

(Penalty)

Written by

Raine Pan

120 Boylston Street  
(+1)8578918660

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A family sits around a table in a crowded area separated from beds. The kerosene lamp above nearly runs out of fuels and emits dim lights with little flying insects jumping up and down. A bowl of soup on the center of the table, filled with seasonal potherbs and a few pieces of meat floating on the top.

A girl XUE (aged 10) sits between her mother, FEN (aged 35), and her sister, YAN (aged 16). She is thin and short, looks only seven or eight years old. Xue's hair is yellowish, a color of chronic malnutrition. Her eyes are very black and round, wet as though they are covered with mist. Xue sits in an awkward position, trying to scratch the bug bites on her fingertips. Her narrow blouse is soaked with sweat, she then leans back to look outside.

XUE

(with a slight and gentle voice)  
Mom...I'm hungry now...

FEN

Just wait for a few minutes, he'll be back soon.

Footsteps approach, a little boy (aged 7) with Muddy face comes in, showing a big smile to his family and takes his seat. Xue faces back to the table and readjusts her sitting position, then grabs her chopsticks to reach a piece of meat nearest to her.

Xue's mom catches a glimpse of her daughter's movement, then pats her chopsticks and gives the meat to the boy.

FEN

Forgot what I taught you before?

Xue doesn't say anything, she turns to pull a piece of steamed bread from a plate and chews it for long.

XUE

(gingerly)

Mom... I'll be in primary school tomorrow, a school uniform fee is Required...

Fen pauses for a moment, then looks up at her husband, YI (aged 36), who is eating like a pig, tucking some vegetables into Xue's bowl.

FEN  
Well I thought it was all free...  
How much then?

XUE  
(lower her head down and quietly eat)  
50 yuan, including the new textbook  
Fee.

As if the steamed bread has stuck in his throat, Yi suddenly coughs a few times. He then clears his throat and looks at XUE.

YI  
(patiently explain)  
Your brother XIN will go to town for primary school in Spring... So we need to save money for that...

With food in his mouth, Xin anxiously mumbles

XIN  
I don't want to go to school! Leave the money for sister please!

YI  
(knocks on his son's forehead, pretend to be angry)  
Isn't going out for fun at nightfall enough?  
We do it for your good son!

XIN  
(continue to rebut)  
Then why don't you do it for my sister's good?

YAN quickly kicks Xin's chair under the table, Then she turns to Xue.

YAN  
(softly)

Uniform is not necessary, there are a lot of students at school not dressed in uniform. At least you are able to go to school, cherish it!

Xue keeps silent, she mocks herself even trying to beg for their help.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD- NIGHT

(Flashback) Xue is walking with a shovel in her hands, and there were some muddy spots on her pants. There are TWO GIRLS (aged 10) walking ahead, the midsummer breeze blows up the edges of their orange T-shirts a little bit. The clothes are made up with soft cotton, embroidered with a blue school logo at the cuff, and dyed in such a bright color that can even shine in the sunlight. Xue obsessively stares at them, and unconsciously approaches the girls. They hear Xue's footsteps and look back, ignoring Xue's friendly smile.

They shoot a glance at Xue's outfit and whisper with mocking faces, then proudly walk away.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Fen notices Xue's sadness and tries to raise her voice to improve the down atmosphere.

FEN  
How about this, Yan got some old uniforms in cabinets. I'll change it to your size and sew you a new one.

YI  
(Nods in agreement)  
Sounds great! No exaggeration, your mother's sewing skills are...incomparable! When she was young, she...

XUE  
(The voice was muffled, with a slight complain)  
Oh yeah, that's why I've never wore a brand new  
dress all my life.

Xue cuts in without letting her dad finish his words, she  
puts down her bowl with a heavy sound.

YI  
(getting angry)  
Hey! Stop talking like that! Why are you  
so stubborn?

XUE  
I try to understand you all the time...(starts  
to sob)  
When can you treat me the same way...

FEN  
(anxious to soothe the conflict)  
Xue, give me some time to figure out.  
No worry, it's just a dress!

XUE  
(Tears well up in her eyes as she tries  
to keep it from falling.)  
Forget it mom. It's never about only a dress.

