

After the crowd dispersed, my mother and her sister let go of their brother. They hugged into a ball on the wet ground and burst out crying. Mud smeared their faces when they wiped off each other's tears. Mixed in the mud were my mother's finger blood and fallen peach blossoms. They smelled like salty, rotten peach flesh that someone was shoving down my mother's throat.



Five days later, long after dark, my grandmother came home. Her hair was tangled and dirty, face swollen, and eyes puffed in black and blue. Remarkably, the Party leader who oversaw the local movement had been the director of the orphanage she lived in as a girl. He had pulled a few strings.



"I don't understand," I said. "Why wouldn't your mother's mother raise her? A well-off family would've helped, wouldn't they?"

"My mother was a servant. The family she worked for was long gone, either to Taiwan or dead."

I didn't ask, But I wondered. Could it be that one of the family members or visitors was her father? Or even the head of the household himself? Had her mother consented to the sex?

But these were not the questions to ask.



My grandmother limped inside and collapsed in bed. No words, no tears. The next morning, she dug out a red shirt from the bottom of a chest. After pulling out half of its wrinkles, she put it on and fastened her hair with a red hair tie. This was how she dressed when she married my grandfather. Red, the Chinese wedding color, symbolized love.

She visited my grandfather in jail, and he admitted everything. He did have a wife. But it was an arranged marriage, and he did not love her. And if he had stayed, he would have been executed as the son of privilege.