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New Arrival

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## *New Arrival*

For years, Jia Cheng thought of leaving his wife and starting a new family. When he bought her out of a brothel in Gold County eighteen years before, he had not expected her to be sterile, although she had told him about her numerous abortions and miscarriages during the years of prostitution and had mentioned her doubt about her fertility. She was a tall, handsome woman with smooth white skin, glossy dark hair, and long eyes, which together with the curved brows made her oval face rather graceful. In the beginning, Jia was happy, since his wife knew men well and tried to please him in many ways. She did everything out of gratitude. Because he had bought her out and given her a family, she hadn't had to stay in that profession any longer, to catch the pox and be educated later in one of the schools set up by the communists to help reform prostitutes from the old days. Nonetheless, she had been in three brothels for over ten years from the age of fourteen, long enough to forget her original name, which she probably had never had. A prostitute was always given a professional name, such as Spring Lotus, Gold Peony, Water Daffodil, White Dove. Usually the name changed once the woman was sold to another house. On the day when Jia bought his wife out, she signed her signature as Ning Feng Wen—the family name of the madam of each brothel she had been through. From then on, that became her name.

Eighteen years passed. Jia was in his late fifties now, still working in the only photo shop in Dismount Fort. Year after year, he expected to have a child, a son, but Ning had never been pregnant. Very often Jia regretted paying 200 silver dollars for his wife. If he had known she was infertile, he would have chosen another woman. It serves you right, he would think. When you were young you only liked women who had kung fu in bed, but you didn't want to spend money visiting those pleasure houses every week, so you brought her home. Now it's too late to think of carrying on your

family line. You're already an old useless dog. It serves you right.

"Did you touch the melons?" he asked his wife one Saturday afternoon.

"No, who wants to touch your rotten melons," she said, knowing that he had hidden them away so as to take them to his mistress in Gold County next morning.

"But two are missing," he said calmly.

"Where did you put them?"

"In the backyard."

"Probably a dog stole them," she answered without turning her head. She was busy making corn-flour porridge, beating the glue in a large bowl with an aluminum spoon.

Quietly Jia put the six remaining melons into a white cloth sack and carried them into the small darkroom used for developing photographs.

Ning never asked him where he went on Sundays, but she knew, and tried hard not to let it disturb her. She had met thousands of men. They were all the same and couldn't live without chasing a woman, just as every cat eats fish. She kept reminding herself that she mustn't stop Jia, who was her benefactor. Besides, she had promised him before their marriage that she would never interfere if he took another woman, and that she would remain his servant forever. Because the new government had banned polygamy, he couldn't have another wife, even though Ning was barren; in secret, however, he had been seeing another woman, whose name Ning didn't know. While she appeared composed, Ning was actually ill at ease. What if he gets a child with that woman? she would think. Will he walk out on me? Then, how can I live? Sometimes, she woke at night, listening to the man snoring away beside her. She wanted to cry, but tears had stopped coming to her eyes long before. She thought it would have been better if she had never been born.

That evening after dinner, Aunt Zhang, who lived on Eternal Way, came to the Jias'. She sat on the edge of the brick bed, waving a palm-leaf fan. "Ning, do you want to make some money?" she asked.

"How?" Ning said, pouring Aunt Zhang a cup of boiled water.

"A young couple in the barracks is looking for a family to care for their baby boy. Sixteen yuan a month. They'll pay for all expenses." Aunt Zhang pressed Ning's white wrist with her shrunken hand as though to convince her that it was a good bargain.

"Well." Ning paused. She had never done that kind of work before, but on second thought, she felt like having a try. I can't always depend on my old man, she reasoned. If he runs out on me, I must make a living by myself.

"If you want to do it, tell me now," Aunt Zhang said. "The couple is desperate because the officer is leaving for the Great Gourd Island in two days and the mother can't take care of the baby while working in the city. I'm sure lots of people will jump at the deal."

"All right, wait a minute, let me talk to Old Jia." Ning got up and went into the small darkroom, where Jia was writing captions on photographs.

After a short while Ning reappeared and told Aunt Zhang that she would accept the work. The young couple were to bring their two-year-old on the next morning.

"What's your name?" Ning asked the little boy.

"Tell Aunt your name," his mother said. She was a small, delicate woman working as a singer in an opera troupe in Dalian City.

"Lei," the boy mumbled.

