

knew of. “Please bring back my husband,” she said. “If he were an evil man, he wouldn’t have married me, an orphan.” She also wrote letters to the local radio station. People turned a deaf ear.

Everyone treated her as a widow. An attractive woman, she had creamy skin, sparkly eyes, and the style of an artist. Many men showed interest in her. Men of better political classes, with higher income, and no baggage from a previous marriage. But she ignored their piercing stares. She knew she was still married.



In the summer of 1970, my grandmother’s relentless effort to rescue my grandfather paid off. The Party’s officials agreed to let him complete his “Political Reformation” with his second family. After he returned home, my grandparents and their five children hid in their one-bedroom shed until 1976, when the Party announced the end of the Great Cultural Revolution after Chairman Mao’s death.

During those six years, their only income was from my grandfather illegally tutoring other people’s children. They ate corn porridge, potatoes, and, sometimes, boiled grass. When my mother and her siblings appeared on the street, other kids would throw rocks at them, so they stopped going to school. My grandmother showed them how to paint, and my grandfather taught them everything else.

In 1978, the Party restored the National College Entrance Exam. Once again, they admitted students based on academic excellence rather than political class. Thanks to my grandfather’s home education, my mother aced the exam and enrolled in Jilin University’s Chemistry Department. She met my father there and, after graduation, married him. They moved to Shenyang.

A year and a half later, I was born.



My head spun after hearing the story. “My grandparents...wasn’t it true love?”