



# 青春走錯路



## YOUTH GONE ASTRAY

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## Chapter 1

The summer sunlight poured down like golden syrup.

Xiao Qing sat by the window, headphones on, pretending to be studying, but fixed on the figure across the street.

That boy--slim, with a guitar slung over his back--walked past the breakfast cue.

Today, like always, he didn't look at her.

Today, like always, she watched him without blinking.

"Are you going to keep staring at him until he notices?"

Her best friend, Yi Wen, sat beside her eating a popsicle and teased, "Even a drama, your gaze could melt him by now."

Xiao Qing didn't answer. Her hand quietly pressed down the curtain.

Some feelings didn't need to be spoken aloud.

Some people didn't need to turn around, because her heart had already followed.

She didn't know his name, only that he often performed on the pedestrian street that he sang ancient songs with a voice that didn't belong to this noisy generation.

That day, he sang a song she had never heard before.

The melody wrapped around the alley like mist,

The lyrics drifted into her heart like a slow tide--

'The flowers bloom not for me,  
The wind blows not to please.  
But I still stand in the dusk,  
Waiting for a glance--just one, please.'

"Do you know him?" she asked the owner of the breakfast shop.

"Ziyang? Oh, he's been playing guitar out there for a while. He lives with his grandmother, I think.  
Quiet kid, doesn't talk much."

Ziyang.

So that was his name.

She repeated it in her heart several times.

It sounded like the sun behind a cloud--bright, but not blinding.

## Chapter 2

Ziyang's world was very different from Xiao Qing's.

He lived in a narrow alley behind the night market, in an old apartment building with peeling paint and squeaky wooden stairs. The rent was cheap, the neighbors loud, and the smell of fried food constantly floated in the air.

But Ziyang didn't mind.

He was used to it.

His grandmother's health had been poor in recent years, and most of the household burden had

fallen on him. He studied music at a public arts college during the day and played at the pedestrian street at night--partly for the extra cash, but more for the quiet sense of purpose it gave him.

He didn't know he had a silent admirer across the street.

He didn't notice the girl with bright eyes and quiet footsteps who always appeared around the same time.

Until that evening.

It was the first time she dared to walk over--not with a greeting, but with a cup of milk tea in her hand.

"You sound amazing," she said softly, holding out the drink. "I... I pass by here a lot."

Ziyang blinked. His voice was calm, but not cold. "Thanks."

He took the drink with both hands.

That small gesture--polite, gentle--somehow stirred something in her.

"I'm Xiao Qing," she added quickly, as if she might not get another chance.

He looked at her, finally really looked.

A pair of clear, nervous eyes.

A face that had probably grown up with everything he didn't have.

"Ziyang," he replied simply.

Then he gave her a faint, almost unnoticeable smile.

It was the first time she had seen him smile.

And from that moment, something began to change.

### Chapter 3

From that day on, Xiao Qing began to pass by more often--sometimes with drinks, sometimes with snacks, sometimes just to listen quietly from the side.

She never interrupted. She only listened.

And Ziyang, though he didn't say much, slowly grew used to her presence--like the way you grow used to the wind brushing past your collar on summer evenings. Quiet, but real.

Her world was one of air conditioning, piano recitals, private school uniforms, and driver pick-ups.

His world was filled with second-hand music scores, part-time gigs, and budgeting coins to last through the week.

Their lives should never have intersected.

But somehow, they did.

Yi Wen warned her, "Are you serious? You're going to fall for a street performer? Your parents will go ballistic."

Xiao Qing replied with a smile, "I'm just listening to music. Nothing more."

But she knew it wasn't just that.

Sometimes, when Ziyang sang, his eyes would close as if he were whispering secrets to the night.  
Those songs weren't for the crowd.

They weren't even for her.

But still, she felt lucky to hear them.

One evening, as the crowd faded and the streetlights flickered on, he turned to her and said, "I've seen you around for weeks. Why?"

She was quiet for a moment.

Then she said, "Because I think your music understands feelings I can't even explain."

Ziyang looked at her--and for the first time, he didn't look away.

#### Chapter 4

Ziyang began to notice more things about her.

She always wore clean, neatly ironed clothes. Her shoes were white without a single scuff mark.

She carried herself with a quiet elegance, like someone who'd never had to rush for a bus or haggle at the market.

But she never looked down on him.

