

THE FAREWELL

by

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INT. THE PEOPLE'S HOSPITAL, WAITING ROOM - DAY

A PAINTING displays an idyllic landscape, bathed in institutional fluorescent lighting. Off-screen, we hear sounds of a Chinese announcement amidst other bustling hospital sounds.

A phone buzzes, answered by an authoritative female voice.

NAI NAI (O.S.)

[Hello?]

[*Note: All Chinese Mandarin dialogue in brackets. Other languages will not be subtitled.]

NAI NAI (80) walks into frame holding a cell phone. A head of neatly-permed white hair, this woman is the consummate matriarch.

BILLI (O.S.)

[Nai Nai. Hi!]

Hearing her granddaughter's cheerful voice, Nai Nai breaks into a warm smile.

NAI NAI

[Billi! It's the middle of the night there, why aren't you sleeping?]

BILLI (O.S.)

[Middle of the night? It's seven...]

NAI NAI

[Seven at night?]

EXT. NYC - EVENING

Horns BLARE as BILLI WANG (30) walks quickly through the kinetic streets of New York City. She's in her element here. Her movement is effortless, even as she switches between speaking Mandarin and English.

WE INTERCUT BETWEEN THEIR PHONE CONVERSATION.

BILLI

[Yea, it's always twelve hours time difference! Isn't it seven in the morning in China?]

NAI NAI

[It's almost seven thirty!]

(beat)

(MORE)

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[Is it cold there? Are you wearing enough? Cold travels through the head! Are you wearing a hat?]

BILLI

[I am.]
(she's definitely not)
[Stop worrying about me!]

NAI NAI

[You have to be careful. I read that in New York there are men who steal your earrings. They rip them out! And then you have to go to the hospital to get your ears stitched up!]

BILLI

[I'm not wearing earrings, Nai Nai!]

NAI NAI

[Ah. So you heard too.]

A loud Chinese ANNOUNCEMENT blares through the phone.

BILLI

[Hey, what's that sound? Nai Nai, where are you?]

The announcement continues.

NAI NAI

[Me? I'm... I'm at your great aunt's house.]

Clearly in a hospital, Nai Nai tells this lie with total ease.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[What are you doing?]

BILLI

[I'm heading to Mom and Dad's for dinner...]

Before Billi can finish, a STREET CANVASSER interrupts with performative cheerfulness.

STREET CANVASSER

Hi! Do you have a minute to save the polar bears?

Billi stares blankly, annoyed by the interruption.

BILLI

I really wanna say something snarky, but I used to have your job.

STREET CANVASSER

(still smiling)

So you know how important it is to support us!

BILLI

I know your job sucks.

Suddenly sympathetic, Billi stops.

BILLI (CONT'D)

(on phone)

[Hold on, Nai Nai...]

She pulls out her wallet. All she has is a dollar. She hands it to the stranger, who eyes it cynically.

STREET CANVASSER

Lemme guess, you got fired?

BILLI

(feigns being offended)

I quit!

(beat, with a laugh)

Cuz I was about to get fired!

Billi and the canvasser share a laugh before Billi returns her attention to Nai Nai.

BILLI (CONT'D)

[Sorry, Nai Nai.]

NAI NAI

[What was that?]

BILLI

[Nothing. Just um... a friend...]

Another announcement blares through the hospital speakers.

BILLI (CONT'D)

[Hey, Nai Nai, what is that? What's going on?]

NAI NAI

[It's nothing. I'll call you back later, OK?]

Nai Nai's abruptness catches Billi slightly off-guard.

BILLI

Uh, OK...

NAI NAI

[I'll call you back granddaughter!
I promise I'll call you back!]

BILLI

OK. [Call me la...]

The line clicks before Billi can finish. It's odd, but Billi shrugs it off and descends into the subway station.

INT. THE PEOPLE'S HOSPITAL, CT SCAN MACHINE - DAY

The bed slides out of the machine. A RADIOLOGIST helps Nai Nai sit up.

RADIOLOGIST

[You can get dressed.]

NAI NAI

[Where's my sister?]

RADIOLOGIST

[She's with the doctor.]

INT. THE PEOPLE'S HOSPITAL, DOCTOR WU'S OFFICE - DAY

Little Nai Nai sits alone across from DOCTOR WU. Though we don't hear their conversation, Little Nai Nai absorbs what is clearly terrible news.

INT. THE PEOPLE'S HOSPITAL, HALLWAY - DAY

Little Nai Nai is overwhelmed with grief, but there's no time for this. Her mind races. Then, with a deep breath, she makes her decision. Yes, it's clear what she must do.

INT. THE PEOPLE'S HOSPITAL, WAITING ROOM - DAY

Little Nai Nai approaches her distressed sister in the waiting room. She musters up a believable smile.

LITTLE NAI NAI

[OK, let's go.]

Her voice is light and bright.

NAI NAI

[Did you talk to the doctor?]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[Yep. You're in full health.]

NAI NAI

[Really? What about the CT scan?
What about the spots they saw
before?]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[It's all clear. Turned out to be
nothing. Just... benign shadows.]

NAI NAI

[Benign shadows? What's that mean?]

LITTLE NAI NAI

(shrugs nonchalantly)
[That's just what the doctor said.]

Nai Nai seems uncertain as she looks at her sister's beaming smile. Little Nai Nai helps her stand, still radiating with optimism.

As they leave the hospital, Nai Nai seems sufficiently convinced.

HAIYAN (O.S.)

(prelap)

... and one day the wife goes out
of town. When she returns, her
husband greets her right away, and
he says, 'honey your cat is dead.'

INT. WANG FAMILY HOME, DINING ROOM (QUEENS, NYC) - NIGHT

HAIYAN WANG (late 50's), also known as DAD, smiles with self-assurance as family and friends anticipate the rest of his joke.

Billi watches her father adoringly, sipping brandy around the remains of their dinner.

HAIYAN

The wife gets very upset, you know?
She says to her husband, how can
you be so insensitive? You just
tell me so abruptly like this?

Despite his slight Chinese accent, Haiyan's a natural storyteller.

HAIYAN (CONT'D)

Her husband is you know, confused!
He says to his wife... OK, how do
you want me to tell you in the
future? She says, "You have to not
be so direct. It's too sudden.

(MORE)

HAIYAN (CONT'D)

You have to, you know, be more gentle in delivering the news. For example, ease me in with something like 'Listen, honey... your cat... it got on the roof...'"

A few scattered chuckles from the table. JIAN LU, also known as MOM (late 50's), enters with plates of cake.

KATHY

Oh my gosh, I'm stuffed. I don't know if I have room for dessert.

Haiyan is slightly irritated by the interruption.

HAIYAN

Come, sit down...

BILLI

Come, Mom.

HAIYAN

Where was I? Oh right... A few months go by. The wife goes out of town again. When she returns home, her husband's there to greet her again. This time, he learned his lesson. When his wife comes through the door, he says, "Listen, honey, you know, your Mom... she got on the roof..."

The table bursts into laughter. Even Billi and Jian chuckle, despite having heard the joke a million times.

INT. BILLI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sound of KEYS in the dark as Billi lets herself in. She's greeted by a LOUD CRASH - like a vase shattering. Billi drops her mail, suddenly on guard. She's scared, but ready to defend herself.

Something FLIES overhead, knocking items off a shelf. Billi's eyes dart across the room, spotting the culprit.

A SMALL HOUSE BIRD on the windowsill. Billi's eyes meet the bird's. Both parties are equally stunned. As she collects herself, she realizes all the windows are closed.

BILLI

How'd you get in here?

The bird stares up with its beady eyes. Billi opens a window to let it out. The traumatized bird doesn't move.

Billi's phone buzzes.

NAI NAI (O.S.)
[Hi Billi. Sorry I hung up
earlier.]

BILLI
[That's OK. What's going on?]

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT - MORNING

INTERCUT BETWEEN BILLI AND NAI NAI FOR PHONE CONVERSATION

MR. LI (80's) shuffles past Nai Nai carrying a THERMOS of tea. Mr. Li is the kind of man that wears the same cap indoors, outdoors, even at weddings.

NAI NAI
(genuine relief)
[Nothing, nothing. I'm OK. You
don't have to worry, child.]

Nai Nai notices the trail of water following Mr. Li.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
[It's leaking!]

He's oblivious. Nai Nai taps him, then shouts louder.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
[It's leaking!]

Mr. Li shuffles unhurriedly back into the kitchen.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
[This old man! So careless!]

INT. BILLI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Billi picks her mail off the ground.

BILLI
[You mean Mr. Li?]

NAI NAI
[I never should've gotten together
with him!]

BILLI
Nai Nai!

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT - MORNING

As Mr. Li wipes up the water -

NAI NAI

[It's OK, he's going deaf. He can't hear me anyway.]

BILLI

[Why are you still with him?]

NAI NAI

(sighs)

[It's been so many years. We get by. Anyway, it's better than living alone. At least there's a live body in the house. Otherwise, when you get up to go to the bathroom, all you see are your own shadows. Listen, do you have a friend yet, my child?]

BILLI

[I um... I have lots of friends. Nai Nai...]

NAI NAI

[I mean a special friend. I worry about you on your own. In a big place like New York.]

INT. BILLI'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Billi opens an envelope, pulls out a letter. A rejection from the Guggenheim Foundation.

NAI NAI (O.S.)

[Billi? Is everything OK?]

She's deflated, overwhelmed by the sense of failure.

BILLI

[I'm fine. I'm uh... I'm just tired.]

And suddenly, she does seem tired. Spiritually, that is.

NAI NAI

[If you're tired, go to bed!]

Billi nods to herself, too familiar with the way these things get lost in translation.

BILLI

OK...

(beat)

I love you Nai Nai...

NAI NAI
I lauf you, I lauf you!

These are the only words Nai Nai knows. As broken as they sound, she says it with all her heart. Billi summons a weak smile, just in case Nai Nai can hear her smile.