"That's a good name. Would you like to have this, Lei?" Ning asked, leaning forward and showing him a toy duck with four wheels and a rope.

"Yeah," he said as he took the toy and put it on the floor. The wooden duck began quacking and flapping its wings while Lei drew it about the room.

He pulled too hard and overturned the duck, its four wheels spinning in the air. Immediately Ning squatted down and put the duck back on its feet. "Here you go, Lei," she said, touching his ruddy cheek. The duck resumed quacking.

While talking with the boy's father, a tall officer, Jia turned to watch the boy and the duck again and again. He was glad to see the little fellow so at ease. "He's a husky boy," he said to the young man, who had one stripe and four stars on his collar-insignia. "You're lucky to have him."

"Sometimes he can be naughty. Don't spoil him," the officer said with a smile, then motioned to his son. "Come here, Little Lei, and meet your uncle."

The boy dragged the duck over and stopped in front of the men. "Call him Uncle Jia," his father told him.

"Ungle," he mumbled, then turned away with the duck quacking.

Jia was very pleased and took a melon out of the sack, which he had just put on a chair and was about to take with him for the ten-o'clock train. "Little Lei," he called the boy back, "would you like to have this?"

The boy's dark eyes stared at the melon and then at Jia. It seemed that he had never seen such a thing and was wondering whether it was something to play with or to eat.

"Don't give him that now," Ning said. "I've made some egg curd for

him. Put it aside. He'll have it after the meal."

Jia put the melon on the table. Out of hospitality, he took another two from the sack for Lei's parents. "You try a melon please. It's very sweet," he said to them. His smile revealed a gold tooth. He was so excited that his long, leathery face turned a little pink, and he couldn't close his mouth to keep from smiling. His wife thought he looked silly.

The couple thanked him. Ning put two of the melons in a basin and washed them. Jia couldn't remain for long, since he had to catch the train. He excused himself, saying he had work to do, took up the partly empty sack, and left for the station.

"Lei, do you want to stay here or come with me?" Lei's mother asked, testing the boy. Her large eyes were winking at the young captain.

Lei looked at her, then muttered, "Stay."

"Good," his father said, laughing, "you're a brave boy. Mom and I will come to see you soon."

"Always listen to Aunt and Uncle, all right?" his mother said.

"Uh-huh." Lei nodded.

"He's like a big boy," Ning praised.

"We were afraid he wouldn't stay," the woman said to Ning. "I'm so glad he likes to be here." Her permed hair tilted a little toward the boy.

After they had tried the melons, Lei's parents left. Ning began to feed Lei egg curd and rice porridge. He had a good appetite, and his small mouth twitched with relish while he was chewing. Ning noticed he had eight teeth.

Gold County was sixty *li* away from Dismount Fort, and four passenger trains went there every day. Jia returned before dinner, but he looked unhappy and kept himself in his darkroom, sucking on a thick pipe. Through the opening between the window curtains, he saw Lei chasing chicks in the backyard. Meanwhile his wife was cooking dinner, the corn stalks sputtering under the cauldron.

Women are all greedy, he thought of his meeting with his mistress. Her face was long. "Three melons! Shame on you." No use to explain. She wouldn't try to understand. I bought eight originally, but she didn't believe it. "You're so stingy. I've never met a man like you." How many men has she met then? A hundred? For things to eat and wear, and for money? I didn't go whoring and didn't plan to pay. It was good that I had no money in my wallet today, or I'd have had to give her some, to calm her down with a large bill. Never seen her so mad. Greedy, so greedy. Women're all the same. Waiting for me to bring her good stuff. At least she showed her true nature. Is she tired of me? Wants to get rid of me? Old, I'm old. So hard to

please a woman.

Remember to bring her more stuff next week to make up for the three melons. What should I buy? A box of vanishing cream? No, I gave her one last month. A pair of nylon socks? What color does she like? No idea. How about some walnut cookies? Don't know. I'm tired. So ridiculous, like playing house with a small girl. You can't reason with a woman. She's well over forty and has married four times—

The door curtain opened. "Come out and eat," his wife said aloud.

Jia emptied the pipe and went to the dining table. Already Lei was on the brick bed, trying to touch the white buns steaming on the low table in front of him. Ning moved to feed him rice and stewed sole. She gave him a cork, with which he played while eating.