Never once acted like she didn't belong in that noisy street.

Sometimes she would bring him new guitar strings.

Sometimes just a note with a quote from a poem she liked.

He didn't say much in return, but once, he started playing a melody she had hummed under her breath days earlier.

Her eyes lit up. "You remembered?"

He nodded. "It had a nice tune."

Xiao Qing didn't dare ask for more than that.

She didn't know what she wanted this to become.

Love?

Maybe not yet.

But something was definitely growing.

Meanwhile, at home, the storm was gathering.

Her mother noticed the subtle changes: the way Xiao Qing smiled while texting, the way she suddenly wanted to walk home instead of being driven. And worse--Xiao Qing had started humming songs she'd never learned in piano class.

"Who is he?" her mother asked one night.

"No one," Xiao Qing replied, too quickly.

But that was enough to raise suspicion.

In Xiao Qing's world, "no one" was never just no one. It meant someone unacceptable.

## Chapter 5

The next evening, Xiao Qing didn't show up.

Ziyang waited longer than usual before packing up his guitar.

He didn't know why he felt disappointed.

He told himself maybe she was busy, or maybe the rain that afternoon had changed her plans.

But the truth was--he had gotten used to her.

Meanwhile, Xiao Qing was at home, facing her parents in the middle of what felt like a courtroom interrogation.

Her mother slammed the cup down. "A street singer? Are you out of your mind?"

Her father didn't speak. His silence was heavier than her mother's anger.

"I didn't do anything wrong," Xiao Qing said calmly, though her fingers trembled slightly. "I like his music. That's all."

"That's not all," her mother snapped. "You think I don't know how this starts? A few songs, a few walks, and suddenly you're throwing away everything for some boy who can't even afford to fix his shoes?"



"Enough," her father finally said. "You will not see him again."

That night, Xiao Qing cried silently under the covers.

Not because she was forbidden.

But because deep down, she already knew this was coming.

Ziyang never had a chance to fight.

In her world, he didn't even qualify as an opponent.

## Chapter 6

The next few days, Xiao Qing stayed home under strict supervision.

Her phone was confiscated.

Her driver now took her directly to and from school.

Even Yi Wen was warned not to bring up "that boy" again.

It was as if her parents believed ignoring Ziyang would erase him from her life.

But Ziyang didn't disappear.

He still played at the same spot every evening.

His songs were the same, but they somehow sounded lonelier.

One day, he spotted a familiar figure standing at a distance behind the crowd.

She didn't come closer.

She didn't wave.

But she was there.

And that was enough.

He sang that night like he had something to say.

The melody danced on the edge of heartbreak,

And his voice, always calm, now trembled just slightly--enough for anyone truly listening to feel it.

Later, as the crowd dispersed, she slipped a note into his guitar case and disappeared before he

could even speak.

'I miss your music. I'm sorry. I'll try to come back.'

Ziyang stared at the handwriting.

It was neat, careful, and familiar--like a whisper that reached him through silence.

He folded the note and placed it in the pocket closest to his heart.

That night, he didn't go straight home.

He walked under the city lights for a long time, humming a new tune.

Something soft.

Something hopeful.

## Chapter 7

On Saturday afternoon, the city was drenched in a slow drizzle.

Not heavy, just enough to blur the edges of everything.

Xiao Qing finally found an excuse to leave the house--an art exhibit her teacher had assigned the whole class to visit.

Her mother didn't argue.

Art, culture, good grades--these were acceptable reasons to go out.

But Xiao Qing didn't go straight to the gallery.

She took a detour.

An intentional, quiet detour to the place where the boy with the guitar always played.

Ziyang was there, under a plastic awning, adjusting the strings of his guitar to keep them dry.

He looked up--and this time, he saw her first.

"You came," he said, voice low but steady.

"I said I would," she answered, brushing a strand of wet hair behind her ear.

There was an awkward pause.

Neither of them knew what the rules were anymore.

"I'm sorry," she said. "They... they think I shouldn't see you."

"I figured," he replied. "I'm not exactly someone your parents would welcome with tea."

"That's not fair," she blurted. "They don't even know you."

Ziyang didn't argue. He didn't need to.

After a moment, he picked up the guitar and said, "Then let them hear me."

He started to play--not loudly, not boldly, but with a quiet honesty that filled the air between them like warmth in the rain.