She looks back at the windowsill. It's empty. The bird is gone.

EXT. BILLI'S APARTMENT - DAY

Billi marches out of her apartment holding an ENVELOPE. It's a new day. She enters the laundromat just downstairs from her apartment.

INT. NEIGHBORHOOD LAUNDROMAT - DAY

Billi stands across from SHIRLEY (20's), folding stacks of laundry for customers. Her first-generation immigrant mother attends to customers nearby. She is the LAUNDROMAT OWNER (and landlord of the building).

LAUNDROMAT OWNER
(in another language)
*Late again! She's always late, and
she didn't even pay last month!*

Billi looks between Shirley and her mother, anxious.

BILLI
I wrote a couple pieces for this
stupid web company and they screwed
me on the payment, but look it's
all here.

SHIRLEY
For what month?

BILLI
(confused)
This one? May?

SHIRLEY
And what happened to April's rent?
My mom says you didn't pay April
yet.

Billi is blind-sided as she realizes her error.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
You know if you moved out, we could
double the rent right now?

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD LAUNDROMAT - DAY

Billi steps outside, realizes she's still holding her laundry.

INT. WANG FAMILY HOME - DAY

Billi bursts through the door carrying the laundry.

BILLI

Ma! Ba! Hello?

JIAN

Shhh! What are you doing here?

BILLI

I've been calling, why didn't you guys pick up?

JIAN

We busy. Have you eaten? I'll make you some wontons.

As Jian heads to the kitchen, Billi heads into the laundry room and puts clothes into the washer.

JIAN (CONT'D)

So what, you broke? That's why you come. I know you... You need money, right?

Billi tries to deflect with humor.

BILLI

No, I just love an excuse to come see you.

JIAN

What's going to happen to you? Are you always going to live like this?

BILLI

Poor but sexy? I hope so.

JIAN

Why you not save? You should change your expensive lifestyle!

BILLI

Seriously, Mom. If you're gonna give me shit every time I come home, I won't come back anymore!

JIAN
Lower your voice. Dad's sleeping!

BILLI
It's six o'clock. What's wrong with him?

JIAN
Nothing. He's just resting.

BILLI
Is he OK?

Jian turns away from Billi and grabs frozen wontons from the freezer. Her body language is evasive.

JIAN
He's fine. We just very busy.

BILLI
Doing what? What's going on?

JIAN
(lets out a sigh)
Hao Hao's getting married, so we have to go to China.

BILLI
What? Since when? Didn't he just start dating this girl a few months ago?

Jian doesn't respond, intently focused on chopping scallions.

BILLI (CONT'D)
I can't go to China right now, Mom.

JIAN
You don't have to go.

BILLI
He's my only cousin, shouldn't I be there?

JIAN
No one expects you to go.

Billi considers this suspiciously.

BILLI
You think he knocked her up?

Jian silently continues cooking.

JIAN
How many wontons you want?

BILLI
Um... Five.

JIAN
Only five? That's not enough.

BILLI
Then make a dozen.

JIAN
I think ten's good.

Billi looks around - the house is eerily quiet. Something's not right.

INT. WANG FAMILY HOME, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Billi stares at the closed door. The light is on inside. She knocks gently and opens the door.

INT. WANG FAMILY HOME, MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Haiyan sits on the edge of the bed, facing away from Billi.

BILLI
Dad?

His stillness, his silence - it's eerie.

BILLI (CONT'D)
What's wrong, Dad?

HAIYAN
Nothing.

BILLI
Did you and Mom get in a fight?

Haiyan fights back tears.

BILLI (CONT'D)
Have you been drinking?

More silence. Terror.

BILLI (CONT'D)
Can you please talk to me? You're scaring me.

Billi looks up to see Jian at the door.

BILLI (CONT'D)
What's going on?

More silence. Billi's insides are shrieking.

BILLI (CONT'D)
(raises her voice)
Something's going on! Just tell me
what's going on!

JIAN
(dry, to-the-point)
Nai Nai's dying. She has lung
cancer. It's stage four.

Billi's heart drops. She collapses onto the bed, sitting
beside her father.

BILLI
What? I just spoke to her, she
didn't say anything...

JIAN
She doesn't know yet.

Billi's mind races.

BILLI
How long does she have?

JIAN
Doctor says three months, but you
never know. Could be faster.

Billi reels.

BILLI
I need to call her...

HAIYAN
No, Billi...

BILLI
I need to see her!

HAIYAN
You can't do that.

Haiyan puts aside his own grief momentarily. His words are
measured.

HAIYAN (CONT'D)

She doesn't know... And the family thinks it's better not to tell her. So you can't say anything.

BILLI

I don't understand. She needs to know, right?

HAIYAN

There's nothing they can do, so everyone decided it's better not to tell her.

BILLI

Why is that better?

JIAN

Chinese people have a saying. When people get cancer, they die...

Billi squints - what the fuck?

JIAN (CONT'D)

... it's not the cancer that kills them. It's the *fear*.

BILLI

What about the wedding?

Jian joins her family on the bed.

JIAN

That was your Dad's idea. If everyone rushed back to see her right now, she would wonder why.

BILLI

So you're throwing a fake wedding to lie to her?

HAIYAN

It's an excuse for everybody to see her.

BILLI

When were you planning on telling me all of this?

We're back to silence.

BILLI (CONT'D)
 (accusatory)
 How could you let me find out like
 this?

JIAN
 (defensive)
 How should I have told you? 'Oh,
 your grandma's on the roof?'

This doesn't get a laugh, but Jian wasn't expecting one.

BILLI
 I need to go see her...

HAIYAN
 You can't.

JIAN
 Everyone thinks it's better if you
 don't go. Look at you. You can't
 hide your emotions! Nai Nai will
 know right away!

BILLI
 I need to say goodbye. What if she
 dies and I don't get a chance to
 say goodbye?

The very thought of this makes Billi break down. Tears stream
 down her face.

JIAN
 You can go later. If you go right
 now you'll give it away. You can't
 help it.

INT. SUBWAY, NYC - NIGHT

Billi stares out the window, past her own reflection, her
 grief apparent. Her laundry bag sits beside her.

INT. FRIEND'S HOUSE, BROOKLYN - DAY

Lit candles on a birthday cake. Everyone sings 'happy
 birthday' for their friend TONY. Billi's mind is clearly
 elsewhere, even as she sings along.

Her mother's right - she's no good at hiding her emotions.

INT. NYC SUBWAY PLATFORM - NIGHT

An ELDERLY CHINESE WOMAN waits for her train across the tracks on the opposite platform. As Billi watches her, she fights back emotions.

As the train arrives, we see Billi's grief transform into determination. She knows she must go.

As the train whisks the elderly woman away...

INT. CHANGCHUN AIRPORT, CHINA - DAY

A sea of Chinese faces. The ceiling is low, the floors are a glossy white marble. It takes a few moments before we spot Billi in the crowd. CHINESE VOICES echo around her.

Billi gets shoved into a stranger. As a reflex, Billi says 'I'm sorry' in English. The stranger responds with a flurry of Chinese. Billi reacts, trying to orient herself.

EXT. CHANGCHUN AIRPORT, CHINA - DAY

A group of TAXI HUSTLERS target Billi, invading her personal space. They inundate her with questions: "Do you need a taxi?" "Where are you going?"

INT. TAXI - DAY

Billi stares out the window. Construction cranes dot the skyline, wide streets interrupted by the skeletal frames of unfinished buildings.

INT. TAXI, ALLEY - DAY

The DRIVER honks repeatedly as he pulls down a narrow alley. Pedestrians and rickshaw peddlers make way for the car to pass.

EXT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT - DAY

The taxi pulls up to a complex of PEACH BUILDINGS.

Billi gets out. She stares up at the looming building, not sure she's prepared for the challenge she's about to face.

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT, STAIRWELL - DAY

Billi climbs the stairs. The narrow staircase is dimly lit by a single bulb. She KNOCKS. We immediately hear barking. As Billi waits, the automatic light goes off, leaving her in the dark for a few brief moments.

Mr. Li opens the door, letting out a shaft of cold fluorescent light from inside the apartment.

MR. LI
[Who's that?]

BILLI
[Mr. Li? It's me, Billi.]

MR. LI
[Who?]

Mr. Li shouts his words, as one does when they're losing their hearing, and perhaps even their mind.

BILLI
Billi!

MR. LI
[Billi? What are you doing here?
Come in, come in!]

BILLI
(peering inside)
[Nai Nai?]

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

As Billi moves into the living room, everyone reacts. Nai Nai, Haiyan, Jian.

There's also UNCLE HAIBIN (early 60's), distinguished grey with black-rimmed glasses. AUNTIE LING (60), quiet but shrewd.

The pimple-faced and sheepish cousin is HAO HAO (early 20's); 'on the brink of tears' is his eternal state of being. AIKO is his sweet but confused Japanese bride.

NAI NAI
[Billi? Oh my god, Billi's here!]

HAIYAN
Why'd you come?

LITTLE NAI NAI
[What are you doing here? We all
thought you weren't coming!]

JIAN
How'd you get here?

They talk AT her, all at once. Nai Nai is the only one who seems pleased by this surprise. In fact, she's overjoyed.

NAI NAI
 [Billi! Billi! What are you doing
 here you stupid child?]

Nai Nai approaches Billi, analyzing her.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
 [Let me look at you. Oh you're not
 that skinny! Your Mom said you got
 skinny, but you're not that
 skinny!]

Nai Nai embraces Billi. Billi's throat swells shut. Her mouth
 quivers as tears flood to her eyes.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
 [Oh my granddaughter! Why didn't
 you tell me you were coming? I've
 been trying to call you all week!]

A deer in headlights, Billi doesn't speak, as if the secret
 would spill out if she opened her mouth. Family members
 observe her carefully, exchanging looks of concern.