The boy saw the roasted peanuts prepared for Jia's drink. He pointed his hooked finger at the peanuts and whined, "Waunt."

"Want this?" Jia asked, raising the whole dish.

"Don't give him that," his wife said. "Too young to chew."

"Waunt," Lei whined again.

"All right, take this spoon first." Ning put the rice into his mouth, picked up two peanuts, and started chewing.

In a few seconds she spat out a lump of peanut butter and placed it on the boy's pointed, waiting tongue. He swallowed the butter and raised his eyes to look at Ning, then pointed at the peanuts and again whined, "Waunt." He gave a smile to Jia, who was drinking white spirits.

"Isn't Uncle's home good?" Jia asked.

"Gooooood." Lei smiled, nodding his round head.

Ning chewed peanuts for him continuously while feeding him. Jia was pleased to watch his wife working with Lei. He took a sip of the liquor and said to Ning, "I like this boy a lot. He's so at home." He turned to Lei and said, "With a thick face, you can eat well everywhere in the world. Little Lei, do you have a thick face?"

"Yeah," the boy said out loud, pushing the spoon a little with his cheek.

"Don't talk to him," Ning complained. "Don't you see I'm busy feeding him?"

Lei's small eyes rested on the porcelain liquor pot. As Ning turned to refill the bowl, Lei raised his finger to the pot and whined again, "Waunt."

"Hey, he wants a drink," Jia cried.

"Don't give him. Too young for that stuff."

The boy understood her words, and his face began to change, his mouth spreading sideways as if he were about to burst into tears.

"All right, all right, Uncle let you try. She's bad," Jia coaxed and moved

over with his cup. He dipped a chopstick into the liquor and then put a drop on the boy's tongue.

"Good?" Jia asked.

"Yeah." The boy smacked his lips and held out his tongue again.

"My, my, what a drinker. One more?" He gave him another drop.

"Don't give him too much. He'll get drunk."

Jia turned to move away, but the boy broke into a cry, kicking and screaming. Several flesh rings appeared on his short plump legs, and tears trickled down his chubby cheeks. Jia turned back and gave him a few drops more.

After supper Lei ran wild. His face was like a red apple, shining with happiness. He laughed loudly and played hide-and-seek with pillows on the large bed. Both Jia and his wife worried, fearing that the boy was too excited and might fall ill. They tried to make him go to bed, but he wanted to play more and even managed to get on Jia's neck for a horse ride. Not until ten o'clock did he agree to lie down between Ning and Jia. Lei slept so well on the first night that he wet the bed and didn't make any noise while Ning was carrying him to the chamber pot.

The following day at dinner Lei again wanted to drink from Jia's cup. Liquor was too strong for him, so Jia poured some apple wine into a cup that was as tiny as the bowl of a pipe. Lei liked the wine better because it tasted sweet. Every day he drank a cup and soon became Jia's wine buddy. Jia would smile and say, "Little Lei, you're lucky, Uncle have money and can buy you wine."

"Yeah," the boy would reply.

Sunday came. Jia had not yet decided whether to go to his mistress. During the day he was busy shooting and developing pictures at the photo shop, and in the evening he spent a lot of time playing with Lei, so he had forgotten to think of what gift he should take to that woman. Now he felt at a loss, wondering if he had to see her so soon.

After breakfast, he made up his mind not to go. Instead, he took the boy to see the country fair. Swaying rhythmically with Lei on his back, Jia turned into Main Street and walked to the marketplace. Near the entrance of the army's clinic he met Meng Long, the head of the town's slaughterhouse, who was sitting on a rock and basking in the sun. Meng rose to his feet and asked, "Who's this, Old Jia? A nephew or a relative?"

"A little friend," Jia said, smiling awkwardly. "His father is on the Great Gourd Island, so he stays with us."

"Little fella, how old are you?"

"Dwo."

"He's big for two," Meng said, and patted Lei on the back.

"Yes, he's a good boy. We've got to go, Old Meng, to the fair." Jia turned to Lei and said, "Say goodbye to Uncle Meng."

"Bye." The boy's white fist wheeled back and forth like a fat mushroom.

On such a fine summer day the fair was always crowded. The peasants from nearby villages were eager to sell their produce to get cash for groceries, which they could buy at the same place. Many kinds of craftsmen gathered here too: cobblers, blacksmiths, tailors, locksmiths, tinkers, knife grinders. Jia didn't want to buy anything, and he merely walked about and asked prices, comparing them with those of the year before:

"How much for an egg?"