Xiao Qing stood there, unmoving, as the music wrapped around her like a memory she never wanted to forget.

## Chapter 8

That weekend, Xiao Qing couldn't stop humming the tune Ziyang played.

It wasn't a famous melody. It wasn't flashy or complicated.

But it had a kind of sincerity--raw and real--that made it linger in her mind.

She tried to replicate it on her piano, but it didn't sound the same.

Her fingers were too clean.

Her technique too polished.

The song needed something messier. Something lived.

Meanwhile, Yi Wen wasn't subtle about her curiosity.

"So," she said, leaning across their lunch table at school, "you broke the house rules for love?"

"I didn't break anything," Xiao Qing replied.

"Oh? Sneaking out to see your forbidden musician boyfriend doesn't count?"

"He's not my boyfriend."

"Yet."

Xiao Qing didn't answer.

But the small smile at the corner of her lips gave her away.

Yi Wen softened. "Look... I know your mom's scary. But if this guy makes you smile like that, maybe he's worth it."

"Maybe," Xiao Qing said, quietly.

That night, back at his apartment, Ziyang replayed the song he'd played for her in the rain.

His grandmother, sitting nearby with a blanket over her knees, listened silently.

After he finished, she gave him a rare smile. "Was that for someone?"

Ziyang didn't respond right away.

Then he nodded. "Yes. For someone I can't afford to lose."

## Chapter 9

The following Monday, Xiao Qing's mother received a phone call.

From a parent.

One of those "concerned" types, always eager to share gossip wrapped in concern.

"Did you know your daughter has been seen talking to a boy who performs on the street?"

Her mother's lips thinned into a line.

She didn't respond, but that night, Xiao Qing came home to a quiet storm.

"You will stop seeing him. Immediately."

Xiao Qing looked up from her schoolbag. "I haven't done anything wrong."

"He is not your equal," her mother said firmly. "You don't understand that now, but one day, you will."

"I understand perfectly," Xiao Qing replied. "You care more about status than happiness."

Her father looked up from his tablet. That was the line that crossed into dangerous ground.

"You're a child," he said coldly. "Don't talk like you understand the world."

"I may be a child," she said, "but at least I know how to listen to people--not judge them by what they wear or where they live."

Silence followed. Heavy, tense silence.

That night, her bedroom door stayed closed.

And in the small apartment across the city, Ziyang stared at his phone, waiting for a message that never came.

He didn't blame her.

But deep down, he feared something he couldn't name:

That love alone might not be enough to fight the world she lived in.

## Chapter 10

The next time they saw each other, it was by accident.

Xiao Qing had just left the bookstore when she heard the familiar sound of a guitar drifting through the air.

She froze, heart pounding.

There he was--under the same tree, same posture, same quiet focus.

Ziyang hadn't seen her yet.

She thought about walking away.

Not because she didn't want to see him,

But because she didn't know what she was allowed to feel anymore.

But he looked up--and their eyes met.

Neither of them moved for a moment.

Then he spoke. "I didn't think I'd see you again."

"I didn't plan to come," she admitted. "But I'm here."

That was all it took.



He smiled--not the half-smile he used on strangers, but the real one. The one that reached his eyes.

"Want to sit?"

She nodded.

They didn't talk much. They didn't need to.

He played. She listened.

And for a little while, it was like nothing had changed.

Only when the sky turned a shade darker did she finally speak again.

"I don't know how long I can keep doing this," she said.

He paused. "Then let's not think about how long. Let's just... do this. Now."

She looked at him, and for the first time in days, she felt light again.

Maybe the future was uncertain.

But this moment--this tiny, stolen piece of time--belonged to them.

## Chapter 11

By midweek, the school corridors buzzed with news about the upcoming talent show.

It was the annual spring event--a mix of serious performances and playful acts, where the "proper" students played classical music and the more daring ones showed off dance moves, fashion sketches, or comedy skits.

Xiao Qing hadn't planned on participating.

But this year was different.

Yi Wen nudged her in class. "You know what you should do? Sign up for a duet."

"With who? You?" Xiao Qing laughed.

"No, not me. I've got stage fright. But you and your mystery boy... that would blow everyone's minds."

"I'm not trying to start a riot."

"Exactly why you should."

Xiao Qing rolled her eyes, but the idea planted itself in her head and wouldn't leave.

That night, she brought it up to Ziyang, half-joking, half-testing.

