

## Xi Yu – 09/16/1990

My cheek pressed against the cold glass. I allowed my eyes to lose focus as I lazily watched the white line delineating the road run past.

My mother's voice broke the trance. I jerked from the passenger window.

"Have you finished the paper yet?" she asked.

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Whenever you make toast, some slices burn more than others. If my family did eat toast for breakfast, Mother would always have the burnt one.

Perhaps it is the mother's job to care for everyone in the home. Mother nags my brother to do his schoolwork. My father enjoys her cooking after a long day. Mother supports most of my endeavors.

*The chill air tickles my damp face as I trudge back to our team campsite. After eighteen hours of lapping the track to fund the cure, I am exhausted. I squint against the rising sun to watch my mother, in her tirelessness, drop the last batch of egg rolls into the sizzling oil.*

The language barrier between Mother and me is enough to create our occasional vicissitudes. It frustrates me when she creates confusion since she cannot speak English well. Although I am fluent in Chinese, my vocabulary is limited to colloquial discourse, unusable for intellectual thought.

Such is the case when I try to explain sarcasm to Mother, a device, which I have learned, the Chinese rarely use. In our heated confrontations over why I should not be staying up so late to work on the school newspaper, I use it lavishly.

"I stay up late because the pages are so perfect, Mom," I would say to her in defiance.

"Well, then you shouldn't need to, right?" she would reply.

*I feel the sun's shy warmth as I zip up the last sleeping bag. All my team members have left. I turn in my Team Captain's box as my eyes close; I feel I can instantaneously fall to the grass and sleep. My mother pushes the dolly containing the propane tank, tents, cooler, and chairs from my hands and tells me to wait in the car.*

I have learned that cancer is a language that both Mother and I can understand. Her sister was recently touched by cancer, and her brother died from it before I was born. Hence, she willingly chaperones the hardest shift every year at our school's Relay For Life. She is the one who stays at our booth to sell the egg rolls, helping us raise money. In the morning, when energy is at its worst, Mother pushes us to move out before we collapse.

I only begin to appreciate Mother's kindness, and I must learn to understand her. She has taught me the value of hard work, and she has taught me what it means to care. More importantly, she has taught me how to be. I hope to do for the world what Mother has done for me.

\* \* \*

I looked at her, startled. The school track disappeared from my peripheral.

"I mean, aren't you going to finish the paper once we get home? You can't possibly be tired now, right?" my mother asked.

I stared at her, then relaxed, and smiled to myself.

"Did I do it right?" she asked. "Was that it?"

I closed my eyes. I understood.

Yes, Mother, you did. You did.