"Seven fen. Buy some, Uncle."

"No, no." He continued to walk.

"What's the price for the crabs?" he asked, passing a fish stand.

"Ten for a yuan. Buy a dozen or two, Uncle Jia. They're fresh, caught this morning," the young vendor said.

"No, they're dead already."

Many people in the country knew Jia, for he was the most experienced photographer in the commune. Whenever they wanted to have a family picture taken, they went to his photo shop.

Jia noticed that quite a few young women whom he had never seen before carried baskets filled with vegetables, fruits, eggs, and meat. They must have been the wives of some officers recently transferred to the Garrison Division. Most of the women were pretty and dressed well, and they didn't take the trouble to haggle. A slim young woman passed by with tomatoes in her basket, leaving behind a whiff of perfume that smelled of fresh apricot. Jia was wondering whether he should ask one or two of the young wives to sit for a large sample-picture.

"Egg, egg," Lei sang in a small voice.

Jia turned around but saw no eggs. Then, following Lei's finger, he found a pile of potatoes on the ground. He couldn't help laughing.

"Little brother," the young vendor raised a potato and asked, "you say this is an egg?"

"Egg, egg," Lei chanted as if to himself.

All the grown-ups around laughed. Jia explained, "He has never seen that."

"How about this?" a middle-aged man asked and showed Lei a large tomato.



“Egg, red egg.”

People laughed again and the crowd was getting larger.

“My goodness, everything round is an egg,” a young woman said loudly, and took a small pumpkin out of a gunnysack. “How do you call this, boy?”

“Egg, big egg.”

The burst of laughter bewildered Lei, who looked at Jia in silence. “Stop teasing him,” Jia shouted at the grownups. “He’s not a monkey. What’s so funny? Did you call everything right when you were just out of your mother’s belly?”

Hurriedly he carried Lei away to a wall at the roadside and put him to the ground. “Those are not eggs, Lei,” he said. “They’re potatoes and tomatoes. The biggest one is called pumpkin.”

The boy stared at Jia with tearful eyes and puckered up his lips. He closed his eyes, crinkled his nose, and was about to cry. “All right, all right,” Jia said and took him into his arms, “it’s Uncle’s fault. I didn’t tell you their names beforehand. Don’t cry. Lei’s a good boy. Let me buy you a popsicle.”

Lei also saw the old woman pushing a popsicle cart over, so Jia’s words calmed him. Jia handed a five-fen coin to the woman and said, “One, please.”

“Milk or red bean?”

Milk.”

Lei was sucking the popsicle. With amusement Jia watched him moving the ice around his mouth clumsily. He didn’t try to help him, for fear Lei would be upset again. Let him enjoy himself that way. “Good?” he asked.

“Yeah.” Lei stuck out his tongue, licking his lips.

Carrying the boy in his arms, Jia made his way through the crowd back to the entrance of the market. Piglets screamed and cocks crowed, while butchers were chopping pork noisily at meat stands. A group of children surrounded an old deaf-mute woman who was using her fingers to bargain with an egg vendor. Beside the stand of jellied bean curd some old men sat on benches, drinking tea and playing chess. In the shade of elms and locusts a few youngsters were reading picture-stories they rented from a bookstand. It was getting hot, and Jia began to sweat.

“Fresh jellyfish, one *jiao* a bowl,” an old woman cried.

“Lei, let’s have some jellyfish, all right?” Jia said.

The boy nodded. They went over and sat down at the stand. Jia bought two bowls, one large and one small, of sliced jellyfish, spiced with parsley, leeks, and sesame oil. He started eating, but Lei would do nothing with the dish but stir it with a pair of chopsticks. Jia picked a piece of jellyfish from his own bowl and inserted it into Lei’s mouth. The boy spat it out immediately.

"Don't like it?" asked Jia.

"Nah." Lei went on drumming the table with the chopsticks.

"Kids don't like jellyfish in the beginning," the woman said. "By and by they'll get used to it."

"Ha, you two are here." Ning emerged from behind, carrying a basket of eggplants and green beans. "I've looked everywhere and couldn't find you. Why do you stay so long? Is he all right?" she asked, pointing at Lei.

