



# Chinese Cinderella





# Silver Medal

When Adeline got home from school, the first thing Aunt Baba noticed was a shiny silver medal on the left side of her pocket. “Where did you get that?” Aunt Baba asked Adeline while pointing at the silver medal.

“Oh, my teacher gave it to me for leading the class. I can only wear it for a week then I will have to return it back.” Adeline replied. Aunt Baba was surprised as it was only the second week of kindergarten and she has already received an award. She took out an envelope from her school bag and gave it to Aunt Baba, she then opened it only to see words in French and English, which they don’t understand. “How are we going to read this? Maybe one day when you have finally learnt how to speak these languages, you can read them to me.” Aunt Baba said to Adeline.

As Aunt Baba opened a box to put the certificate inside, an old picture fell out. Adeline picked it up and took a look at it, and asked, “Is this a picture of my dead mama?” Aunt Baba looked at it and replied, “No, that’s Grandma and Grandpa.” Adeline really wanted to see a picture of her real Mother so she kept asking Aunt Baba, but she avoided eyes with Adeline and said she didn’t have any.

“Your Mother came down with a high fever three days after you were born. She passed away when you were two weeks old.” Aunt Baba said quietly. Then she changed the subject and told her to shower and do her homework.

Adeline then remembered that Big Sister told her long time ago Aunt Baba and Mother used to be best friends and they worked together in a bank in Shanghai owned by their grandaunt, the youngest sister of Grandfather's. But then Mother died giving birth to Adeline, so that is how she became bad luck.

It was quite sad being called bad luck by family members at a very young age, and to make it worse, she doesn't have a loving step mother. Adeline only had Grandma and Aunt Baba to care and love her.

In the evening, Adeline was still wearing her silver medal. The dinner bell rang at seven and Aunt Baba held her hand and led her to the dining room. When she sat down, Third Brother congratulated her for winning the award, but Second Brother heard what she said and twisted her arm under the table. Adeline's siblings didn't like it whenever she wins an award and get praised. They would always pick on her and tell her to stop bragging.

That night, when Adeline was in a room with Aunt Baba and Grandma, she saw Grandma soak her feet in steaming hot water. They told her to leave as Grandma's feet were going to stink up after they take off the bindings, but Adeline wanted to stay because she was fascinated by Grandma's tiny feet. She learnt that when Grandma was still young, she had to wrap her feet everyday to make it smaller to make it look more feminine. But now it was just all deformed. Grandma couldn't even run or jump when she just was four years old.

When Adeline decided to finally go to bed, she heard Grandpa pounding the on bathroom door fifteen minutes later. Grandma had fainted and was frothing at the mouth. Aunt Baba called the doctor but it was already too late. Grandma has died from a stroke.





# Shanghai

A few weeks after Grandma's funeral, Grandpa decided to bring Adeline, Big Sister, Big Brother, and Second brother to the railroad station. They didn't exactly know why. He brought them in to a crowded platform marked with a sign that says 'TO SHANGHAI'. They went to the first class compartment, and came face to face with their Father, which they have not seen for about one and a half year because he lived in Shanghai with step-mother and Fourth Brother.

Being devout Buddhists, Grandpa and Aunt Baba wished to observe the traditional hundred-day religious mourning period for Grandma before leaving Tianjin. Third Brother was still recuperating from measles, so he would join them later with Little Sister, Grandpa, and Aunt Baba.

"What about our clothes?" Big Brother asked.

"Aunt Baba will deliver them separately. If we brought too many luggages, the servants would be suspicious. It's also important that the servants knew nothing about my whereabouts, otherwise the Japanese might arrest me. So make sure to talk as little as possible so you will not give anything away." Father replied.

Few hours later, when they have finally reached their Shanghai home, step-mother went through all the rules with them and told them where their rooms were. They all stayed at the third floor of the

house, but stepmother, Younger Brother and Sister slept in the second floor. They all went to expensive missionary schools too.



# Family Reunion

“Aunt Baba, Grandpa, Third Brother, and Little Sister are scheduled to arrive on the last Sunday of October.” Big Sister told Adeline. She could not wait to see Aunt Baba. Little Sister has been separated from step mother since she was just six months old, then she was almost two years old.