Nai Nai kisses her all over her face. Billi fights for
 control of her emotions.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
 [Your mother said you were too busy
 to come!]

Billi opens her mouth and still, nothing comes out.
 Anticipation lingers in the air.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
 [What's wrong with you? Why aren't
 you talking?]

Billi looks at her family, then back at Nai Nai. She swallows
 hard. After a few long beats -

BILLI
 [I missed you.]

NAI NAI
 [Sure, but your work comes first.
 You shouldn't have come if you're
 so busy. How'd you get here? Did
 you fly?]

Billi musters a smile.

BILLI
 [No, I swam...]

Nai Nai laughs and slaps her on the butt. The tension begins to subside.

HAIYAN
You should've called.

Nai Nai pats Billi's butt as they all head back to the couch.

NAI NAI
[Silly child. This butt. This butt never changes! I've always loved this little round butt. Come sit!]

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN - NIGHT

A meat pie fries in the pan. Jian is at the stove as MRS. GAO (40's) chops veggies and Little Nai Nai kneads dough.

Billi peers in and hugs Little Nai Nai.

BILLI
[Little Nai Nai...]

LITTLE NAI NAI
[Billi! You must be starving. I'm making your favorite - meat pies! It's your favorite, right? I remember it's your favorite.]

BILLI
[Looks great...]

As Mrs. Gao crosses.

LITTLE NAI NAI
[Billi, this is Mrs. Gao.]

MRS. GAO
[You're the granddaughter! You came home too!]

LITTLE NAI NAI
[Last time you were here, we still had Ms. Jin, right?]

BILLI
[Ms. Jin? I remember Mrs. Ma?]

LITTLE NAI NAI
[Mrs. Ma was four maids ago! Has it been that long since you've been back?]

Billi turns her attention to Jian, who stands over a frying pan, giving her the cold shoulder. Billi bear hugs her mother from behind.

JIAN

Stop fooling around! The oil's hot!

BILLI

Don't be mad, Mom.

JIAN

How you buy ticket here? Credit card, right?

BILLI

Don't worry. It's all fine, Mom. Look at my face. Look.

Billi gives her the widest possible smile. Jian stifles a chuckle, too proud to give in. She feigns stoicism and shoves a plate of meat pies into Billi's hands.

JIAN

Go put these on the table.

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT, DINING TABLE - NIGHT

The family eats, making small talk about the food. Billi scans the table, watching everyone devour meat pies.

Nai Nai beams at the sight of the entire family around the table.

NAI NAI

[It's been far too long since we've all been united like this.]

AUNTIE LING

[What's it been? 20 years?]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[Haiyan left China 25 years ago. And you guys left for Japan soon after.]

UNCLE HAIBIN

[That's a long time.]

HAIYAN

[Time flies...]

Mrs. Gao comes out with a plate of piping hot meat pies.

MRS. GAO

[These are hot. Eat these fresh ones!]

NAI NAI

[Look at these two wonderful grandchildren of mine!]

Nai Nai playfully touches Billi and Hao Hao.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[You see... my granddaughter is very strong. Independent. Not someone who just follows everyone else.]

Billi swallows.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[Hao Hao was always a sensitive child, but look at him now. All grown up and getting married! I've been looking forward to this day for a long time.]

AUNTIE LING

[Too bad neither of them speak Chinese very well!]

UNCLE HAIBIN

[Hao Hao's Chinese is fine. He's just being shy. Hao Hao, talk to Nai Nai in Chinese!]

Everyone stares at Hao Hao. He reluctantly obeys, speaking slowly in his broken Chinese.

HAO HAO

[Nai Nai... We don't need a big wedding banquet. We just came to spend time with you.]

NAI NAI

[Don't be ridiculous! You guys came back home to get married. We must have a proper wedding banquet.]

AUNTIE LING

[Let's just keep it small. We don't need to go overboard.]

NAI NAI

[Stop it! Everything's already booked and I sent out invitations last week! My only grandson's getting married, we can't look cheap!]

Little Nai Nai picks at her food. Everyone turns their focus to the food, chewing intently. Hao Hao is, quite reliably, on the brink of tears.

Nai Nai suddenly notices Billi's untouched meat pie.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

(accusatory)

[Why aren't you eating?]

Billi stares down at her plate, unable to work up an appetite.

BILLI

[I'm not hungry.]

NAI NAI

[How can you not be hungry? You've been traveling for 24 hours. Eat, eat.]

Nai Nai picks up the meat pie and feeds it to Billi. Always a child in her grandmother's eyes, Billi takes a reluctant bite.

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT, BATHROOM - NIGHT

Billi closes the door. She lets out a breath as she sits on the toilet - a moment of refuge.

On the wall in front of her is a poster of a chubby, overly cheerful baby. Underneath, in Chinese, it reads:

They all say I'm adorable.

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Passing Nai Nai's bedroom, Billi notices details of her simple life: the neatly-made bed, framed photos of Billi surround the room. In the next bedroom, Mr. Li shuffles around loudly in his slippers. He hacks up a loogie.

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT, DINING TABLE - NIGHT

Billi returns to the table in a daze. Nai Nai turns to look at her with concern.

NAI NAI

[What's wrong?]

The threat of being exposed lingers in the air.

BILLI

[I'm fine.]

UNCLE HAIBIN

[It's probably the jet-lag. Come, I'll take you to the hotel.]

BILLI

[Hotel? Why can't I stay here? I always stay here.]

UNCLE HAIBIN

[With so many people visiting, it's easier if everyone stays at a hotel. It's very close.]

NAI NAI

[Don't worry, it's an excellent hotel. It's brand new.]

Billi swallows her disappointment.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[Go get some rest. We have a lot to do the next couple days before the wedding.]

The family's eyes linger on her, menacing.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD ALLEY - NIGHT

Billi and Uncle Haibin walk side by side in awkward silence. They pass street vendors wrapped in smoke and incandescent lighting, selling meat skewers off their grills.

UNCLE HAIBIN

[Nai Nai is very sick, you know?]

He speaks in an eerily calm, matter-of-fact tone. Not sure if the question is rhetorical, Billi answers.

BILLI

[I know.]

UNCLE HAIBIN

[Nai Nai herself doesn't know. We're not going to tell her.]

BILLI
[I know. Dad told me.]

UNCLE HAIBIN
(not listening)
[She doesn't have long left. We got
several opinions already. I also
spoke to a doctor in Japan. A
cancer specialist.]

Billi stares straight ahead, unengaged. This doesn't deter Uncle Haibin.

UNCLE HAIBIN (CONT'D)
[I got her some medicine. It was
expensive.]

BILLI
(hopeful)
[From the Japanese doctor?]

UNCLE HAIBIN
(matter-of-factly)
[From the internet.]

Billi is at a loss for words. More awkward silence.

UNCLE HAIBIN (CONT'D)
[Nai Nai... she loves you so much,
you know?]

BILLI
[I know.]

UNCLE HAIBIN
[You and Hao Hao spent every summer
with her and grandpa until you
moved to the US. But you were very
little then, so you probably don't
remember.]

BILLI
[I remember.]

UNCLE HAIBIN
[She doesn't know. So you have to
be very careful not to tell her.]

It feels like he's testing her. Billi's patience wears thin. She raises her voice.

BILLI
[I know! Dad already told me!]

Like a broken record, Uncle Haibin's tone remains consistent.

UNCLE HAIBIN
[She doesn't know a thing.]

Billi relinquishes with a sigh. As they continue on, their repetitious dialogue falls into pace with their walking.

BILLI
[I know.]

UNCLE HAIBIN
[We're not planning on telling her.]

BILLI
[I know.]

UNCLE HAIBIN
[No matter how sad you feel, you cannot say anything.]

Billi stares ahead as they head into a brightly lit commercial district.

BILLI
[I know.]

INT. HOTEL BEST, LOBBY - NIGHT

Billi and Uncle Haibin stand across from MICHAEL (late 20's), the hotel manager.

UNCLE HAIBIN
[What do you mean the elevator broke? Isn't this a newly opened hotel?]

MICHAEL
[We're working on it. Come come, I'll carry this.]

A group of lively BUSINESSMEN and MISTRESSES walk in. Billi studies them - clearly in the hotel for a different reason.

BUSINESSMAN #1
[We want the same room as last time.]

MICHAEL
[I'll check for you.]

Michael finds their key for them.

UNCLE HAIBIN

(to Billi)

[You're OK, right? I'm gonna head back. Get some sleep.]

Billi nods and he leaves.

INT. HOTEL BEST, STAIRS - NIGHT

Billi follows Michael upstairs. Several flights later, she stops to catch her breath.

BILLI

[Are we almost there?]

MICHAEL

[Almost there! It's not much higher.]

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

[Are you visiting from abroad?]

BILLI

[Yes.]

MICHAEL

[From where?]

BILLI

[America.]

MICHAEL

[America? You don't look American.]

This makes Billi pause, but she's used to it.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

[What are you here for?]

Billi debates which answer to give him. She decides on the lie.

BILLI

[A wedding.]

MICHAEL

(beat)

[Who's getting married?]

BILLI

[My...] cousin.

(remembers the Chinese)

'Tang di.'

MICHAEL

[Oh your cousin. He's also from America?]

BILLI

[No, they live in Japan.]

INT. HOTEL BEST, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Michael lets Billi into her room.

INT. HOTEL BEST, BILLI'S ROOM - NIGHT

Billi surveys the room as Michael drops off her bag.

MICHAEL

[Japan?! What are they doing in Japan?]

BILLI

[I don't know. My uncle's an artist. He paints.]

The odd-patterned carpet, the strange paintings, the wallpaper - it all clashes, yet somehow, it works.

MICHAEL

[And what does your father do in America?]

BILLI

[He's a translator, do you have water? For drinking?]

MICHAEL

[You can use the boiler.]

Michael points to an ELECTRIC BOILER.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

[So tell me, what's better? China or America?]

