

When I was six, my mother deposited me at my grandmother’s apartment to live with her for a year. That let me claim residency in her city, Changchun,