"He's fine," Jia said with a grin. "He likes looking around with me."

"Let's go home. It's getting too hot," Ning said, picking up the boy and kissing him on his milky lips.

"Let me carry him." Jia got up.

His wife put the child on his back. She had bound feet, and the vegetables were heavy enough for her. Together they walked back. On the way home they never stopped talking to the child, asking him questions and teaching him to name things. Ning remembered that her husband and she had not walked together on the street for at least nine or ten years. He always felt embarrassed walking with me, she thought. How happy he looks now, and even younger. This boy is a little devil and has caught his old heart. If only I could give him a child. He likes a house full of children and grandchildren. Too late. He should have married another woman.

Lei's mother came every other week and took him to Dr. Liu in the army compound for a day, but his father couldn't return from the island so often. Strange to say, the son didn't miss his parents at all and was always happy when he was back with the Jias again. His mother was glad that he didn't cry when she left.

For two days Lei had a fever. Jia took him to Dr. Liu on Bath Street and brought back two packets of herbs. The doctor said there was too much fire in the boy—the Yang was too strong—so the medicine was to reduce the fire and build up the Yin. Ning decocted the herbs, but the boy disliked the bitter liquid. It took a lot of white sugar and sweet words to coax him into taking the medicine. Even so, the fever continued, and Lei began to have a cough.

"Close up the mosquito curtain," Jia told his wife when she laid the sleeping boy on the bed. Behind Lei's ear they had found a red blotch, probably a mosquito bite.

"Don't you see I'm doing it?" She placed a pillow to hold down the opening of the curtain, then bent down and kissed the boy's cheek. "Little devil, you get better tomorrow," she said.

Jia turned off the light. It was sultry, so he took off his undershirt and

underpants and lay down and closed his eyes. Lei's stuffy nose was whistling away softly in the dark. Soon Jia went to sleep.

At about one o'clock Ning's voice woke him up. "My old man, turn on the light. Lei's burning hot."

Jia pulled the lamp cord and sat up to have a look at the boy. He was terrified to find Lei's face covered with red spots. "My God, he has a rash!"

Ning climbed out of bed and went to the desk. She found an old thermometer in a drawer and brought it over. After shaking it down, she inserted it into the boy's armpit. "Lei, tell me where it hurts," she begged, tears coming to her eyes.

The boy moaned without answering. His lips were so parched they looked chafed. His jaw moved slightly as if chewing something. "Get some water for him," Ning told her husband.

Jia went into the kitchen and brought back a bowl of water, a spoon, and a wet towel. "Here, here you are," he said, and sat down by the child. "Lei, open your eyes. Can you see your uncle?" he asked.

The boy didn't respond. Ning took out the thermometer and raised it to the bulb. "Heavens! It reached the end!"

Jia grabbed the thermometer and read it. The mercury column passed 41 Centigrade. He jumped to his feet and took his undershirt, telling his wife, "You take care of him. I'm going to the clinic to get a doctor." He rushed out into the night.

He was running to the Commune Clinic, which was not far—just at the corner of Safe Street. A dog was roused by Jia's footsteps and started barking at him. He didn't bother to give it a look, but kept running along and murmuring to himself, "Must save him. Must save him." The road of white gravel spread under his feet like a band of clouds in the moonlight. He didn't feel anything—it was as though he were flying to the street corner.

Within five minutes he had arrived at the clinic and set about pounding the boards that covered the door and the windows, shouting, "Doctor, wake up and save life!"

He pounded and yelled for a while, but no response came from inside. He was wondering whether there was anyone on duty at all. Then it dawned on him to try the army's clinic. He turned around and dashed down Main Street.

The lights in the army's clinic were still on. Jia went directly to a screened window and saw a doctor and two nurses inside sterilizing something in a large boiling pot on an electric stove. He knocked at the windowsill. One of the women raised her head with a start. "What do you want in the middle of the night?" she asked. They all turned to gaze at the old man, who looked

very pale and distracted.

"Help, doctor," Jia moaned. "My boy's dying."

"Why don't you go to the Commune Clinic?" the other nurse asked.

"Nobody's there. The boy is not mine. His father is an officer in your army. We look after the boy for him. Come and save his life, please!" Jia was choked with emotion, his deepset eyes tearful. He wiped the sweat off his gray brows.

"All right, we're coming," the doctor said. He turned to one of the nurses, saying, "You stay here. Liang Fen and I are going with him."