BILLI

[Uh... they're different.]

Billi tries to usher him towards the door, but he continues to linger.

MICHAEL

[What do you mean different? It must be much nicer over there.]

BILLI

[It's just... I don't know,
different.]

MICHAEL

[But you're probably more used to
America, right?]

BILLI

[I guess...]

She continues to inch him out the door.

MICHAEL

[Well let me know if you need
anything else.]

BILLI

[K thanks. Bye.]

INT. HOTEL BEST, BILLI'S ROOM - LATER

Billi fills the boiler. She sits on the edge of the bed,
literally waiting for the water to boil.

NAI NAI (O.S.)

(prelap)

HA!

EXT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Nai Nai swings her arms, hitting herself all over her body.
Her face beams, her eyes sparkle. She's full of life and
Billi seems like a drag in comparison.

NAI NAI

[Come Billi! Do it with me! It's
good for you!]

Billi does a weak imitation of Nai Nai's exercise.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[No, stronger. HA! It clears out
all the bad toxins. Then you
inhale, take in lots of fresh
oxygen. HA! You do it. You also
have to slap yourself to get the
circulation going.

(demonstrates slapping)

Slap your arms. Slap your legs.
Slap your back like this... Try
it!]

Humoring her grandmother, Billi obeys her orders and laughs at herself. For a moment, she forgets the circumstances of her visit.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
[Good! Bigger! From your gut.]

For a moment, they revel in the joy of slapping and shouting.

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT, STAIRWELL - MORNING

Nai Nai's knuckles turn white from her grip on the railing, pulling herself up one step at a time.

It pains Billi to see this. She tries to help.

NAI NAI
[I'm alright, I got it. I come down by myself every morning.]

BILLI
[Doesn't that hurt your legs?]

NAI NAI
[Even so, I have to come down to exercise. It's the reason I'm so healthy. Even at my age!]

Billi swallows, unable to contradict her.

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT, DINING TABLE - MORNING

Billi and Mrs. Gao set out Chinese breakfast foods.

The door bell rings and Chen YuPing (40's) waltzes in. (We'll refer to her as GU GU, which is Chinese for Aunt). She has the hip confident style of someone much younger and exudes an attitude of success.

GU GU
[Billi! I heard you came!]

Gu Gu's son LITTLE BAO (8) trails in behind her, playing on his iPhone. Bao is what the Chinese call a little emperor - pampered and well-fed.

GU GU (CONT'D)
[You remember Bao, right? Bao! Say hi to the big sister!]

BILLI
[Little Bao, you've gotten so big!]

BAO
 (barks)
 [It's not Little Bao! I'm just
 called Bao!]

Nai Nai calls everyone to attention.

NAI NAI
 [Alright, alright hurry up and eat
 breakfast! We have a big day
 ahead!]

UNCLE HAIBIN
 [Have you taken your pills?]

NAI NAI
 [I'll take them later.]

UNCLE HAIBIN
 [You have to remember to take them
 every day, or there's no point!
 Where are they?]

NAI NAI
 [Next to my bed. Come you guys! Eat
 before the food gets cold!]

AUNTIE LING
 [Ma, you sit!]

As everyone finally takes their seat -

NAI NAI
 [OK, listen to me all of you. I
 know everyone's excited to see me,
 but let's not forget why we're all
 here.]

Furtive glances around the table. Nai Nai gestures to Hao Hao
 and Aiko.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
 [The wedding is the big event.]

As if they really had forgotten, they all nod a little too
 enthusiastically.

HAIYAN
 (mutters unconvincingly)
 [Yes... that's right. The wedding
 is the big event.]

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

As Jian helps Mrs. Gao clean up, Nai Nai sidles up to her.

NAI NAI

[Jian, something's off about Haiyan on this trip. Have you noticed? His face is all puffy and discolored. He seems very unhappy.]

JIAN

[He's fine, Ma.]

NAI NAI

[He just looks so tired. Is he still drinking? You can't let him drink. Alcohol can ruin a person. I know so many men around here who have drank themselves to death.]

JIAN

[He barely drinks at home anymore.]

NAI NAI

[Is everything OK between you two?]

JIAN

[Everything's fine. We're fine.]

NAI NAI

[I know you guys have had your issues in the past...]

JIAN

(defensive)

[It's got nothing to do with us. We're doing great!]

NAI NAI

[You shouldn't have him work so much. It's too much pressure for one person to support your entire family...]

Was that a jab at her?

JIAN

[I told him to close the office and retire, but he refuses! He feels useless at home if he has nothing to do. He loves being surrounded by people who need him - clients always coming to him...]

(MORE)

JIAN (CONT'D)

oh Mr. Wang, help me with this,
help me with that.]

NAI NAI

(nods)

[Well it's also good to have something to do. Being idle can be bad for your health. He just doesn't know how to take care of himself. You have to think about him more. Give him lots of medicine. Let's put it this way - if he's not well, you can't live well either. Right?]

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT, DINING TABLE - MORNING

As Nai Nai rejoins the table, she clocks Haiyan again. Something's definitely not right.

Uncle hands her a couple pills. Nai Nai clocks Billi's concerned look.

NAI NAI

[They're just vitamins. Your uncle bought them from Japan. He says they're expensive so they must be good. Japanese people know how to take care of themselves!]

Mr. Li gets up from the table silently.

AUNTIE LING

[Uncle Li, you're done eating?]

NAI NAI

[Don't mind him. That's how he is! He eats and leaves. He doesn't care about anything that doesn't concern him!]

Mr. Li is immune to Nai Nai's insults. Nai Nai tries to serve food. Everyone yells: *Sit down! Serve yourself! Hurry up and eat!*

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[I want to talk to you all about something. If anyone asks, none of you are to say that Hao Hao and his bride have only been dating three months.]

AUNTIE LING

[Ma, I already told you, Aiko's not pregnant.]

NAI NAI

[Doesn't matter! You know how people think! I don't want everybody talking behind our backs. If anyone asks, just say they've been dating 6 months.]

JIAN

(sarcastic)

[Why not just say a year then?]

NAI NAI

[Good idea. A year sounds better. The wedding banquet is in three days. We have so much to do. I need someone to come see the banquet hall with me.]

BILLI

[I'll go.]

NAI NAI

[You don't need to come. You won't be much help anyway.]

HAIYAN

[Ma, I can come.]

NAI NAI

[No you need to rest! Look at your face - it's not right!]

HAIBIN

[Why don't you stay home and rest, Ma? I'll go check on the banquet hall.]

NAI NAI

[You don't even know who to talk to! I have to go myself.]

BILLI

[What can I do, Nai Nai?]

NAI NAI

[Nothing. You don't look great either, must still be the jet lag.]

GU GU

[What if I take them to the massage parlor?]

NAI NAI

[That's a great idea!]

BILLI

[Nai Nai I want to come with you.]

NAI NAI

[No, you guys go relax. You better not get sick before the wedding!]

Nai Nai piles more food on Billi's plate, then shoves a doughy cruller in her own mouth.

INT. GRAND HOTEL, BANQUET HALL - DAY

Nai Nai and Uncle Haibin stand across from the WEDDING COORDINATOR in an empty banquet hall. Nai Nai is visibly upset.

NAI NAI

[It's not right! I ordered meal set one! When I booked the wedding, you guys told me meal set one would come with lobster. That's what you said. Now you act like you don't know anything about it?]

WEDDING COORDINATOR

[I really don't know anything about that. I was told it's crab, but I can check with the chef.

(screams)

Little Ping! Little Ping!]

LITTLE PING, a young cook dressed in a tall chef's hat wakes from a nap at a nearby table.

WEDDING COORDINATOR (CONT'D)

[Go get the chef!]

Little Ping drags himself into the kitchen.

WEDDING COORDINATOR (CONT'D)

[Why don't you look at the alcohol options in the meantime. We have baijiu, red wine, white wine, beer...]

NAI NAI

[We also have champagne.]

UNCLE HAIBIN
[Champagne? What champagne?]

NAI NAI
[Your brother brought it! He didn't
tell you? He got several cases!
It's from France. Looks very nice
and expensive!]

Something about this rubs Uncle Haibin the wrong way.

UNCLE HAIBIN
(frowning)
[Chinese people aren't accustomed
to drinking champagne! Get the
baijiu.]

The BANQUET CHEF approaches -

WEDDING COORDINATOR
[Chef, Mrs. Zhao says she was told
that meal set one would include
lobster, not crab.]

BANQUET CHEF
[It's crab, not lobster.]

NAI NAI
[What kind of scam is this? It's
three days before the wedding, we
already paid a deposit and you make
this kind of a change without
telling us!]

BANQUET CHEF
[I don't know anything about that.
I was told we're serving crab.]

Agitated, Nai Nai coughs and collapses onto a chair. Uncle Haibin rushes to her side.

UNCLE HAIBIN
[Ma! Don't get all worked up, crab
is great!]

NAI NAI
[I'm fine. I just need to rest a
moment.]

INT. MASSAGE PARLOR, LOBBY - DAY

Numb with anguish, Billi and Haiyan sit waiting, dressed in oversized spa pajamas.

HAIYAN
So what's going on with the
fellowship?

BILLI
Nothing.

HAIYAN
You still haven't heard anything?

BILLI
No.

HAIYAN
When are they going to let you
know?

BILLI
(irritated)
I don't know Dad!

HAIYAN
How's your money? Can you afford
this trip? Do you need help?

BILLI
I'm fine.

Before Billi can continue, Gu Gu approaches, also in pajamas.
She's accompanied by a MASSAGE PARLOR RECEPTIONIST.

GU GU
[All set, let's go.]

INT. MASSAGE PARLOR, HALLWAY - DAY

Billi, Gu Gu and Haiyan walk down the hallway.

HAIYAN
[Sis, you're too generous.]

GU GU
[You're family. It's so rare for
you guys to come home. Let's just
all relax so we can be happy in
front of Nai Nai.]