When they arrived, everyone greeted one another and the house was more crowded. Step mother had repeatedly tried to signal her baby (Little Sister) to come to her, but to Little Sister, her mother was a stranger and she just ignored her and pretended no one was telling her to do anything.

Aunt Baba tried to help stepmother to get Little Sister to get to her too by unwrapping a piece of candy and waving it. She ran eagerly to Aunt Baba, she then handed the candy to step mother. Little Sister got annoyed then ran to the candy dish instead and tipped all the candies on to the carpet. That showed Little Sister did not really like stepmother at all.

“You shouldn’t have done that!” Big Sister said in a stern voice. But Little Sister did not care and said directly at stepmother, “Don’t want you! Don’t like you. Go away!”

Step mother was shocked and hurt, she absolutely did not expect Little Sister to say that. She bet down to pick her up, who was wriggling and resisting with all her might. Little Sister then started howl-

ing at the top of her lungs while tears rolled down her cheeks. “Don’t want you!” she repeated. “Aunt Baba! Aunt Baba! Tell her to go away! Go away!”

Step mother placed Little Sister firmly on the couch next to her. She was pushing blindly against her mother’s neck and face. “Keep still!” Stepmother screamed. The string holding her pearls broke and the pearls tumbled one by one, rolling across the carpet, and on the wooden floor.

That was certainly too much for stepmother, she was very annoyed and angry by Little Sister’s behaviour, so she gave her a stinging slap. That made Little Sister cried more loudly. Step mother was now beating her daughter in earnest. Her blows landed indiscriminately on Little Sister’s ears, cheeks, neck, and head. But no one did anything but watch them silently. Adeline did not know why no one stopped stepmother.

Adeline could not help but shout out, “Stop beating her! She’s only a baby!” She immediately regretted what she did. Stepmother stopped and Little Sister’s screams also simmered down to a whimper. Stepmother glared at her. Adeline looked at Aunt Baba and she shook her head at her to tell her to stop and she did the wrong thing.

Step mother pointed and Adeline and said, “How dare you?” By then stepmother was furious. “Get out! I will never forgive you and you will pay for your arrogance!” Stepmother shouted.

Adeline and her siblings from then on were not given any tram fare or pocket money from Father and step mother, so they could learn the value of money. Even though their schools were a mile and a



half away from their home, stepmother still didn't care and just told them that exercising is good for them.



# A Birthday Party

“Adeline! I got a new dog and I want you to come to my birthday party to see it, please!” Adeline’s classmate told her. Adeline was unsure because she didn’t want to get scolded by her step mother again. She tried to come up with an excuse, “No thanks, dogs bite.”

“No it doesn’t! My dog is a small cute puppy and I’m sure it doesn’t bite. I also have a doll collection that my dad bought when he was in America, I want to show that to you!” Her classmate persuaded. She told Adeline when the birthday party was and where was her house. Adeline figured that her birthday party was held during a school holiday, so she thought of pretending to go to school that day but she was actually going to the birthday party.

The night before the birthday party, Adeline could hardly sleep since she was quite excited. On Tuesday morning, she put a silver dollar that Aunt Baba gave to her in her pocket, then took her school bag and went to her classmate’s house.

Adeline knew she had just broken one of step mother’s rule, and if she found out, the consequences would be disastrous. For a few hours, Adeline was just a normal girl attending her friend’s birthday party.

During lunch time, when everyone was going to the bathroom to wash their hands, Adeline told her friend that she had to go as her family is expecting her to come for lunch. Even though her friend persuaded her to stay, she still could not or else her stepmother would be suspicious and angry.

“Okay, but what is your house phone number? I’ll call you when we are about to cut the cake” Her classmate asked. Adeline gave away her house phone number without thinking twice because she was in a rush.

She ran home quickly as she thought she was late but she reached about twenty minutes earlier than she usually does. She just hoped that step mother would not see her so she wouldn’t get in trouble.

Adeline went to her room quietly so no one would notice that she was at home. Just then, when she entered her room, she came face to face with step mother. She was standing by the table, looking around. Adeline was frightened and didn’t know what she should do. She quickly put the silver dollar she was holding into her pocket.