"There's this school talent show. Just a silly thing. We could... perform together, if you're not busy."

Ziyang raised an eyebrow. "Me? On a private school stage?"

"I'll sneak you in the back," she grinned.

He didn't say yes immediately. He just looked at her for a long second before finally nodding.

"Alright. Let's shake up their expectations."

They spent the next few days practicing in secret--her on keyboard, him on guitar, both of them adding harmonies slowly, patiently.

It wasn't just music.

It was a quiet rebellion.

And for the first time, they were making noise together.

## Chapter 12

Rehearsals became their secret world.

After school, Xiao Qing would sneak out through the side gate, her keyboard slung over one shoulder, and meet Ziyang in the abandoned art room of a nearby community center.

The place smelled faintly of paint and old books.

No one disturbed them there.

She would play a few chords, he would follow with guitar, and their voices would blend--sometimes clashing, sometimes dancing together like light and shadow.

"Slower here," he'd say gently, tapping the beat on the edge of the table.

"You're the boss," she'd smile, adjusting her tempo.

They were completely in sync.

It surprised both of them.

Xiao Qing wasn't used to letting someone else lead.

Ziyang wasn't used to someone following him without judgment.

Once, after they finished a run-through, she said quietly, "I wish we could just stay like this. No audience. No rules."

Ziyang looked at her. "You mean no parents."

She looked down, biting her lip.

"I'm not asking you to fight them," he said. "I'm just asking you not to hide from yourself."

That sentence stayed with her the whole night.

Not to hide from herself.

Could she really do that?

## Chapter 13

The night before the talent show, Xiao Qing couldn't sleep.

She lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, the melody of their song looping in her mind like a restless tide.

It wasn't stage fright.

It was the fear of being seen--for real.

At school, she was always the "perfect daughter": well-mannered, top grades, quiet smile.

Tomorrow, she'd step on stage with someone her parents wouldn't even allow through the front door.

She turned and checked her phone.

A message from Ziyang had arrived an hour ago:

"Don't worry. Just sing with me like it's only the two of us. I'll be there."

She stared at the words, then typed a reply, deleted it, typed again, and finally just sent a heart emoji.

It said everything she didn't dare write.

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Meanwhile, Ziyang was also awake.

He wasn't worried about singing.

He was worried about her.

He knew what this performance meant--it wasn't just a song. It was her quiet rebellion.

Her first step away from the world built for her.

His guitar case sat ready by the door.

Next to it, a wrinkled note she had written weeks ago still rested on his table:

"I think your music understands feelings I can't even explain."

He smiled to himself, then gently folded the note again.

Tomorrow, they would stand under the lights.

Whether the world clapped or judged didn't matter.

Because for those three minutes, they would be free.

## Chapter 14

The auditorium buzzed with restless energy.

Students chattered, teachers took their seats, and parents filled the back rows with arms crossed and expectations high.

The lights dimmed slightly as the host announced the start of the talent show.

Xiao Qing stood backstage, hands trembling slightly.

Her dress was simple--white with silver trim--but elegant. She had done her own hair, something she hadn't done in years.

Ziyang stood beside her in a black shirt and jeans. Nothing fancy. Nothing fake.

"You ready?" he asked.

She took a shaky breath. "No. But let's do it anyway."

Their names were called.

They stepped onto the stage together.

For a second, silence.

Then a few whispers rippled through the crowd.

"Isn't that the street performer?"

"She's performing with him?"

"Does her mother know?"

The judgment hung in the air like fog.

But Xiao Qing didn't look at them.

She looked at Ziyang.

He nodded once.

And then the music began.

She played the opening keys--soft, deliberate.

He followed with gentle strums of his guitar.

Then their voices rose together, weaving in and out like two threads of the same fabric.

It wasn't perfect.

But it was real.

And by the time they finished, the auditorium had fallen into a hush.

Then--slowly, like hesitant rain--applause began.

It grew.

Filled the room.

Even some of the parents clapped.

Xiao Qing turned to Ziyang, breathless, her eyes wide.

He smiled. "Told you. Just sing like it's the two of us."

Chapter 15

After the show, everything moved in a blur.

Students came over, excited and surprised.

"That was beautiful!"

"Didn't know you could sing like that, Xiao Qing."

"Your duet was... wow."

She smiled politely, but her eyes kept drifting toward the exit.

