

Sān Sè Jǐn

Mina Han

Bloom by Belle Villar



“Méihuā? No flower? Why is it called ‘no flower’ when it is clearly a flower?”

“The ‘méi’ means ‘plum’ in that word. Méihuā. Plum blossom.”

Cecilia drew a breath.

Ah, plum blossoms. They were Li Xue’s favourite— they’d bloom in the winter, red against the snow. They’d stand alone amidst the harsh, barren landscape. They should’ve been a beacon of hope— but the red was only angry, and the thin branches pointed like persecutory fingers. It’s all your fault. All your fault!

Did they ever bloom or did they just come back from the dead? Was there ever a season for them? Just them?

She tried her best not to bite the inside of her cheeks. Nothing was more adept at making her feel like a terrible person. And nothing— that is exactly what she had done. If only she had sacrificed more. If only she had said more. Said more.

Duǒ— a counter for flowers. Duǒ— to hide.

Huā— flower. Huā— to spend.

Méihuā— plum blossom. Méihuā— did not spend.

“I see,” said Tadeu. “Everything sounds the same in Mandarin... you have to rely on other words to figure out what one word means, and then those other words

also sound like other words! What do you do then? Hah!”

He glanced at Cecilia. She was looking at the ground. He looked back up at the trees.

“...So I’m glad we both speak English. I would like to understand you.”

The leaves were green and the branches were spread out like an umbrella above them. Should he tell her that he had looked up the difference between plum trees and cherry trees just in case they’d ever go on a walk like this one?

He shoved his hands deeper into his pockets. No, no. It’s not necessary.

The two walked in silence for a bit, the uneven pavement crunching beneath their steps. Tadeu rolled the lint in his pockets between his thumb and index finger. A rock was stuck in the groove of his shoe sole, but he didn’t stop to get it out. Cecilia was a fast walker.

“You know,” Tadeu started, “I think my host family’s daughter is named Mei Hua. Is it normal for Chinese names to be words?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, the... the name is a word. The actual word used today.”

“Huh?”

Lan Ying— Orchid beauty.
Cecelia— Blind.

“For example, ‘Kevin’ is not really a

word, but ‘Mei Hua’—”

“How about ‘Rose,’ is that not a word and a name?” Cecilia offered a small chuckle.

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet!” She flung her arms out, missing him by a hair. He flinched, before straightening up.

She does this often— the sudden bursts of energy in an attempt to keep her thoughts from showing on her face. He smiled, almost resignedly.

“Tic-tac-toe, three in a rose.”

“I am going to kill you.”

“In Flanders fields the poppies blow, between the crosses—”

“Don’t even try to finish that one.”

Tadeu laughed, as she tried to laugh too. She had skipped her last high school Remembrance Day assembly to text in the washroom. It would have been around midnight where Li Xue was. I’m still thinking about you. Erase. I hope your parents aren’t still angry. Erase. She finally settled on a *zuijin hao ma*, which remains undelivered. The last message that had been delivered was her birthday message— February the third— which never got a reply.

How very like her, to start pouring her heart out only after they couldn’t speak anymore. To start only when she knew no one was on the other end. She only

blooms in the winter— what a coward.
What a coward!

Tadeu nudged her in the side. “Which do you like more, poppies, or roses?”

Cecelia blinked. What had he asked?
Ah, right.

“Roses, probably. Not the red ones, the white ones.”

“Are those your favourite?”

“Favourite roses? I guess.”

She sighed. Tadeu scratched the back of his head.

“...Then, what’s your favourite flower?”

“Uh... peonies? I think?” She thought a bit more. No, not peonies. Whatever— she already said that peonies are her favourite, and she doesn’t feel like thinking about flowers anymore. It’s a little difficult when they’re surrounded by flowers.

Tadeu cleared his throat.

“My own favourite might be the pansy,” he said.

“Why, because they’re edible?”

Chī huā— eating flowers.

Huā chī— “flower crazy.” An antho-maniac, someone extravagantly fond of flowers.

Huā chī— someone who is smitten, a love-struck fool.

Pansy— someone just like her.

“No,” Tadeu shook his head, “it’s be-

cause of their name in Portuguese. Do you know what we call them?”

“Of course I don’t.”

She looked up, only to catch Tadeu’s expectant face already turned her way. She made a show of rolling her eyes.

“...Well, what do you call them, then?”

Tadeu grinned.

“Amor-perfeito!”

Pansy— offensive slang— weak, effeminate. A gay man.

Pansy— perfect love.

A droplet hit the ground, leaving a dark spot. Perfect love. Perfect love. Perfect love.

Rise by Belle Villar

