PRICE OF A SMILE

Written by

Anna Krieske

Address
Phone Number

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INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

A wooden school lunch table. A small hand slaps down two quarters.

Another hand slaps down a five dollar bill.

Another one gently places a toy dinosaur.

A final hand places a fifty dollar bill on the table.

A chorus of children gasp.

A blonde boy, AIDEN, 7, sits smugly at the head of the table before grabbing his fifty and putting it back in his pocket. The other children, all the same age, follow suit. ISLA pockets her five dollar bill, OLIVER pockets his quarters, and LIAM puts his dinosaur back in front of him. One more more child, a small Chinese girl, MAY, sits quietly and observes.

OLIVER
Dude, you got FIFTY BUCKS? That's crazy!

LIAM
I only ever get toys, weird.

ISLA
Why are your teeth worth so much more than me or Olivers?

Aiden shrugs.

AIDEN
Do you guys floss?

The three of them slowly shake their head.

AIDEN (CONT'D)
Bingo.

MAY
Where did you guys get all that?

ALL IN UNISON
The tooth fairy.

ISLA
Duh.

They all look at may dumbfounded.

MAY
What's a tooth fairy?

Once again they all gasp.

AIDEN
Only the best thing ever.

LIAM
She gives you money when you lose your baby teeth!

OLIVER
Or toys.

ISLA
You just have to put your tooth under your pillow at night, and she comes and takes it while you're sleeping and leaves you something for it.

May gets excited.

MAY
I have a loose tooth right now! I can probably get it out today. Do you think the tooth fairy will leave me money too?

ALL IN UNISON
Of course!

May smiles and wiggles her loose tooth with her tongue.

INT. APARTMENT - EVENING

LIVING/DINING/KITCHEN

May lays on her stomach in a sparse living room. A few family pictures hang on the wall, and a small couch that has already seen five different families lives go by. May is coloring in a coloring book, watched over by a makeshift family altar complete with a folding side table, chipped ancestral tablet, and burnt out incense.

MAY
Then when you wake up in the morning, your tooth is gone! And the tooth fairy leaves you money!

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MAY'S MOTHER, 40s, is pacing in the kitchen. Her hair is tied back in a loose bun, a few stray hairs and dark circles frame her deep brown eyes. Her eyes have seen more hardship than peace in her lifetime, but still she listens to her young daughter with care.

MAY'S MOTHER
And what does this fairy do with the teeth eh?

She speaks with a thick Chinese accent, still pacing.

MAY
I don't know, no one said anything about why she wants teeth.

May's mother picks up her purse and removes a wallet. She opens it and dumps out two quarters. She looks longingly at MAy then tucks them into her pocket.

Suddenly May's older sister ALICE, 20s, bursts through the door. Immediately May's Mother rushes to her. Alice's beautiful face is marred by a swollen black eye and running mascara. Though she tries to stay covered by a large overcoat, we can see the short and revealing dress underneath, and it's ripped.

May's mother looks Alice up and down racked with worry.

MAY'S MOTHER
Are you alright? What happened? What did they do to you?

Alice just shakes her head with broken resolve.

MAY'S MOTHER
That's it. This ends now. You can't keep doing this. I won't let you.

Her strict tone falters as she holds back tears. Alice only looks at her, tired.

ALICE
I would rather do this than get evicted and have May on the street. I'm taking a shower.

She hugs her coat tighter and slips into a hallway away from her mother and sister.

May looks to her mother.

MAY
Ma, what happened to Alice?

MAY'S MOTHER
We all make sacrifices to support this family.

She turns away and wipes away tears.

MAY'S BEDROOM

May is tucked in tight while her mother sits on the side of the bed. She holds up a tooth.

MAY
Look! It came out while I was brushing my teeth!

May's mother smiles warmly.

MAY'S MOTHER
Look at that! Growing up so fast.

MAY
The tooth fairy gave Aiden fifty whole dollars! Do you think I'll get that much?

Her mother says.

MAY'S MOTHER
(Mumbling)
Maybe she give different amount depending on your family wealth.

May's smile weakens a little.

MAY
That doesn't seem fair. If they already have more than everyone else why should they get even more?

MAY'S MOTHER
I ask the same thing.

She stands up and kisses May on the forehead

MAY'S MOTHER
Wan'ān, hao mèng

(Goodnight, sweet dreams in Mandarin)

LIVING/DINING/KITCHEN - NEXT DAY

May's mother and sister are sitting at the kitchen table sifting through papers, bills, and mail.

MAY
Look! The tooth fairy came!

She triumphantly holds up her fifty cents.

Stressed and focused, they do not look up.

MAY
Ma?

May's mother snaps out of it a bit.

MAY'S MOTHER
How nice! The fairy must have liked your tooth.

May steps closer, looking at the concerned faces of her family.

MAY
Why do you both look sad again?

ALICE
Again? When did we stop?

