FLASH FICTION

i once fell in love with a girl named red

by Liu Yuniang



"Warm Waters" by Marta Zubieta

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Her name is ?? Zhu Dan.

? Zhu means vermillion. It's a common Chinese surname. ? Dan means flaming cinnabar. In other words, her full name means "red." I told her, once, sincerely, about how beautiful and auspicious her name is. She just looked at me with tired eyes behind oversized glasses, and shrugged with a smile.

She said, "Not really. It's not pleasant to the ears."

She's Chinese, so in Japan where we studied together, we'd call her Shuu. Zhu in Japanese is read as Shu, but she told me she felt that only one "U" felt unnatural. So, she has always been Shuu-chan to me. But Zhu Dan… red, and red — maybe people whose name means red have such a natural affinity towards the color red. Which is why my heart, the one bursting with vermillion, has always been hers since the beginning.

Zhu Dan. You might think your name is unpleasant to the ears, but your name, to me, is an intoxicating sip of nostalgia that reminds me of intense sunsets.

Once, in the busy streets of Ikebukuro, you looked up at the reddish wave of the sky and told me how pretty it was. But when you turned to me, I began to ponder if you were noticing how pretty the fiery sunset was… or if it was the blush on my face.

And to know that I'd die clueless, never knowing if you loved the almighty sky or the small me, is a torture I should bring to my grave.

Every time I remember you, I remember our matching bird plushies. My little bird plushie begs for her companion: the freckled girl with a ponytail and a collection of homely fits and stars in her eyes and cherry on her lips.

Her Japanese name, Shuu, is coincidentally also the reading of ?, which means autumn in Japanese. We met in autumn. The time leaves had started to crunch underneath our shoes.

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I'd wanted more time with you. It was not supposed to be like this. I still want to pour water from the jar to your glass when we eat out together, I still want to give you surprise trinkets and treat you to strawberry crepes and open blind boxes in front of Animate together. Who knew that our last meeting would be at Narita Airport?

In the midst of families with giant luggage and cranky little kids; in the midst of laughing young women on their first ever girls' trip and chaotic intercom announcements and the hub dub of tourists trying to navigate the Narita mayhem, there was only us, us, and us. There were only you and me, in such a turbulent ocean, together for the very last time.

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Zhu Dan, I'll tell you this. My heart is bloody, warm, and beating. You could dig your hand into the cavity of my chest and yank that throbbing muscle all you like; but promise, you should promise me, to make it yours. You can let the blood drip onto your tongue, you can take a bite and taste how much bitter yearning I have borne for you. You can squeeze the blood out of it, prove to yourself that crimson is not only the color of yours, but mine too.

Sink your teeth into my heart. You deserve it, because that is what you own.

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