

PROMPT #3: Looking through old family photos, multiple generations back, you notice there is a cat in almost every group photo. The same cat — color and pattern: the cat that is currently purring on your lap.

Photo Memoir

by **Zi Xin Khor**

As Yuki flips open an old, dusty album in the temple library, a black cat jumps and snuggles on her lap. It has always been a pleasure to look over old pictures, as Yuki likes to wonder about the different story behind these family pictures. However, as the pages add on, a constant appearance of a cat in the photos caught her eyes. It hooked her attention not only because there was a fat face black cat but it also wore the same weird collar as the cat on her lap, which had a good luck knot on it. The cat on her lap was named Momo, which means peach in Japanese. He has always been around the temple. Nobody knew where he came from nor where he got the name Momo. Her guess was that whoever named him must have related his fat face to a peach.

What's it like when you've realized the cat by you is all your family photo for generations? Yuki could now answer that it feels like being struck by lightning a hundred times, shutting down all her nervous system in an instant. When her brain finally restarted, Momo had already leaped off her lap and stepped on a picture that had fallen off the album. The picture was a picture from 1930 with a young man standing behind an elegant middle aged woman. The lady was wearing a long beautiful *cheongsam, which seems like a wedding dress. As for the man, he was wearing a normal yet professional tuxedo, making him look like someone fresh out of college. For some reason that photo gave her a sense of familiarity. It was as if she was there when the picture was taken. However, Momo did not give her any time to think because a sudden spark of light from Momo's paw shattered her thought process immediately then dragged her consciousness into an abyss.

Yuki woke up in the middle of a city where a wild nightlife was going on left and right. The style of the city wasn't an everyday 21st century design though. Not to mention all the women are mostly in traditional cheongsam and men in old fashioned tuxedo. As she glanced around

flusteredly, trying to navigate through the crowd, she picked up the year 1930 on a thrown away newspaper.

“Be careful. Don’t want to hurt yourself before you get the camera” a voice from her bag (which she didn’t even realize she was carrying) said calmly.

“What!?” Yuki shrieked in the middle of the crowd, drawing many to look at her.

“Turn left” the same voice told her while totally disregarding Yuki’s awkward moment of awkwardness in the crowds.

Maybe because she was still in the shock phase that’s why when Yuki realized it, she had already turned left into a small alley. A fat face cat wiggles its head out of her bag, jumps to the ground, and glances at a corner. Yuki follows his sight and sees a young man standing or she should say floating by a junk pile as if waiting for someone. At that moment, Yuki felt her skin crawl with her heart losing its center of mass. For some reason, since she woke up, she couldn’t remember what happened before she fainted and now she has to deal with a talking cat and an unknown creature. In one night, Yuki felt she had experienced everything one couldn’t possibly go through ever in their life.

“You came as promised.” the ghost spoke

The ghost words rang a bell deep down Yuki’s heart, emerging some long forgotten memories. She remembers that she has a shifu who adopted her for 17 years and is now walking towards the end of his life. Yuki couldn’t help it but try to make the best of every day with Shifu. Then she met this ghost by chance in the temple and heard about a magical device called the camera. He said that it would help her capture the most cherished memories and would gladly give her his camera he used when he was alive to her. The only condition was to help him buy a wedding dress and bring it to his fiancée. So she went on a journey of working multiple jobs to make enough money as fast as possible and promised to the ghost that she would meet him in town by this alley on moon festival day, August 15th andshe made it.

“Are you sure you want to help? If you start to help one there will be more on the wait.” The cat asked

“I’m sure Momo, let’s go get the wedding dress now.” Yuki firmly declared her choice

“*Sigh*up to you. The path you take belongs to you after all.” Then he hops back in the bag.

Yuki navigates through the crowd again but just this time she had to use more energy. The reason was she doesn't have the ability to go through a person like a spirit does. By the time they stopped, she was showered in sweat, grasping every bit of fresh air she could. She then finally looked upon the store they stopped by. It was still a vintage looking building but it wasn't the dazzling wedding gown store she anticipated. In contrast, it looked as if it had never been cleaned for a million years.

".....Are you sure?" Yuki looked at the ghost puzzled.

Guessing what Yuki was thinking, the ghost, feeling a little embarrassed, explained, "Emmm my family waned when I passed away not long after. I later found out most of the stuff got sold here."

Yuki felt a little sad for him as she dreads the cruelty of time that never forgives anyone, no matter the dead or living. They walked in the store and bought the wedding dress. It was a gorgeous, gentle red cheongsam decorated with completely rounded pearls and embroidered with full bloom peonies.

"Wow, you were rich! You also must have really loved her a lot!" Yuki said

The ghost smiled slightly as they walked out of the store to their next destination. The next challenge was to see his fiancée, May. Mr. Ghost said that May's family was a powerful family too, and their marriage has been arranged since childhood. Since she is one of the family's central figures, it will not be easy to see her. But on moon festival day, he knew that May would go to pray at a nearby *Guan Yin temple every year. So when Yuki arrived at the temple, through the back window, she saw a lonely lady in black cheongsam with a camera on her hand sitting by the back doorway. Under full moonlight, it was clear that she was a middle aged woman with little wrinkles around her eyes. Yet, the wrinkles could not cover up the elegance that is engraved in her bones, uplifting the nobility of her beauty. Even the most ravishing flower would be instantly overshadowed with her presence.

"That's her," the ghost steadily said. But, Yuki knew that he was torn on the inside.

Yuki approached May and handed over the box with the wedding dress while saying, "Someone who really loved you asked me to pass this to you."

May was stupefied for a bit but quickly took the box and opened it.

"Did...did he pass?" May asked with a trembled voice

Yuki noded

“I hoped he was still alive... I...I would rather him stay in England and forget about me than die.” Tears rushed out from May’s eyes at that instant.

Yuki didn’t know what to say so she looked peaked in the bag to see Momo. Momo yawned and said, “Don’t look at me. You’re the one who took the job.....fine.”

Momo leaped out from the bag and touched the ghost. May’s eyes lit up as Mr. Ghost’s body became less transparent.

“Why have you not married someone else?” the ghost asked

“Why else? To wait for you.”

May gave a mellow smile and asked, “Lin-lin, will you still fulfill the promise you’ve made 20 years ago to marry me after you’ve come back from England?”

“Yes! Yes I will”

May changed into the wedding dress and fulfilled her wish of marrying her most loved man that night. She agreed to give the camera, which was Lin-lin’s, to Yuki if she would take their wedding photo. In order to make Lin-lin appear on screen, Momo had to be in the picture to share his spiritual power with him. So the final picture had a couple that disregarded the border of life and death just to fulfill a promise and a plumed face cat who made the picture look cuter.

The moment Yuki pushed the camera button, glaring light from the flash caused her to close her eyes. When she opened her eyes again, She was back to where she had begun the long lost memory, staring right at the peach-faced cat, Momo.

Vocabs:

*Guan Yin: Chinese goddess

*cheongsam: Traditional clothing during the last dynasty towards the republic of China. It originated from Man Zhu. Often mistaken as Chinese traditional clothing.