MASSAGE PARLOR RECEPTIONIST
[What kind of treatment would you
like, 'mei nu'?)

Gu Gu clocks Billi's confusion.

GU GU
 [She's from America. Her Chinese isn't great. Just give her the full body massage.]

MASSAGE PARLOR RECEPTIONIST
 [Cupping too?]

GU GU
 [The whole package.]

MASSAGE PARLOR RECEPTIONIST
 [You want the same thing, 'mei nu'?]

GU GU
 [I don't need cupping.]

Gu Gu speaks too fast for Billi to understand. She turns to her father for a translation -

BILLI
 What's 'mei nu'?

HAIYAN
 It means 'beauty'.

GU GU
 [Always beauty, beauty. They call everyone that in China these days. Old or young, beautiful or ugly, everyone's a beauty! It's so stupid.]

The MASSAGE PARLOR RECEPTIONIST turns to Haiyan.

MASSAGE PARLOR RECEPTIONIST
 [Sir, what about you?]

HAIYAN
 (jokes)
 [Oh you can call me beauty. I don't mind.]

MASSAGE PARLOR RECEPTIONIST
 (doesn't crack a smile)
 [I meant what kind of treatment would you like, sir? May I recommend our bath and massage package? The tub is filled with herbs and you can soak in it.]

Gu Gu and Billi watch Haiyan. He's indecisive.

HAIYAN
 (to Gu Gu)
 [What do you think?]

GU GU
 [Why are you asking me? It's your
 massage! Do you want to soak in a
 tub?]

Haiyan contemplates this carefully, as if the right treatment
 might cure his grief.

HAIYAN
 [Can you show me the tub?]

The receptionist leads Haiyan down the corridor.

INT. MASSAGE PARLOR, MASSAGE ROOM - DAY

Billi paces anxiously. Gu Gu clocks this and tries to cheer
 her up.

GU GU
 (teasing)
 [Hey Billi. Do you know why they
 separated your Dad from us?]

BILLI
 [Why?]

GU GU
 [You really don't know?]

BILLI
 [What?]

GU GU
 (smirks)
 ['Hit the airplane'.]

BILLI
 [Hit the airplane?]

GU GU
 [You don't know this phrase? You're
 not married yet. I shouldn't tell
 you this stuff.]

BILLI
 [What's it mean?]

Gu Gu covertly demonstrates a jerking-off motion, giggling.

GU GU
 [You know, it shoots so high he
 could hit an airplane!]

Despite herself, Billi laughs. Haiyan appears at the doorway.

HAIYAN
 [The bath looks nice. I think I'll
 do that.]

Billi and Gu Gu burst out laughing.

HAIYAN (CONT'D)
 (confused)
 What happened?

INT. MASSAGE PARLOR, MASSAGE ROOM - LATER

Lying on her stomach, Billi stares down at the masseuse's feet in nylon stockings inside white pumps. She cringes as the masseuse lights a cup on fire and places it on her back.

BILLI
 [It hurts! Gu Gu, you said it was a
 massage.]

BILLI'S MASSEUSE
 [A little pain is normal. Otherwise
 it doesn't work. Just relax.]

Billi turns to Gu Gu, who's absorbed in her cell phone while getting a foot massage.

BILLI
 [Gu Gu... Don't you think we should
 tell Nai Nai?]

Gu Gu's attention stays on her phone.

GU GU
 [Tell her? What for?]

BILLI
 [What if she has things she wants
 to take care of?]

GU GU
 (matter-of-factly)
 [She doesn't have anything like
 that... Ow!]

Gu Gu yanks her foot back from the masseuse.

GU GU (CONT'D)
[That hurt, what was that?]

GU GU'S MASSEUSE
[That's your stress point. Have you
been anxious lately? You must try
to relax.]

BILLI
[But... what if she wants to say
goodbye?]

GU GU
[Say goodbye? That's so painful!
What's the point of that?]

Billi winces with pain, her entire back covered with cups. Gu Gu seems very pragmatic and matter-of-fact.

GU GU (CONT'D)
[You see her for yourself. She
seems fine, right? Just like a
normal person...]

Billi realizes this is valid.

GU GU (CONT'D)
[If you tell her, you'll ruin her
good mood.]

Billi considers this.

INT. WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO, SETUP 1 - DAY

Aiko and Hao Hao pose in front of a backdrop, dressed in elaborate wedding attire. They're as stiff as the plastic bride and groom toppers on a cake.

A PHOTOGRAPHER adjusts the couple's positions.

PHOTOGRAPHER
[Get a little closer. Even closer.]

The cake toppers don't know where to put their hands. It's all very forced and awkward.

NAI NAI
[Get closer! What's wrong with this
girl? Can't you look like a normal
couple in love?]

Nai Nai instructs Aiko sternly in Chinese. (Aiko doesn't understand Chinese).

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[Put your head on his shoulder. Put your hand around her. And smile!]

Aiko looks to Hao Hao for a translation, but he's too busy figuring out how to smile. Nai Nai directs her disapproving look to Billi.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[That girl is so unaffectionate. Nothing like our family. I have to yell at her just to hug him or put her cheek against his! Makes me wonder what they do in the bedroom when I'm not there!]

BILLI

[She seems really sweet, Nai Nai.]

NAI NAI

[I don't like her. She's dumb. She doesn't understand anything!]

BILLI

[She doesn't understand, because she doesn't speak Chinese...]

NAI NAI

[No, it's because she's dumb.]

On cue, something on set falls, making Aiko trip. Everyone reacts.

Against the chaos of the photo shoot, Nai Nai calmly shifts her attention to her granddaughter. Billi is clearly the better bride in her eyes - if only she'd find someone to marry.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[Look at you. Smart. Beautiful. You should have someone take care of you.]

BILLI

[I take care of myself, Nai Nai.]

INT. WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO, SETUP 2 - DAY

The conversation is seamless, but in the background, the bride and groom pose against a different backdrop.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
 [You're still young. But as you get older, it's good for you to have someone to take care of you.]

BILLI
 [Does Mr. Li take care of you?]

Nai Nai looks away. She takes a beat before answering.

NAI NAI
 [It's also good to be independent. A woman needs to be self-sufficient.]

The woman's got a response to everything. Billi laughs as Nai Nai presses her cheek against Billi's.

Meanwhile, on set, Aiko stumbles in her impossibly high heels and Auntie Ling rushes to her assistance.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
 [Stupid child. You are too lovable. I'll never forget when your parents brought you to my house the summer before you turned two. You were so small, so skinny. You had that horrible nanny who stole your eggs and she'd take you all over the city and only feed you popsicles. Do you remember this?]

Billi shakes her head.

BILLI
 [Why did she steal my eggs?]

NAI NAI
 [Eggs were rationed back then. Your parents saved theirs so you could have at least one a day.]

INT. WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO, SETUP 3 - DAY

Billi considers this sacrifice, internalizing the complicated mix of love and guilt.

NAI NAI
 [You poor thing, I felt so bad for you. You had terrible digestion, from too much dampness trapped inside, so you'd have diarrhea all the time, everywhere... all over the floor.]

BILLI

[I'm sorry I pooped on your floor.]

And she does seem sorry. Behind her, the young couple hold up flutes of fake champagne for a photo.

NAI NAI

[It wasn't your fault! I told your mother to leave you with me so I could fix you. Spending that year with me, you became fatter, the color returned to your cheeks.]

BILLI

[You fixed me!]

NAI NAI

[You were just a happy child. Everyone loved you. You were so open, always smiling. My child, there's been so much going on this trip, we haven't been able to talk much.]

On cue again, a LOST BRIDE waddles onto set from a back door. Suddenly, there are two brides against the backdrop, causing momentary confusion. The BRIDE HANDLER immediately pulls her back out, apologizing.

Nai Nai is unfazed by all this, her attention fixed on Billi.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[This event is very important. There will be a lot of relatives and friends who haven't seen you since you were little. I know you have a lot on your mind, but you must still be generous in spirit. Be courteous!]

INT. WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO, SETUP 4 - DAY

Nai Nai takes Billi's hand as they walk through a Garden of Eden setting. They walk past fake tropical trees and a random peacock.

NAI NAI

[When you see people, you should loudly say 'hello auntie! Hello uncle!' Don't be 'nio nio ne ne'.]

BILLI

['Nio nio ne ne?']

NAI NAI
 [You don't know 'nio nio ne ne'?
 You know... like this...]

Nai Nai demonstrates the phrase comically. Billi chuckles.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
 [That's 'nio nio ne ne'. Very
 selfish, closed off. Nobody likes
 that kind of person. Promise me.]

BILLI
 OK...[I promise.]

Nai Nai affectionately pats her butt.

NAI NAI
 [When you get married, I'll throw
 you an even bigger wedding
 banquet!]

We stay on Billi's face as this lands on her.

INT. RESTAURANT, PRIVATE ROOM - NIGHT

The entire family gathers around a large round table covered with food. There are a few new family members including GU FU (Gu Gu's husband) and two cousins - SUN AO (early 40's) and his wife NICO.

Gu Gu pours beer for everyone.

GU GU
 [Come, let's toast. Welcome home,
 welcome home! How rare it is for us
 all to be together. Just look at
 your mother's face...]

Everyone raises their glass and drinks. Sun Ao gleefully refills for everyone.

HAIYAN
 [Sis, thank you for everything...]

Gu Fu dismisses him playfully with a wave.

GU FU
 [We're all one family. No need to
 talk about thanks. Come on, let's
 all drink.]

SUN AO

[Let's see who can handle their alcohol better, Americans or Chinese!]

Uncle Haibin lights up a cigarette. As he offers one to Haiyan, Billi intercepts -

BILLI

[My dad quit.]

UNCLE HAIBIN

[Really?]

Uncle Haibin looks at Haiyan in disbelief and Haiyan avoids eye contact.