XUE jumps down from her seat, with a half of food left  
in her bowl. Ignoring her parents' reproaches, she  
escapes to her room, a shared bedroom with five flat beds  
crowded together.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lying on her bed, Xue sees an inky sky with twinkling stars  
from the open window. Xue quietly counts the stars, then  
gets lost in thought.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - AFTERNOON

Sky turns from dark to blue, Xue (aged 15) just graduated  
from primary school. She is hand-washing a beautiful

uniform dress aside the river. Her black bright hair is combed into one long plait of braids hanging in the ear side, nearby forehead a few wisps of hairs swing in the breeze.

Xue's figure has now presented a kind of girl-charm with slender waist and slightly developed chest, outlining a beautiful curve in the sunset. Her lotus-roots-like arms are fondling in the rippling blue river, a crystal sweat drops down along her soft face, a faint flush gradually shows on her cheeks. Those misty, wet eyes are clearer and brighter now, only her slight frown still tells a sense of cowardice and melancholy.

(Flashbacks)

INT. KITCHEN-AFTERNOON

Xue cheerfully runs into the house and smells a food fragrance from the kitchen.

XUE

(hugs her mom at back and shout)  
Mom! How do you know that I have  
a good news for you?

FEN

(Gets a little shocked)  
What good news?

XUE

Then why do you buy and cook  
ribs today?

She points at ribs boiling in the pot and smiles with happiness.

FEN

(tires to avoid eye contact with Xue)  
Ah, nothing. Tell me about the  
good news.

XUE

You could never imagine this..  
I ranked the first in my final  
Exam!

She grabs an unfinished rib from another table and puts it into her mouth, then mumbles with satisfaction.

XUE  
Headteacher said I...I  
could possibly...get into the...  
the top local senior high!

Xue excitedly waits for her mom's response. Her mom stops the work in hands for the moment, then gives out a slight sign. She turns back with a restrained smile.

FEN  
Happy for you, my girl.

She puts down the spatula and swipes her hands on the apron.

FEN  
Comes with me, I got a secret  
gift for you.

INT.BEDROOM-AFTERNOON

Fen opens the closet and takes out a new and bright red cotton uniform dress from the bottom.

XUE  
No way! When..when did you  
get it?!

FEN  
(Holds the dress in front of XUE  
and measures with eyes)  
It fits well. I made it with cloth  
bought from the town last week.

XUE  
(Too excited to say a word)  
Can I...try it?

FEN  
(Squats down and pats on Xue's head

gently)  
Sure you can.

Yi rushes in all of a sudden.

YI  
Are the ribs prepared? He'll be  
back soon!

FEN  
(Quickly stands up)  
Yeah! Emmm...Nearly finished!

XUE  
Wait...who...little brother?

YI  
Who else! Xin got the first prize  
at the school sports day! Thanks to  
him we get to eat ribs to celebrate!

XUE  
So the ribs are for...Then why buy me  
a gift?

She turns to her mom with confusion.

XUE  
You actually know nothing about my  
performance at school right?

YI  
Don't fuss it up girl. The dress is a  
souvenir for your last day of school!

Fen gives her husband an anxious stare.—

XUE  
Why the last day? I even haven't started  
my senior high!

Yi takes a deep breath and walks towards Xue.



YI

Listen...Senior high will be another  
cost...and Xin just transferred into  
a new school,so...

Fen grabs the edge of her husband's shirt, and carefully  
shakes her head with begging in her eyes.

XUE

(looks at her parents' reactions and  
feel about to cry, but she eventually  
laughs)  
I see.

She takes the dress and quickly puts it on. Without looking  
at the mirror and ignoring tears on her face, she walks  
across her parents.

XUE

Time to eat.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - AFTERNOON

When she templates, a spray splashes in front of Xue and  
wets her coat. She looks angrily across the river and sees  
THREE BOYS (aged around 15) make funny faces at her.

BOY1

(Provocatively)  
Yo, pretty, no more school now?

Xue heads down and quickly dries out her dress. She stands  
up and starts to head back home.

BOY2

Hey you! Don't pretend to be deaf!

Boy3 throws another stone towards Xue.

BOY3

Come on! Just a talk!

XUE

(shaving voice)

There's nothing to talk with you  
Guys.

Three boys then go across the bridge and chase behind.  
Xue quickens her pace, not daring to look back.