“Why are you home so early?” Step mother asked Adeline. “I got released early... From school of course.” Adeline replied hesitantly. Adeline looked at stepmother’s face blanky. Stepmother was suspicious and she didn’t trust her. “What’s that you’re holding?” Stepmother kept asking questions.

“Nothing! It’s nothing!” Adeline replied, praying that her stepmother would just stop asking her questions and getting her in trouble. Stepmother didn’t stop asking her what she was holding. She pulled

Adeline towards her and tried pulling her hand out of her pocket to find out what she was holding. Adeline's hand was then finally pulled out and step mother noticed the silver dollar.

“You stole this from this house didn't you? You little thief!” Step mother was furious. Adeline was scared. She shouldn't have went to the birthday party. She also wanted to say she stole it from the house because she thought that it was an easy way out. Just when she wanted to tell stepmother, the new maid knocked on the door and told stepmother, “Someone is on the telephone, she wants to talk to her.” She pointed at Adeline.

Adeline's face turned white. She regretted going to the birthday party and giving the house phone number. She was scared of what her stepmother will do to her after hanging up the phone. She followed them down and watched stepmother talk to her classmate fearfully. Stepmother asked Adeline's classmate why they weren't at school and that she would not be joining the birthday party anymore.

When she hung up the phone, she glared at Adeline. “Not only are you a thief, but a liar, and manipulative as well! Nothing will ever come out of you! The problem is that you got the bad blood from your mother and you don't deserve to be housed a fed here, girls like you should be sent away! You don't belong here!” Step mother yelled. That sent a chill down Adeline's spine, just because of a birthday party.

“You are to stay in your room until your father comes home. You are not allowed to leave your room!” Stepmother commanded.

A few hours had passed and Adeline was still in her room, drooling with hunger. Not long, her father came home and entered her room in a towering rage while holding a dog whip, that a friend of his gave him last Christmas, looped around his arm. When he questioned Adeline, she did not dare to lie. He then told her to lie face down on her bed and he whipped her.

Tears rolled down her cheeks, as she was in pain. She saw a rat scurrying across the floor, and also screamed out in terror but bit her lip and remained silent throughout the punishment.

“Aunt Baba is a bad influence. She spoils you and gives you money behind our backs. You both have to be separated.” Adeline was disappointed and upset, but she couldn’t do anything, or else she will get in more trouble.



# Moving to Tianjin

A few weeks later, Father and stepmother decided to bring Adeline north to Tianjin from Shanghai so she could be separated from Aunt Baba.

When Adeline entered the plane, she thought that it was rather strange that the plane was so empty when the airport was so crowded. She settles down and the plane began to toss and roll and few minutes later. Adeline felt sick to her stomach, closed her eyes and fell asleep.

Adeline felt someone shaking gently on her shoulder. She opened her eyes and realized it was father. She thought that they have already landed, but father just needed to ask her some questions so he could fill out the landing cards.

“I’m afraid I’ve forgotten your Chinese name... Is it Jun-qing?” Father asked with a sheepish expression on his face. Adeline meant so little to him, he can’t even remember her name. She sighed. “No, Father. That’s Little Sister’s name. Mine is Jun-ling.”

“Of course! Jun-ling! now , give me your date of birth.” He gave an embarrassed chuckle. The problem is Adeline didn’t know when her birthday was. In their family, the step children’s birthdays were unknown. He asked her how old she was, and she told him that she was ten years old.

“Ten years old! How times fly! But we need to fill in this landing cards. Why don’t I give you my birthday? Would you like that?” Father asked.

“Yes, please, Father! How wonderful to share the same birthday as my Father!” Adeline was thrilled. That’s how her birthday became November 30, the same as her father’s.

Step mother’s brother met them at the airport to pick them up. It was already dark outside. After they greeted each other, father and step mother hurried Adeline to the big black motorcar. When they reached their destination, step mother and Adeline left the motorcar and stood in front of the massive gates of a large building. It all looked really familiar to Adeline

The gates swung open as soon as stepmother pressed the doorbell. Two foreign nuns were standing at the door. They shook stepmother’s hands and patted Adeline’s head. She bowed at them too.

“We’ve been waiting for you,” they said. Stepmother apologized for being late. They took the suitcases inside, after that stepmother went back in the motorcar and Adeline watched as it slowly fades away. None of them bothered to even look up of wave goodbye to Adeline. She felt an awful loneliness. They had tossed her aside like a piece of garbage.

