Kin

The first time I saw her, I turned away.

We couldn’t believe our eyes, they said, when we found her in the Shanghai adoption agency - just like you so many years ago – and we thought it was you! Give Meiqin a warm welcome, Dad grinned. After all, God has bestowed on you a soulmate. C’mon. Say hello to your long-lost twin.

Even when the moon started stealing back the sun’s reign and the skies fell into the mysterious hues of raven, Meiqin occasionally sat in the verandah. I would come and find her on the swinging bench, her petite form bunched up like a ball. I would greet her passingly, pretending to be looking for something, and she would echo it back. Then I would leave empty-handed as soon as I came.

Aren’t you cold? I asked once, for her lips were purple.

She glanced up at my voice, her glassy eyes reflecting in mine. Silence hung in the air like a thick miasma. The likeness of our faces disconcerted me and the longer her eyes remained on mine, I could no longer look.

We ate dinner as a family. To any outsider we were an odd combination of ethnic opposites, sitting around the table under yellowing tints of the sky which were peeping through the windows. Before Meiqin’s arrival it was still like this, and prying noses would scrunch up disdainfully at the adopted oriental daughter; but now there were two. Meiqin’s plate would always be half-full. She would finish first, folding her tissue and wiping her mouth clean. And I, with my chicken halfway down my throat, would turn away from the TV and attempt a joke; what, wait for me, don’t finish so fast! In the beginning, the sides of Meiqin’s mouth would quirk but never open. Then she would wordlessly take Dad’s, Mum’s, and my plates
to the sink in that order in practiced poise. The running tap. The crash of plates against each other. It must have been an act of unquestioned duty, maybe gratitude for saving her life, a habit, or all three.

She’s Chinese, Mum explained. Let her be.

Perhaps it this same tendency of duty when she put the little iPod in my hands, ragged at the edges and water blurring the screen. I envisioned it; the roar of the washing machine had mercilessly scratched at the once-streamlined design. Aluminium was half peeled off as if a beast was attempting to undo its parts. But now it was just a useless clunky piece of metal, once a storage of select precious memories... broken and ripped away as if it was never there, as if forgotten.

*Ih... was in pocket.* She meekly mumbled and I finally saw her apologetic expression. Guilt for my earlier unpardonable thoughts filled the now hollow crevices of anger. There was an exchange of silence before she lightly tapped me on the shoulder and beckoned me to follow.

In her room, Meiqin kneeled down and dug into the deepest depths of her last drawer. She grabbed a little red velvet satchel, gold and white oriental intricacies embroidered along. In it she pulled out two round rusted metal pendants made black by time and history. Two red strings were weaved through square holes punctured in the middle of them both.

Necklaces?

*China. Old. Family treasure.* She took one of them and beckoned me over.

Coins? I asked again. Meiqin silently undid the string and wound it around my neck. As she tied it, I studied the coin. Intricate pictographs were carved on the surface and edges worn and scratched. When she was done, I let it go and it rested on the left side of my chest which Meiqin then adjusted.
From our mama. From Meiqin. For Stacey.

My mouth opened to say something, but then shut again. In my mind the words were racing against each other, but they would not run into my tongue. She averted her eyes to look at the other coin pendant that she held tenderly between her fingers. I could not interrupt her moment of peace as her gaze was concentrated and intent. But I was triggered to recall her fragile figure, knees to chest, watching the lunar crescent on a swinging bench and the moonlight shining brighter than all the stars together in the treacherously dark sky.

The coin pendant was tightly clutched inside her trembling fist. Mama, Meiqin whispered and I hurriedly wrapped my arms around her. She started to shake uncontrollably as she wept. Before I realised, we were holding each other tenderly and I, crying anxiously, for a twin sister long undiscovered and a mother I’d never met.

I wondered how often she missed home. I wondered if the times when she would look out the window and stare at the sky were the times when she wished she was under a different sky. I wondered how she thought of our sky; was it too big, too blue, too bold?

Beautiful, Meiqin said once when we were lying down on the field and watching clouds. My hands were behind my head and my knees bent, but her whole body was spread on the grass. Our bikes recklessly lay next to us, a wheel of mine still turning. She stretched out her arm in front of her and opened up her palm as if snatching up and devouring the entirety of the sky.

What’s the sky in China like, I asked.

Purple. Zi se.

Zi se, I repeated after her, the roll of the unfamiliar language on my tongue. That must be pretty.
No, pause. *Here is beautiful.*

The first time I saw her, her arms were limply holding onto bags like fragile strings and ready to snap apart. Mum’s hand was squeezing her left shoulder for comfort but she continued to stare intently at the ground with pursed lips. Finally, she furtively glanced up, and looked at me, and said, *Hallo. Ni hao.*