UNCLE HAIBIN (CONT'D)

(to Billi)

[I don't think so. I think he just told you that.]

Sun Ao sees that Nai Nai didn't finish her beer.

SUN AO

[Auntie, don't think you're excused! You also have to gan bei!]

Nai Nai laughs, and nods. She makes a show of emptying her glass. Her family cheers.

NICO

[Hey Billi, you ever think about moving back to China? A lot of foreigners are moving here to make money now!]

GU GU

[How long would it take to make a million dollars in America?]

BILLI

[Um... a long time.]

GU GU

[Really? It's very easy in China.]

BILLI

[Money is not the most important. There are lots of things that money can't buy.]

NAI NAI

[Look at my granddaughter! She's so wise!]

GU GU

[But if you get rich, first you buy the things money CAN buy. Then you can also enjoy the free stuff money can't buy!]

Jian is triggered by this.

JIAN

[YuPing, if you can get rich in China, then why are you planning to send Bao to America for college?]

GU GU

[For more opportunity...]

JIAN

[What kind of opportunity? Money-making opportunity? After studying in America, maybe Bao also won't care about money. Just like Billi. She's got different values.]

BILLI

Mom, can you not talk about me?

GU GU

(trying to make peace)
[You guys don't have to worry. When she becomes a big famous writer, she can make big money. You're investing in her talent!]

JIAN

[So raising a kid is like playing the stock market?]

BILLI

(to Dad)
What's that mean?

HAIYAN

They're saying you're a stock investment and you'll make us rich.

JIAN

But I can't expect that from you, right? You're a losing stock.

Jian smiles at her own joke, but Billi isn't amused.

HAIYAN

[These American kids are only concerned with their own dreams.]

SUN AO

[Nowadays, Chinese kids are that way too!]

JIAN

[But in America, they actually have the freedom to pursue their dreams. Doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, everyone has the same opportunities.]

BILLI

You're kidding right? You think everyone in America has equal opportunity?

JIAN

[You know, the first year we moved to America, our friend Henry introduced us to an American church. The first time we went, we were really nervous, didn't understand anything. After the service, we walked past the piano and Billi stood in front of it, staring. She reached her hand out and Haiyan stopped her. The pastor came over to introduce herself. Haiyan explained to the pastor that Billi used to study piano in China. She stopped after we moved and really missed it. We couldn't afford it. The pastor didn't say anything, but came back moments later and handed me a key. She said, "This key opens every door on this property. Come anytime and Billi can play the piano."]

NAI NAI

[Really? They really did that?]

JIAN

[I didn't speak English so I thought I misunderstood and Haiyan translated for me. I almost started crying.]

HAIYAN

[They even got her a piano teacher for free.]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[Look at that. That would never happen in China. America really is different, huh?]

NICO

[But China has China's benefits! We're not totally useless.]

JIAN

[Yea, the roast duck is still delicious!]

Jian's the only one laughing at her own joke again.

BILLI

Mom. That one church is not representative of all of America. We have so many problems - healthcare, guns, public education...

JIAN

(suddenly defensive)

If you think China's better, then why don't you move here?

NAI NAI

[That's enough. You listen to me! You can't go around criticizing your motherland. Don't any of you forget that you're still Chinese!]

HAIYAN

(jokingly)

[Well, technically, we're American.]

The Chinese family all glare at him.

HAIYAN (CONT'D)

(nervous smile)

[I just mean that we're American citizens now. We hold American passports.]

NAI NAI

[That's just a piece of paper. The blood in your veins is still Chinese!]

UNCLE HAIBIN

[I'll always be Chinese. No matter where I live or what passport I hold.]

GU GU

[You all think the moon outside of China is rounder, but do you ever think about your mother? Having to grow old without her kids around.]

Haiyan and Haibin both grow quiet with guilt.

NAI NAI

[OK OK, enough! Everyone's home, let's talk about happy things!]

Jian's got a bone to pick and she just won't let it go.

JIAN

[But YuPing, you say you still plan on sending Bao out of the country for college?]

GU GU

[He won't stay there. He'll come back.]

JIAN

[You can't guarantee that.]

Gu Gu knows that Jian's right.

JIAN (CONT'D)

[But even with the risk that he won't return, you'd still send him out, right?]

Gu Gu swallows. The table is silent as everyone chews intently. Food is always there to fill the awkward spaces. Sun Ao tries to change the subject.

SUN AO

[So um... how's your piano Billi?]

BILLI

[I don't play anymore.]

What little air remains in the room is sucked out.

INT. HOTEL BEST, HALLWAY - NIGHT

A long hallway. The entire family marches back to their rooms, one after another. Billi lags behind.

Smoke lingers out of an open door in the hallway and she peers inside. A group of drunk middle-aged men smoke around a mahjong table, a few of them shirtless.

Billi watches the women around them. One SEXY WOMAN catches Billi's gaze. Their eyes lock, each caught by the other in their performative act.

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Little Nai Nai, Mr. Li and Nai Nai walk through the front door. Nai Nai is coughing. Mrs. Gao attends to her.

NAI NAI
[Go home, I'm fine.]

LITTLE NAI NAI
[You're coughing a lot.]

NAI NAI
[It's probably the flu. I'll be fine. Don't mention it to anyone, I don't want them to worry.]

Little Nai Nai nods.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
[Go on. Go upstairs. I'm fine.]

Little Nai Nai grapples quietly with the consequences of her lie. With no other choice, she leaves.

INT. HOTEL BEST, BILLI'S ROOM - NIGHT

Billi takes her shirt off and examines her back in the mirror. It's covered with large round purple welts from the "ba guan" (cupping).

INT. HOTEL BEST, BILLI'S ROOM - MORNING

Billi wakes to voices echoing through the hallway. She opens her eyes to find a SMALL HOUSE BIRD on the windowsill. It looks just like the one that got stuck in her apartment.

Her eyes meet the bird's. What does it mean? Shouting continues in the hallway and she gets up to investigate.

INT. HOTEL BEST, CORRIDOR - MORNING

As Billi steps out of her room, Uncle Haibin rushes past.

UNCLE HAIBIN
[Hurry up, I'll meet you downstairs!]

Billi turns to see Haiyan getting dressed.

HAIYAN
[Do you know how to get there?]

Uncle Haibin holds his cell phone as Little Nai Nai's voice shouts through the speakerphone.

LITTLE NAI NAI
[It's building 8!]

UNCLE HAIBIN
[OK auntie, I'll figure it out.
Just get over there and we'll meet
you!]

Billi looks back and forth, caught in the middle of this crossfire.

BILLI
[What's going on?]

UNCLE HAIBIN
[Nai Nai went to the hospital.]

Hao Hao steps out of his room, still half asleep.

BILLI
What happened?!

HAIYAN
I don't know.

Billi's heart sinks as she and Hao Hao lock eyes.

EXT. NANHU BRIDGE - MORNING

Billi, Hao Hao, Haiyan and Uncle Haibin are lost as they frantically try to orient themselves.

INT. THE PEOPLE'S HOSPITAL, EXAM ROOM - MORNING

Nai Nai sits on the exam table with Mrs. Gao by her side. As Billi, Haiyan, Hao Hao and Uncle Haibin rush in, Nai Nai scrunches her face in annoyance.

NAI NAI
[Why did you all come?]

She turns to Little Nai Nai.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[You told them? I told you not to say anything! You didn't need to come!]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[You come to the hospital by yourself while your sons are all here! If something happened and I didn't tell them, they'd blame me!]

NAI NAI

[I didn't come alone. Mrs. Gao brought me!]

HAIYAN

[Ma, you can't just disappear without telling any of us!]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[I'll go see where the doctor is...]

As Little Nai Nai opens the door to leave, a group of doctors rush past with a stretcher, another reminder of what's around the corner.

Nai Nai clocks the fear in Billi's eyes.

NAI NAI

[I'm fine! I just came to pick up some medicine. It's not a big deal!]

Billi takes a seat beside Nai Nai. She takes her hand as the rest of the family looks on.

BILLI

[What medicine?]

NAI NAI

[I have this lingering cough from the last time I had a cold. I just wanted to see if there's better antibiotics to help me heal faster.]

Billi grasps Nai Nai's hand, brings it to her face. She takes in the scent of her grandmother's skin, the feel of it on her face. She kisses Nai Nai's hand.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[I'm fine my child.]

The words sit on the tip of Billi's tongue. She knows she needs to tell her the truth.

BILLI

[You're not. Nai Nai...]

NAI NAI

[You don't need to worry about me. Anyway, I'm 80 years old. I've lived a long life. I'm not scared and you don't have to be scared for me. I just want you to be successful and have a good life and I'll be satisfied. I know you're worried, but I'm OK. Don't worry. I'm fine.]

Before Billi can say anything else, Little Nai Nai enters with the young handsome DOCTOR SONG.

DOCTOR SONG

[Mrs. Zhao. Let's have a look.]

He's on autopilot, going through the motions of a routine exam. Little Nai Nai holds her breath.

DOCTOR SONG (CONT'D)

[Breathe, breathe, cough. You have some infection...]

NAI NAI

[I'm already on antibiotics but it's not working! You gave me bad medicine. You have to change it. Give me a better one so I can feel better!]

Nai Nai gestures to Hao Hao.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[This is my grandson, he's getting married in two days!]

DOCTOR SONG

[Ah. Congratulations.]

NAI NAI

[Everyone came back for the wedding! This is my granddaughter. She's from America.]

Doctor Song's eyes widen with excitement as he turns his focus to Billi. He switches to English.

DOCTOR SONG

Oh, you visit from America! I went to school many years in the UK.

BILLI

Oh. Cool. That's um...

DOCTOR SONG

Where do you live?

BILLI

New York...

DOCTOR SONG

I always want to visit New York City. Very beautiful city.

BILLI

It is... but listen... Do you know about my grandmother's condition?

Haiyan clocks what's going on.

