Amor Fati

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Amor Fati

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Summary

Against all odds, Xiao has a red string.

written for Unbound Souls: A Xiao x Albedo zine!

Notes

actual first work posted to this archive and it's not even backdated I genuinely never posted this. this is an old piece so it's not reflective of my current style oopsies

See the end of the work for more notes

Even a yaksha knows the myth of the red string.

Some say the red string binds together so-called “soulmates”, persons destined for each other in this life. Others believe that the concept of “soulmates” must be an inherently romantic one, and the person one is connected to is fated to be their lover and lifelong partner. Still others contend that the idea of red strings and “soulmates” is merely an extension of the idea of “fate”, and like the idea of “fate”, it is only a beautiful fantasy and nothing more.

Xiao is unsure what his stance is on these concepts of red strings and soulmates.

Once upon a time, that nameless dream eater might have fancied such a romantic idea and satisfied itself with knowing that inevitably, there will be someone for it, but Xiao is no longer that entity. There was no red string for him to cling onto, no sign fate for him to pin that naive hope on. When he was saved by his Lord Morax, there was no red string binding him to his savior and the god he would forever be indebted to. It also goes without mentioning all of the suffering he had endured from not just his first master, but also under Lord Morax. Was that also part of his fate, just like how his red string was meant to be? For something meant to be as absolute as fate itself, the absence of a red string and the loss of his innocence has all but extinguished that fanciful wish.

As an adeptus, Xiao has a duty to protect Liyue from the monsters and demons that lurk throughout his Lord’s lands. As one of the five yakshas, Xiao should have nothing outside of his duties to his Lord and to the other adepti he commands in times of need. But as Xiao himself, he still has yet to forget how sweet of a dream it was when long ago, he chanced upon a mortal’s dream of a red string.

Of course, he knows that the existence of a red string in a mortal’s dream is of no indication that it could exist in real life, but Xiao cannot deny that deep down, there is a part of him that still wishes such a myth could be real. While he has already long accepted his eternal fate to be that of endless fighting, even the vigilant yaksha can entertain the thought of a soulmate from time to time. After all, these are only entertaining thoughts, a dream he can no longer stomach, but still, they are his thoughts.

“Commander Alatus!”

But they are merely thoughts that he will have to leave for another time. Xiao jumps from where he was just perched on the tree branches and heads for his comrade who called his name.

Even a yaksha may end up with a red string.

In the face of bloodshed and death, Xiao doesn’t notice the red string that appears on his hand until after the battle is over. The string itself is unobtrusive, moving along with him as he fights rather than against him, so as he engages in the ruthless combat necessary of him, even someone who notices the smallest hints of his karmic debt leaching into his surroundings misses the thin, red line that follows him. It doesn’t help that even hilichurls, monsters,

demons, whatever else stands between him and his duty fulfilled all bleed red, a shade much closer to the shade of a red string than one would initially presume. A thread so small, so light, and so freely floating would never catch his attention in the middle of battle.

It is only after the dust settles and Xiao takes a breath before leaving the battlefield (only temporarily, he knows. Every respite is only temporary) that he can begin to survey the destruction that took place. While even this scene before him, with what amounts to a crater compared to the lush forest that once stood here, pales in comparison to the destruction he spearheaded when those monsters of Khaenri'ah came, he mourns. What exactly he mourns for just a short moment before he leaves is a mystery, even to him. Is he mourning the loss of life, from the trees to the wildlife? They, too, had only been innocent bystanders caught in the middle of an endless war. Is he mourning the loss of his innocence from those bygone days? That nameless dream eater could never imagine a future where it would suffer bloodshed at its own hands over and over, day after day, century after century. Is he mourning something else, as if those feelings would be enough to pay his karmic debt or bring his lost comrades back from the dead? This is a question that Xiao cannot answer for himself. He tells himself he doesn't need to.

After that moment of mourning comes the briefest of respites Xiao can afford to himself. He dismisses his polearm. It can do nothing for him in this next moment, not against the inevitable pain of yet another death added to his debt, not towards the restoration of this land to how it once was, nothing. He takes a seat among the bamboo forests where the yakshas once made their home, if it could be called that. With his comrades, he took naps and woke up to markings all over his face, but now, he sits wide awake. There is no use contemplating what can only remain in the past.

What he does turn his attention to is the red string now clearly visible against the green bamboo.

He had thought that after the deaths of his comrades, the disappearances of his brothers-in-arms, and the long battle against the darkness that came from Khaenri'ah that someone like him just wouldn't have a red string. How could a weapon of war, honed for the sole purpose of eradicating evil, yet slowly succumbing to the karmic debt of doing so, ever even dream of having a red string? How could this ever-vigilant guardian ever think that fate would promise him someone to walk beside him when his path has only ever been one of death and destruction? And yet the string that reveals itself, tied to his last finger on his left hand, is more than enough of an indicator that fate had other things in store for him.