They put on white robes, picked up a medical box and two flashlights, and went out. Jia rushed to the entrance to meet them.

The moment their shadows appeared at the front door Jia ran up to them, and with both hands he held the doctor's arm. "Thank you, young man. You've saved my old life. You're a good man. My old woman and I—"

He stopped because Nurse Liang turned around tittering.

"Look at yourself," the doctor said, laughing heartily. "You have nothing on below your waist, old man."

Jia looked down and saw himself without his underpants. "I—I—, too scared. Sorry, sorry," he mumbled, using his hands to cover himself.

The nurse took off her robe and handed it to Jia. "Put this on, Uncle," she said.

"Thanks, thanks." He wrapped himself up immediately.

They moved into the street and hurried east. Jia walked, then ran while the doctor and the nurse were striding behind him. It was damp and foggy. Jia was fluttering along like a ghost in white on the street of the sleeping town.

Lei had measles. On hearing the diagnosis, both Jia and Ning felt relieved; they had thought it must have been something like smallpox. The nurse gave Lei an injection of penicillin, and the doctor, whose surname was Chui, told them not to worry about the rash, which would continue to spread over the boy's body but would disappear in a few days. The fever would go down every day, and a nurse would be assigned to come to give Lei the injection four times a day. In the meantime, they must let the boy rest well, drink more water, and eat liquid food.

When Dr. Chui and Nurse Lian were about to leave, Jia handed back the white robe and said with an awkward smile, "Thanks. I was so scared." He scratched his sparse hair.

"Next time, remember to wear your pants," the young man said and laughed. The nurse took back the robe, tittering.

After they left, Jia and Ning didn't go to bed. Instead they spent the small hours talking about the boy and watching his blotchy cheeks bulging out and sagging down, and they also rubbed him with a wet towel time and again. They smiled at each other, remembering how Lei had called the Moon Goddess on the wall his bride, how he had nodded his head when they asked him whether he would give them money when he grew up, how he had promised to give his mother a hundred yuan, his father a hundred, Ning a hundred, Jia a hundred, his Moon Bride a hundred, and himself a hundred, how he had wanted his picture-story books to be placed by his pillow when he went to bed, how he had passed water on the floor and cried, heartbroken, when Ning swept the mess away because he thought a small river of his was gone, how he had stepped on the feet of the baby boy of the Mings, then given him a candy when the boy was about to cry....

Beyond the windows roosters crowed, one after another. Dawn was approaching. How short was the night. They could have talked and talked for many more hours.

Three days later Lei's mother came to see him. He was almost recovered but still had brownish scales on his skin. She thanked the Jias for looking after Lei so well and then took him with her to spend the Sunday in their apartment. Though the Jias knew Lei would be back by the evening, they felt restless, as if they did not know where to put their own bodies. Jia didn't speak much, but sat in the backyard pulling away on his pipe.

The day before, he had received a short letter from his mistress, who asked him to see her that Sunday. She said: "If you don't come this weekend, you mustn't see me again." Without much thinking, Jia wrote her a note, which ended with these words: "I'm too busy on Sundays. Sorry, I cannot come. I really have no time. Too tired."

Aunt Zhang stopped by and chatted with Ning. She laughed when she heard of Jia's night expedition to the army's clinic. "I have an idea," she said to the Jias. "Since you like the boy so much, why don't you take him as your nominal son? That'll tie him to you forever, at least in name. I'm sure his parents won't mind. I can talk to them. That may make them feel more secure about leaving the boy with you."

Jia beamed and looked at his wife. Yes, why not?

But Ning frowned a little and said, "I've thought of that, Aunt Zhang. I don't think we should take Lei as a nominal son. You see, I'm an unlucky woman. If I'm fated to be childless, I shouldn't have a child. Lei is a bright boy with a good future; I can't let my bad luck stand in his way and block his fortune. No, he's too good for us."

Aunt Zhang looked at Ning with amazement.

Jia stood up and walked away silently. He felt sad, but he believed Ning was right. The boy was too good to be their own. It was enough to know that Lei would come back in the afternoon and to wait for him here when he stepped in. He would be happy if he could wait for him like this every Sunday. He knew that in a few years Lei would leave them for school in a bigger place and then go into the large world, but some day the boy might come back to this small town to see them, as a friend.