EXT.ON THE ROAD BACK TO XUE'S HOME-NEARLY NIGHT

BOY1  
(shout at back)  
Stop! I said stop!

A burst of laughter.

BOY1  
You dropped your hair string sweetie!

Xue startles, hurriedly to touch her braids, only to find  
that the bottom has been spread out, the rubber band  
disappears.

Xue stops and turns back, still heads down a little bit.

XUE  
Please give it to me.

BOY2  
(pretend not hear at all)  
Said what?

XUE  
(takes a breath and heads up)  
I said, give it to me, now.

BOY3  
(Shakes his head)  
Tut-tut, that's not your supposed  
attitude girl.

Xue gets more and more uneasy seeing them approach.

XUE  
(heads back)  
Fine, keep it.

All of sudden boy1 chases in front and grabs her basket of clothes.

BOY1

(Mockingly)

Who the fuck do you think you are, huh? At school u didn't give us a shit, for what? Your higher grade?

(drops Xue's basket  
on the ground)

Don't you understand? Now we are totally the same!

Xue stares at him in anger and immediately bends down to pick up the clothes scattered on the ground, boy1 then steps on it.

BOY1

(heads down on Xue)

Oops, my bad. I forgot that you were even worse, your mom's baby girl.

XUE

(Eyes turn red gradually)

Shut your mouth and move your step.

Boy2 Rushes in front and pulls up Xue's collar.

BOY2

Dare you say it again?

XUE

(Stares back with furies)

Shut your...

Di...Di...Di....Suddenly a screech of car horns ahead, blinding Xue with its intense headlights.

DRIVER

(shouts at them)

Get out of the way, kids!

BOY3

(Talks back)

Sorry sir, our sister is having a  
tantrum here. We'll take her home.

(Pulls Xue to the  
roadside)

XUE

(Screams in shaving  
voice)

No, that's not true! They stopped my  
way back. Help me please!

EXT./INT. CAR- NIGHT

DRIVER (aged 50s) looks back at the man sitting behind.  
He is Dai (aged 43), dressed in a dark suit with a A  
well-groomed hairstyle. When he is unsmiling, his aura  
is intimidating, and a small frown seems to tell his  
temperamental personality.  
While trying to take a nap, he waves his hands to his driver  
while still keeping his eyes closed.

DAI

Mind your own business.

Driver nods his head, shuts down the window and starts the  
engine.

Dai frowns when hearing the sound of the engine, he leans  
forward in displeasure and unwillingly opens his eyes,  
then looks around.

The car drives pass the three boys, they waves to the  
car with big smiles. Behind them is a wisp-thin girl, a  
plain-dressing but surprisingly pretty girl. Her long  
hair  
hung down over her shoulders and her bright eyes were  
fogged  
by the moonlight. She stares at him with a complex

expression, the slight frown on her beautiful face makes him  
can't help giving a hand.

DAI  
(stares at Xue but saying to his  
driver)  
Stop the car.

EXT./INT. OUTSIDE THE CAR- NIGHT

DAI  
(walks towards boys)  
What's happening here?

BOY1  
Sir, we are having fun.

DAI  
  
Oh, really?  
  
(Point to Xue)  
This lady seems not to enjoy it at all.

BOY2  
(whispers to Boy1)  
He is the mine manager, my dad works  
for him! Just let her go.

BOY1  
(Takes a breath)  
Well, we need to go now, it's too  
late. Take her if you want.

Boys run away and leave Xue standing alone in front of  
Dai.

XUE  
(Don't know what to say)  
...I..

DAI  
Never mind, it's nothing.

XUE  
(Bows down cautiously)  
Thank you

DAI  
(Never expects her  
to bow and laughs)  
Hah, no need to do this.

Xue doesn't say a word, packs her things and hurries to leave.

DAI  
(Tries to stop her)  
You want a ride? It's dangerous at night.

XUE:  
(Quickly glimpses at  
Dai and heads down)  
No, thanks.

Dai gazes at her. A beat. He walks towards Xue.

Xue steps back in fear.

Dai takes out a name card and puts it into her basket.

DAI  
Contact me if you need.

Dai exits, the car drives away.

Xue stands in the darkness, she tries to read the card under a nearly broken streetlight.

XUE  
(Reads word by word)  
Manager Dai.

Xue looks in the direction that the car leaves, stands for long.