HAIYAN

Billi, don't...

NAI NAI

[What are you guys talking about?]

Billi smiles broadly for Nai Nai's sake.

BILLI

[Oh Nai Nai, he studied in England so he speaks English!]

NAI NAI

[Really?]

DOCTOR SONG

[It's true.]

Nai Nai smiles at Dr. Song, clearly having her own agenda.

NAI NAI

[Doctor Song, let me ask you. Are you married?]

DOCTOR SONG

(blushes)

[Not yet.]

NAI NAI

[So handsome. A doctor. And you
speak English. Not married?
Impossible!]

Billi switches back to English. Nai Nai watches them,
clueless.

BILLI

How bad is she? Tell me the truth.

DOCTOR SONG

The cancer is quite advanced.

BILLI

Don't you think you should tell
her?

DOCTOR SONG

It's complicated. In her situation,
most families in China wouldn't
tell her. When my grandmother had
cancer, my family also didn't tell
her.

Billi registers this with surprise.

BILLI

Don't you think it's wrong to lie?

DOCTOR SONG

It's not really a lie if it's meant
for good.

BILLI

It's still a lie.

DOCTOR SONG

It's a good lie.

Billi doesn't understand the idea of his good lie. Good for
what?

BILLI

And how's your grandmother?

DOCTOR SONG

She passed away. A few months after
she was diagnosed.

This affects Billi, but Haiyan also registers this.

DOCTOR SONG (CONT'D)

(to Nai Nai)

[Mrs. Zhao, you had pneumonia a few months ago so I'm thinking this could be some residual infection in your lungs from that. We should do an X-ray to make sure the infection isn't spreading.]

NAI NAI

[That's not necessary! I just came in to change my medicine. Can't you just give me a better brand of antibiotics?]

DOCTOR SONG

[We can change your medicine, but just as a precaution, let's do an x-ray.]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[Sis, since you insisted on coming and you're already here just do the X-ray!]

UNCLE HAIBIN

[You heard him, Ma. It's just precautionary.]

Nai Nai looks to Haiyan for his opinion. He diverts his gaze to the ground.

INT. THE PEOPLE'S HOSPITAL - DAY

Nai Nai sits alone in a hospital gown awaiting her X-ray. She has a coughing fit.

INT. THE PEOPLE'S HOSPITAL, HALLWAY - DAY

Haiyan paces back and forth, carefully considering his words.

HAIYAN

[Maybe it's time we tell her.]

Everyone looks up, as if betrayed.

HAIYAN (CONT'D)

[And we make some plans... like who's going to come back to stay with her when she's sick.]

UNCLE HAIBIN

[We can make plans without telling her.]

Haiyan lets out a conflicted sigh.

HAIYAN

[It's just... in America, we would not make this kind of decision. We couldn't, really.]

BILLI

[It'd be...]
(switches to English)
Illegal. How do you say illegal?

HAIYAN

[Illegal. In America, this is illegal.]

UNCLE HAIBIN

[This isn't America.]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[I recommend...it's not time yet.]

BILLI

[How do you know?]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[I just know.]

BILLI

[Don't you think she'd be furious if she found out that we all knew and were keeping it from her?]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[How can she be mad when she did the same thing herself?]

BILLI

[What do you mean?]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[When your grandfather had cancer, your Nai Nai lied to him too. It wasn't until he was very close to the end that she finally told him. She said, "Old timer, you have the same disease that took our prime minister." He died three days later.]

BILLI

[So she did tell him.]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[Yes, in the end she told him. She thought it'd be cruel to let him leave this world without knowing what got him.

(beat)

When your Nai Nai reaches that point, I'll tell her too.]

EXT. NAI NAI'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

The family unit makes their way back, past our familiar peach buildings.

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Close on ELLEN, a chihuahua whose white hair matches that of the two Nai Nai's. She whimpers.

LITTLE NAI NAI (O.S.)

[Sing Ellen! Sing! Sing a song for us!]

NAI NAI

[Sing a song, Ellen, sing!]

Under duress, Ellen begins to "sing" - yelping at the top of her lungs. Everyone laughs.

As the dog stops singing and the laughter dies down, they suddenly remember. We linger on each individual face - the smiles drop, replaced by silence filled with uncertainty and fear.

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jian, Little Nai Nai and Auntie Ling cook tirelessly, dripping with sweat.

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Uncle Haibin pours the remainder of a beer into Haiyan's glass. They drink compulsively, surrounded by empty bottles.

Hao Hao and Aiko play a game on Aiko's iPhone.

Billi is at the piano. She hits a few keys. It's out of tune, clashing with the cacophony of voices behind her.

Nai Nai notices her sons' empty beers.

NAI NAI

[Mr. Li, go get the Mao Tai we saved!]

Jian rushes out of the kitchen in a panic.

JIAN

[Ma, the wedding's in two days and there will be a lot to drink. Maybe it's best to save that bottle...]

NAI NAI

[What am I saving it for?]

MR. LI

[Where's the Mao Tai again?]

NAI NAI

[In the bookshelf!]

Mr. Li goes to find the bottle. The sound of Billi's piano continues to escalate, forcing Jian and Nai Nai to raise their voices.

JIAN

[You know these two sons of yours. Once they start, they can't stop. The doctor says Haiyan's already got a fatty liver!]

Mr. Li brings out the bottle and pours for Haiyan and Uncle Haibin.

NAI NAI

[It's rare for them both to come home. If they want to drink, let them drink! We're celebrating!]

Suddenly, Billi breaks into a full impassioned piano piece (perhaps Liszt or Prokofiev). Everyone stops what they're doing to watch, a little surprised.

Billi's fingers fly furiously. Expressing through music what she can't express in life, Billi's eyes flicker with rage.

As Billi finishes, everyone is stunned silent. To mask the awkwardness, Little Nai Nai claps enthusiastically.

LITTLE NAI NAI

[Good! Oh my god, too good!]

HAIYAN

[Play another one.]

UNCLE HAIBIN

[But play something happier...]

Billi sits at the keys, raw with emotion.

INT. HOTEL BEST, HALLWAY - NIGHT

The men stagger back to their rooms with the help of their wives.

JIAN

[I told you not to drink, you had to drink! Your mother's always telling me to take care of you, but if she's giving you booze she doesn't worry about your health? Every time you drink you get drunk!]

BILLI

Mom, leave him alone.

HAIYAN

[Who drank too much? I'm not drunk! My mom gave it to me. I drink with my Ma... I drink for my Ma...]

INT. HOTEL BEST, JIAN & HAIYAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Billi watches as Jian removes Haiyan's jacket in bed.

JIAN

Grab me the water. Over there.

Billi grabs the bottle. Jian brings the bottle to Haiyan's mouth, forcing him to drink.

JIAN (CONT'D)

Come. Help me remove his shoes.

Billi and Jian undress Haiyan as he groans.

BILLI

Nai Nai shouldn't be organizing this wedding.

JIAN

She enjoy it, so just let her do it!

BILLI

She's sick. She should be resting or in the hospital, not stressing about a fake wedding!

JIAN

You don't know your grandma as well as you think you do.

(MORE)

JIAN (CONT'D)

Don't you know, she loves to boss everyone around! Make her feel important and in control.

BILLI

Mom...

JIAN

It's true! That's why she hated staying at our house in America. Because she couldn't tell anyone what to do. She see me and nothing I do is good enough for her but in America she couldn't say anything there because it was MY house.

Jian becomes increasingly aggressive with undressing Haiyan, stripping him down to his underwear.

BILLI

Stop it, Mom.

JIAN

(suddenly defensive)

What? [What did I do?]

BILLI

I know you've always had issues with her, but you need to drop it!

JIAN

I don't have issues with her. She has issues with me!

BILLI

She's dying! Can't you be a little more sensitive?

Haiyan groans as their voices raise to a shout.

JIAN

What do you want from me? To scream and cry like you? You know, when my father died, I also sad... But I not act like you! When I went back to China for the funeral, everyone was watching me, all expecting me to fall apart! They think if I don't cry, I don't love my father.

BILLI

No one's asking you to cry.

JIAN

Death is very personal. I don't have to cry in front of everyone to prove anything! I don't like to put you know... all my emotions on display, like I'm in a zoo! Here they think that's the only way to grieve. By performing for everybody. Otherwise they think you're not respectful. You know, in China... they even hire professional crier just WAAAAAH screaming crying to show oh how sad they are. It's ridiculous! I hate that!

Billi can't look at her mother. She is at a complete loss.

Prelap the sound of WAILING.

EXT. NATIONAL PEACE CEMETERY - DAY

A funeral procession is led by a melodramatic CRIER. Nothing specifically indicates whether she's professional or amateur.

Nearby, the Wang family (including Gu Gu and Bao) gather around YE YE'S GRAVE. The tomb bears a PHOTO OF YE YE.

They quickly set out fruit, eggs, bao zi (dumplings), bamboo-wrapped sticky rice, and other offerings. Everyone talks over each other in a lively manner.

Despite being in a graveyard, the setting is full of life. Nai Nai hands Hao Hao a bag of food.

NAI NAI

[Here, put these out.]

She hands Billi some bananas.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[Give Ye Ye some bananas. He loved to eat bananas.]

Haiyan opens a bottle of Chinese baijiu. He pours it over Ye Ye's grave, then takes a drink himself.

HAIYAN

[Dad, I'm toasting to you.]

Aiko and Hao Hao converse in Japanese over some tangerines.

NAI NAI

[Hurry up and set those out!]

They put them on the grave.

GU GU
[You have to peel them!]

Hao Hao picks the tangerines back up.

LITTLE NAI NAI
[Do they need to be peeled? I don't think they need to be peeled.]

NAI NAI
[Yes, yes. Peel them! Otherwise Ye Ye can't eat them!]

Haiyan hands Billi the bottle of baijiu. She takes a swig.

HAIYAN
Hey, what are you doing? Pour it there!