Mother Marie used to be stepmother’s English teacher and Mother Natalie was her French teacher. They both spoke English, which Adeline barely understood. “No! No! No Chinese! You must only speak English or French here! This is how you learn!”

Adeline then asked Mother Natalie if she was in Tianjin. “Didn’t your mother tell you? Yes! You’re in Tianjin and she has enrolled you as a boarder at St. Joseph’s, where she herself went to school. She telephoned us two days ago and told us that you have attended kindergarten here as a day girl when you were five years old. Don’t you remember?” She stared at Adeline in astonishment.





# Hong Kong

It has been a few months since Adeline moved to Tianjin. She had no one to play with and was alone, she was bouncing a ball against the wall in the school yard. Suddenly Mother Marie was waving her arm and yelling her name. Was it lunchtime already?

“Adeline! Your aunt is here to take you out of school! She is sailing to Hong Kong next week and wants to take you with her!

Adeline was overjoyed. Aunt Baba has come to her rescue! She ran as fast as she could to the visitors’ lounge, followed by Mother Marie. Abruptly, Adeline stopped. In front of her was a small, mousy foreign woman with dark brown hair, dressed in a Western suit. There was no one else.

The lady greeted her in English. “How big have you grown! Do you remember me? I am Aunt Reine Schilling, your step mother’s older sister.” Adeline smiled back shyly.

Something came over Adeline. Great waves of anguish swelled up. She tried again and again to greet her Aunt, to be polite and say how grateful she is for her to come over and pick her up, but words choked her as she struggled, silently cursing her poor English. Then all of a sudden, in front of Mother Marie and Aunt Reine Schilling, she started to weep for no absolute reason.

Aunt Reine Schilling comforted her, “Hush now! Hush! Everything will be alright! It’s a good thing your parents mentioned you were enrolled as a boarder at St. Joseph’s when they dined with us in September. Otherwise how would we have known? To think we might have left Tianjin without you! Now you can sail with us to Hong Kong next week. You can share a cabin with me and my daughter, Claudine. She is nine. My husband, Jean will share one with my son, Victor, who is ten. Your parents would be so glad to see you. They fled to Hong Kong three months ago with grandpa and your younger brother and sister.”

For the first time since Adeline’s arrival in Tianjin, the sisters allowed Adeline to go out. She asked her Aunt where Aunt Baba was, and she said she chose to remain to Shanghai. Adeline wanted to go Shanghai to see Aunt Baba but Aunt Reine said that the Communists will probably be marching into Shanghai in a few months. Adeline didn’t want to see her parents. She didn’t know how they would react, seeing her come back to them.

They were finally leaving Tianjin. They three children were very excited as they entered the cabin. They played together, and doesn’t leave anyone out. Aunt Reine Schilling also shows love to Adeline. This was probably the first time Adeline felt like she was loved and cared, she also felt that she was Aunt Reine’s daughter because she treats her equally as Claudine.

When they reached Hong Kong, they went to Father and Step mother’s place. Everyone greeted one another happily. Adeline didn’t know why her parents were so happy so see her. Adeline was most excited to see Grandpa in the house. She hugged him tightly. Adeline then was told to read the Chinese news paper to Grandpa. Halfway when she was reading it, she gave up and told Grandpa she doesn’t

want to learn Chinese anymore because it's boring. He explained that Chinese was just like drawings and told her many stories.

The entire week Step mother went out with the Schillings. She always invited Grandpa but never included Adeline. Adeline had to do housework, take care of Grandpa and do other things, while others can relax.

Finally a week later, Adeline was then enrolled in a boarding school in Hong Kong. She did well in school and made many friends. Everything went well.



# End of Term

It was finally the end of the term and classes had finished. She had two best friends, Mary and Rachel. Adeline was really private about her life and didn't like to share with them about her family. Whereas, her friends also had problems.

Mary's father kept a 'small wife' and spends most of his time with his second family. Her mother though ostensibly his 'big wife' saw him only on Mary's birthday and Chinese New Year. Rachel's parents were separated when she was younger. They all promised to always be there for one another. Step-mother and Father doesn't really abuse Adeline as much as before anymore because she was getting older. Adeline's life was getting better and better.