Xiao holds his hand up to the sun, its light filtering through his fingers so bright that it almost seems like the red string fades from existence. He knows what the myths say, that a red string may twist and tangle, stretch and settle, but it will never break. At some point or another, the person at the other end of this string will find him, or he will find them, and then what happens after that is beyond the scope of the myths told over and over again by the humans. Even for the human imagination, it seems that once fate has played its tricks, those connected by the red string are left to their own devices.

He wonders who could have the misfortune of being connected to someone as ignoble as him.

Even a yaksha may find the person tied to them by a red string.

Xiao has seen his red string point in all sorts of different directions. Once upon a time, when his Lord still visited the other gods, he knew where the other nations were, but even now, when those visits have ceased, he still remembers. South to Sumeru, north to Mondstadt, west to Fontaine, he can still tell where his red string points to. Whoever this thread ties him to, they surely must be on quite the journey to have visited every nation in Teyvat. Not once has he seen this string tangle; no matter where he is or how many obstacles must surely lie between him and the person on the other end, the string has always been straight, even phasing through the mountains and trees of Liyue. It taunts him, urges him to follow the red to the other end, as if it knew that he has the power to do so, but Xiao always refuses.

He doesn't remember when the string began to persistently point north to Mondstadt. It's something he notices only on a quiet day at Wangshu Inn, patiently eating his almond tofu (For the record, Verr Goldet, it is *not* his beloved dish). The string had pointed straight to Dragonspine, across Dihua Marsh and Bishui River and the sea, as if to tell him *look, the end is in sight* .

All Xiao does is turn away from that snowy peak.

It isn't that he doesn't believe in fate, nor is it that he is purposely avoiding whoever is tied to the other end of his red string. It's just that he doesn't need to pursue the end of that thread; the existence of the red string has no bearing on his contract. As such, the red string is a far lower priority than his contract or the wellbeing of Liyue and its humans, so Xiao has no reason to seek out that person connected to him. And since this string is the work of fate, then he will allow fate to run its course just this once and bring that person to him.

(He doesn't consider the possibility that he still doesn't quite believe someone like him can have a red string and everything it entails. He doesn't allow himself to.)

The day he meets that person, his alleged "soulmate", is one that does strike him as particularly out-of-the-ordinary, but not because of meeting that person.

Xiao regularly patrols the entirety of Liyue, save for the city of Liyue Harbor and the small Qingce Village. The borders of Liyue are where he pays special attention to because their distance from humanity makes them a hotbed of demonic activity as well as a relative safe zone where his destructive tendencies will go mostly unnoticed by humans. The only exception to this general trend is Stone Gate on the border between Liyue and Mondstadt.

For the sole road connecting the cities of Mondstadt and Liyue Harbor, he finds that the place is strangely unsafe for humans to pass through. On his regular patrols through the area, always far from any human, lest his karmic debt affect them, too, he always finds geovishap hatchlings and hilichurls just down the side path. For the most part, these can be managed by adventurers or some particularly skilled travelers, so it's rare for Xiao to involve himself in an area so dense with humans.

However, this day, he finds a geovishap hatchling affected by his karmic debt.

Xiao's first thought is that *this shouldn't be possible.* He has carefully kept his distance from this area for all the times he's patrolled here, so for his debt to affect a creature so far away from him would mean that he must be underestimating his current debt. He doesn't spare a second though before jumping from his perch atop the cliffs that tower over Stone Gate. Besides the obvious infestation of his karma, the geovishap should prove to be no match for him. Just a fraction of his full power will be necessary to deal with this creature swiftly; he doubts that this vishap hatchling would have lived long enough of a life to know to fear his mask. His jade spear gleams in the sunlight as he summons it in his plunging descent.

In the next moment, he can't tell if the wind is truly singing the screams of all those deceased by his hand or merely the manifestation of his karmic debt from the hatchling impairing his senses, but all he can hear is the violent shattering of the hatchling's armor against his spear. He feels more than he sees his polearm going through the creature's heart as the aura from his debt flows to him.

"Quite the death for such an interesting specimen."

Xiao's gaze shoots up towards the source of such a foreign voice. It would make sense for there to be foreigners here, but he hadn't noticed someone standing so close. When did this person come close? Glancing up to see striking blond hair and brilliant blue eyes, Xiao's own eyes stray down to the hand holding a clipboard, a familiar shade of red circling this man's finger.

Xiao looks down to his own hand, tracing the length of his string with his eyes and back to that man's hand.

"It seems fate itself has ordained for us to meet," the man remarks, concealing his clipboard somewhere in his long white coat. "Never mind that. My name is Albedo, Chief Alchemist of the Knights of Favonius. With the sheer speed and force with which you killed that abnormal geovishap hatchling I had been observing, I find you interesting and would like to study you, if you do not mind." He raises the hand his red string is tied to and smiles at Xiao. "I'm certain we will have many opportunities to be alone in the future."

End Notes

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