Ziyang had slipped out early--before the applause even ended.

She knew why.



He didn't belong in that world. Or at least, that's what everyone made him feel.

Yi Wen caught up to her. "That was epic. But you better go before your mom explodes."

That warning came too late.

As soon as Xiao Qing stepped outside, she saw her mother waiting by the car.

Arms crossed. Face like ice.

"Get in," she said.

The car ride was silent until halfway home.

"You embarrassed us," her mother finally said.

Xiao Qing stared out the window. "I didn't do anything wrong."

"You stood on stage with a boy who sings for coins on the street."

"I stood on stage with someone who makes music that matters to me."

Her mother scoffed. "Do you even hear yourself?"

"I do. For the first time."

That night, after being sent to her room without dinner, Xiao Qing opened her window and looked out at the city lights.

Somewhere out there, Ziyang was probably doing the same.

She didn't cry.

She didn't panic.

Because for once, she had chosen something on her own.

And no one could take that three-minute song away from her.

## Chapter 16

Ziyang didn't sleep much that night either.

He sat by his window with his guitar on his lap, fingers moving over the strings, not to play but to feel

Xiao Qing's words echoed in his mind:

■I didn't do anything wrong.■

She hadn't.

But he knew the consequences she would face for choosing him.

The next morning, he walked past the school wall as usual, guitar slung over his shoulder.

He wasn't hoping to see her.

But he still looked.

She wasn't there.

Instead, he saw a flyer stuck to the school gate: Photos from the Talent Show.

He smiled faintly.

They hadn't joined to win.

They'd joined to be heard.

And they had been.

## Chapter 17

At school, Xiao Qing was the subject of whispers.

Some admired her bravery.

Some gossiped.

A few simply stared, unsure of how to place her now.

She wasn't the quiet, elegant girl anymore.

She had crossed a line—and once crossed, it couldn't be erased.

Yi Wen stayed close, her tone light as always.

■You™re famous now. Congratulations.■

■Famous or infamous?■

Yi Wen smirked. ■Same thing in high school.■

During lunch, Xiao Qing found a quiet corner and pulled out her music notebook.

She scribbled down fragments of lyricsŠhalf thoughts, lingering emotions, things she couldn™t say ou

She wasn™t writing for grades or praise.

She was writing for herself.

For the first time.

## Chapter 18

That weekend, Ziyang and Xiao Qing met again—this time at a small books

She wore sunglasses and a hoodie.

He laughed. ■You planning a heist?■

She rolled her eyes. ■I™m avoiding being spotted by the drama club.■

They sat on the floor between shelves, surrounded by old sheet music and c

■This place is magic,■ she whispered.

Ziyang nodded. ■It™s quiet. That™s rare.■

He picked up an old songbook and handed it to her. ■Want to try this one r

She flipped through the pages, then paused at a faded lyric:

,Love doesn<sup>TM</sup>t ask permission. It simply stays.<sup>TM</sup>

She looked up.

He was already watching her.

And for a moment, neither of them said anything.



## Chapter 19

Xiao Qing™s mother found out.

Not from school. Not from a teacher.

But from a parent™s group message: a blurry photo of Xiao Qing and Ziyang at the bookstore.

The reaction was swift and cold.

■This ends now,■ her mother said that night. ■No more contact. No more songs. No more shame.■

Xiao Qing stood still.

Her father added, ■We™ve enrolled you in summer music camp in Vienna. You leave in two weeks.■

Vienna.

It sounded like a dream.

But in this momentŠit felt like exile.

■I don<sup>TM</sup>t want to go,■ she said.

■You don<sup>TM</sup>t get to want,■ her mother replied. ■You get to grow up.■

## Chapter 20

Ziyang heard the news from Yi Wen, who had overheard in the hallway.

■She<sup>TM</sup>s being sent away. Music camp in Europe. Parents are furious.■

He nodded slowly, quietly.

Then he asked, ■When?■

■Two weeks. Maybe less.■

That night, he stood at the edge of the bridge where they used to meet after

The city lights flickered on below.

Cars passed, lives moved forward.

But he just stood there, guitar on his back, heart too full to play.

He didn<sup>TM</sup>t chase her.

Didn<sup>TM</sup>t call or beg.

But the next day, he wrote a new song.

Not for a crowd.

Not for applause.

Just for her.