

Uncle X

Written by Olivia Ho

The hill was a heaven for children. It was a little far from the village, there were many big trees, and as well as some wild fruits and edible plants.

She was sitting under the largest tree with her children. How large was the tree? She had tried to measure it with her three friends, they held their hands and embraced the tree, but even four could not completely surround it.

There was a huge hole in the trunk of the tree, one side of the tree had been burned and had turned dark. Her children were curious about that, so she told them that a fox had lived in the hole for hundreds of years. It wanted to be a human, the god told it that if it could endure the pain caused by thunder and fire, it could become a human. The dark mark was the scar left by thunder and fire.

She laughed when her children said, "Was the fox stupid? It's so tough as a human, people have to go to school and go to work."

Her children pointed at a house that had almost collapsed and asked her whose house it was, she sank into silence for a while and told them it was Uncle X's house. She was silent again because she didn't know how to tell them the story of Uncle X.

Uncle X had been dead for 20 years, he could not speak, just could make sounds like "Ah, ah, ah..."

Uncle X had moved there in his twenties. He was the youngest brother of her father's friend, Uncle Z.

When Uncle Z was young, his father died, his mother married with another man surnamed Li and brought his newborn brother, X, to the man's village. Almost all the villagers in that village had the surname Li, except for the women. His mother kept the surname Ho for her son.

Uncle Z heard that his brother X was bullied by the villagers and struggled with a difficult life after his mother died. He built that house for X and brought him away from the Li village. Since then, Uncle X had been living in Ho village.

Uncle X worked hard to build a new life for himself. He always smiled. He had three cattle and some fields. He went into the mountains to herd his cattle. He grew some vegetables in his field behind his house, and helped others take care of their crops.

Most of the children liked to laugh at him and call him "Mute, mute, mute..." He waved his fists and made sounds like "Ah, ah, ah..." to try to drive the children away, but they only laughed more loudly.

She had never treated him like that. She called him Uncle X when she met him, then he smiled and waved his hands, and gave her two cucumbers or two tomatoes.

Since she went to the boarding middle school, she had rarely been to the hill or seen uncle X.

One weekend evening, her parents talked about Uncle X during dinner time, they told her some shocking and unexpected news: Uncle X had been arrested by police.

She pieced together what happened from her parents' conversations.

About two weeks earlier, Uncle X had been herding his cattle in a valley when he met a man about fifty years old from another village, and the man also could not speak.

They looked at each other and said "Ah, ah, ah..."

She could not understand what had happened, but according to Uncle X, the man had laughed at him and shouted insults at him. Uncle X became angry and threw some small stones at the man, and the man threw stones back at him.

They started fighting. Finally, Uncle X killed the man.

She came home from school again more than a month after her previous visit. From her parents, she heard that Uncle X had died in the detention centre.

Uncle Z told her father that he met X in the detention centre. Uncle X begged him to take him away from there because he could no longer bear being beaten by police officers and other suspects. Uncle Z told him it would be better if he went to jail after the trial.

But Uncle Z had not found any way to help him yet; uncle Z had already received the message that X was dead.

He was dead; he had not waited for his trial.

She didn't tell her children the story of Uncle X.

Children thought studying and working was hard, but for some people, the hardship of life was too much and too heavy.

She hoped they could find the real heaven and live different lives.