Her mother shoots her a look but sighs.

MAY'S MOTHER
Because May, this world is very very expensive, and we all do what we must to keep our family together under one roof.

May clutches her quarters tighter, her brows knit with concern for her mother and sister.

HALLWAY CLOSET

May's face is screwed up and concentrated as she digs through a metal box. She smiles when she finds what she wants and pulls it out.

A pair of pliers.

MAY'S MOTHER (O.C.)
May! Come on you're gonna be late!

May shoves the pliers in her backpack

MAY
Coming!

And rushes out.

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

HALLWAY

May catches up with Aiden in the hallway.

MAY
Hey Aiden! Do you have any more lose teeth?

AIDEN
No, not yet. But my dad says the tooth fairy gives you twice as much every time you lose a tooth so I'll get a hundred bucks! I can like, buy Legoland.

He shrugs and turns into the boys bathroom.

May waits a few beats and follows him, holding the pliers behind her back.

The door closes behind her.

AIDEN (O.C.)
Hey this is the boy's bathroom-

He's cut off by the sound of a scuffle.

Then the sound of bone dislodging from tissue,

And Aiden SCREAMS.

May leaves the bathroom holding the now bloody pliers.

She pulls a little sandwich bag from her backpack, grabbing the last few crackers from within and crunching off screen.

She places one bloody baby tooth inside it and zips it closed.

DIFFERENT HALLWAY

THREE GIRLS are walking single file out a door.

RICH GIRL

–My mom got it for me. It’s Louise Baton I think.

Just as the two girls in front of her cross the threshold to the bustling playground, the Rich Girl stops, hearing crying down the hall.

She slowly walks down the eerily empty hall, and turns a corner.

The crying stops.

RICH GIRL (O.C.)
Hey are you okay?

The sound of a scuffle.

A TEACHER exits a classroom and walks towards the branching hallway.

Then the sound of bone dislodging from tissue

May comes back from around the corner again holding the pliers and plastic bag, walking quickly in the opposite direction.

The rich girl starts crying loudly.

The teacher and May both quicken their pace.

Another tooth is dropped in the bag.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Liam calls out from behind a tree,

LIAM
Alright I’m it! I’m counting to ten!

He covers his eyes.

LIAM
One!

The sound of a tooth being pulled.

A tooth drops into the bag being held over a slide.

LIAM
Two!

The sound of a tooth being pulled.

A tooth drops into the bag being held over some bark chips.

LIAM
Three!

The sound of a tooth being pulled.

A tooth drops into the bag being held in front of a swing set.

LIAM
Four!

The sound of a tooth being pulled.

A tooth drops into the bag being held in front of a water fountain.

LIAM
Five-

His word is cut off.

The sound of a tooth being pulled.

A tooth drops into the bag, held in front of the tree Liam was counting behind.

May walks away from the park quickly, hands bloodier than before, clutching a sandwich bag teaming with bloody teeth. Behind her, parents are rushing to their screaming and crying children.

EXT. APARTMENT - DAY

May walks up to the door of her apartment. She hears Alice and her mother arguing inside. She quietly opens the door and sneaks inside.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

She quietly closes the door behind her.

Alice and her mother are standing in the kitchen, both angry and crying. May's mother is waving around a piece of paper with a bit of blue painter's tape stuck to the top.

In bold red letters it says

"EVICTION NOTICE"

MAY'S MOTHER
We will… We'll find another place. Smaller. Cheaper.

ALICE
They don't get cheaper than this ma. And even if they did, no one will rent to us with an eviction.

May's Mother's eyes fall to the floor.

MAY'S MOTHER
How… How can anyone afford to live in this place.

May's eyes light up from her spot in the corner.

A police siren wails in the distance.

MAY
Don't worry ma!

Her mother and sister both jump at her presence.

MAY'S MOTHER
May! How long have you been-what's on your hands?

ALICE
What do you mean 'don't worry'?

They both look at the smiling May in confusion.

The siren gets louder.

MAY
Look! I'm gonna get so much money from the tooth fairy, we won't ever have to move agin!

May triumphantly holds up the snack bag of bloody teeth.

Her mother and Alice both scream, startling May out of her pride. May's Mother clasp's her hand over her mouth and turns away. Alice rushes to May and snatches the bag from her hand.

ALICE
What is this? What did you do?!

The siren is right outside the apartment. Alice looks out the window and back to May.

ALICE (CONT'D)
Go to your room.

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May is on the verge of tears.

MAY
But… We can pay for-

ALICE
No! We can't. I said go to your room.

Red and blue lights flash through the window.

ALICE (CONT'D)
NOW.

May runs to her room crying and slams the door shut, throwing her backpack on the ground. The pliers tumble out onto the floor.

She wipes away her tears and picks it up.

MAY
We all make sacrifices. For the family.

She closes her eyes and puts the plier in her mouth.

CUT TO BLACK.

The sound of a tooth being pulled.

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