As she finishes pouring, Nai Nai hands her a bag of cookies.

BILLI
Should I open these too?

HAIYAN
[No. Just set those out.]

GU GU
[No! You have to open everything!]

Billi tears open the plastic wrap on the cookies. Gu Gu hands everyone bunches of flowers, and rips off some petals.

GU GU (CONT'D)
[You have to rip the petals off too.]

She demonstrates by aggressively tearing up the flowers.

HAIYAN
[Why do we have to rip the flowers?]

GU GU
[Because of the thieves! There are people who steal offerings off your grave and put it on their own family's! This way, they won't steal it!]

Billi is perplexed by all this, but obeys nonetheless. Haiyan lights a cigarette and sets it upright on the grave.

NAI NAI

[Hey, don't give him cigarettes! He already quit!]

HAIYAN

(teasing)

[Ma, he never quit.]

NAI NAI

[He did! A few weeks before he passed, he quit.]

HAIYAN

[He just told you he quit, but he never quit...]

UNCLE HAIBIN

[Ma... let the man smoke. He's already dead, what else can happen?]

This makes Nai Nai laugh, and her laughter is contagious.

Nai Nai takes a bite of banana, then feeds some to Billi. Jian eats an egg, Haiyan smokes a cigarette. It's a feast.

EXT. NATIONAL PEACE CEMETERY - LATER

Smoke and ash rise from a blazing fire near the grave. Billi pokes at the fire with a stick, burning fake money, a paper iPhone.

Nai Nai tosses a paper "coat" into the fire.

NAI NAI

[Burn the coat so Ye Ye can stay warm in the winter.]

EXT. NATIONAL PEACE CEMETERY - LATER

The entire family is lined up in front of the grave. Ash settles gently on their hair and their clothes.

Nai Nai leads them in paying their respects.

NAI NAI

(to the grave)

[Old timer, we all came to see you. Your grandson's getting married tomorrow. We came to get your blessing.]

The sun beats down. Heat rises from the cement. Billi squints through the lingering smoke.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[We ask you to bless Hao Hao and his new bride. Bless them with happiness and bless their child with health and strength. One bow, two bows, three bows.]

As Nai Nai bows, the rest of the family follow.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[Old timer, you left us too soon. Why did you have to leave so early? We hope you are at peace, wherever you are. We wish you well... One bow, two bows, three bows.]

They bow again. Hao Hao wipes away some tears.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[Bless both our sons, Haiyan and Haibin with success in their businesses. One bow, two bows, three bows.]

More bows. Sweat pours down their faces, but Nai Nai is only getting started.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[Who else? Bless Billi, and her future. That all the elements of her life will come together soon. One bow, two bows, three bows.]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[Still bowing! We're all dizzy!]

NAI NAI

(ignores her)

[And bless my sister. Bless her to...]

LITTLE NAI NAI

(interrupts, jokes)

[Bless me to win lots of money when I play Majong!]

Nai Nai doesn't crack a smile as she continues.

NAI NAI

[Bless your niece, YuPing and also Bao to do well on his exams. One bow, two bows, three bows.]

As the embers die down, a GRAVE CLEANER approaches to sweep away the ashes.

EXT. NATIONAL PEACE CEMETERY - DAY

The group meanders out of the cemetery, snaking through the sea of gravestones.

NAI NAI

[When the time comes, let's just send my ashes into the ocean. No one's ever home anyway.]

GU GU

[What are you talking about? I'm here!]

NAI NAI

[Still, let's just send it in the ocean. That way no one has to travel back and forth all the time.]

GU GU

[Send it into the ocean, what nonsense!]

NAI NAI

[You don't agree?]

GU GU

[I don't agree! We're Chinese... Humans need to return to the earth they came from!]

Nai Nai lets out a dejected sigh as they continue their march back into life.

INT. TAXI - DAY

They drive past a significant landmark.

BILLI

Hey I remember that...

HAIYAN

[This is Nai Nai's old neighborhood.]

Billi leans toward the window to see.

HAIYAN (CONT'D)

You remember that house? The one with the garden?

BILLI
Where? Where is it?

JIAN
[We already passed it.]

BILLI
[Can we go back? I want to see it!]

NAI NAI
[There's nothing to see. Our old neighborhood is long gone. Even I don't recognize it anymore.]

Billi stares out the window, eyes longing.

INT. HOTEL BEST, LOBBY - NIGHT

They enter through the hotel's revolving door, one after another.

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nai Nai soaks her feet in a bucket of hot water, as Mr. Li attends to her.

MR. LI
[Is it hot enough?]

NAI NAI
[It's still a little cold.]

Mr. Li carefully pours hot water from a kettle into the bucket.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
[OK OK, that's enough.]

Nai Nai watches as Mr. Li shuffles away holding the kettle.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
[Careful, don't burn yourself.]

He doesn't acknowledge her. Perhaps he didn't even hear.

Alone in her room, Nai Nai drops a certain performance of her own. She is weary. She coughs. Perhaps she knows the truth. Or perhaps, at 80, she just knows her time is limited.

INT. HOTEL BEST, CANTEEN - NIGHT

Haiyan and Haibin smoke near an open window. They are engulfed by shadows, as if in hiding.

HAIYAN

[I think that's something we'll need to discuss with her.]

UNCLE HAIBIN

[What's to discuss? Of course ma has to be buried beside ba. Her relationship with Mr. Li is just one of convenience!]

HAIYAN

[But she's still with him so I think it should be her decision.]

BILLI (O.S.)

Dad?

Haiyan takes one last inhale before stamping out the cigarette.

BILLI (CONT'D)

Are you smoking?

HAIYAN

No.

BILLI

You said you quit!

HAIYAN

I did.

A plume of smoke exits his nostrils.

HAIYAN (CONT'D)

I will.

Uncle Haibin offers Haiyan another cigarette. Billi grabs the box.

BILLI

[Stop giving him cigarettes!]

UNCLE HAIBIN

[Don't control him! He's your father, you shouldn't control him.]

HAIYAN

Go to bed, Billi.

Billi looks at the two men, sensing something's up.

BILLI

What are you talking about?

HAIYAN

Nothing.

BILLI

[Are you going to tell her?]

Uncle Haibin examines Haiyan carefully. Haiyan doesn't meet his gaze. He sighs in a way that tells us he's conflicted.

HAIYAN

[I can't, Billi. I won't go against my family.]

BILLI

Dad...

UNCLE HAIBIN

[You know Billi. You need to understand something. You guys moved to a Western country a long time ago, so you're no longer connected to the Eastern way of looking at things. In America, you think one's life belongs to oneself. But that's the difference between the East and the West. In the East, your life is part of a whole. Family. Society.]

He lectures to her like she's a child. Still, his words register.

UNCLE HAIBIN (CONT'D)

[You want to tell Nai Nai the truth because you feel too much responsibility carrying it. If you tell her, then you don't have to feel guilty anymore. We're not telling her because it is our responsibility to carry this emotional burden for her.]

INT. HOTEL BEST, HAO HAO AND AIKO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Hao Hao, Auntie Ling and Jian crawl around the floor as Billi walks past the open door. She stops to watch them.

JIAN

[Billi, don't just stand there. Come help us find Aiko's earring.]

Billi joins the others and gets on all fours.

BILLI
[Where did you drop it?]

HAO HAO
[Somewhere close.]

Auntie Ling speaks to Aiko in Japanese. This is not subtitled.

AUNTIE LING
Be careful, don't move! Maybe it's caught on your clothes somewhere.

BILLI
Mom. I want to stay. To help take care of Nai Nai.

Jian looks at Billi like she's crazy.

JIAN
You stay? For what? You can't cook, you can't clean. You barely speak Chinese!

BILLI
I'll figure it out.

Jian realizes her daughter is being serious.

JIAN
So... you just stay and what... wait for her to die? What about the fellowship? You're 30 years old and you just stop your life. Stay here. And every day she has to look at you... with that sad look on your face. That's not nice for anyone, right?

BILLI
So what can I do? Tell me what I should do! Because she's all that's left. One of the few good memories I have of my childhood were those summers in Nai Nai's house where they had that garden and Ye Ye and I used to catch dragonflies. We moved to the States and everything was different, everyone was gone and suddenly it was just the three of us.

This finally gets to Jian and she softens.

JIAN

I know it was hard. It was hard for us too...

BILLI

But you *chose* to leave. You were adults and you understood why. I was just a kid. Nobody ever asked me what I wanted or how I felt. I just had to trust you and you told me it was a good thing to leave, but it didn't feel like a good thing when you and Dad fought all the time because we didn't have money and I was the weird Chinese girl in school who didn't speak English and had no friends or anyone to talk to. I wanted to believe that it was a good thing, but all I saw was the fear in your eyes. I was confused and scared constantly because you guys never told me what was going on.

Hao Hao, Aiko and Auntie Ling observe awkwardly as Billi finally lets it all go, tears streaming down her face.

Hao Hao hands Billi a tissue.

BILLI (CONT'D)

And then Ye Ye died and you guys didn't tell me he was sick so it felt like, he just vanished suddenly. And you didn't even let me go to his funeral!

JIAN

You were in school. We didn't want you to miss school. We did what we thought was best for you.

BILLI

But I never saw him again! When I came back to China, he just wasn't here anymore, and every time I come back, he's just... gone. The house is gone, Adia's gone, our Beijing home is gone, and soon she'll be gone too.

This is it. This is everything she's been feeling. Billi lets out a deep sigh of relief from the catharsis.

INT. HOTEL BEST, BILLI'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

YE YE (60) smokes a cigarette by the window. It's the middle of the night and Billi opens her eyes, as if stirred by his presence.

Her POV of the window: Ye Ye isn't there, but his smoke lingers like a ghost.

EXT. CELEBRITY HOTEL - DAY

A row of identically-clad waiters shout a long-winded Chinese welcome in unison, with wide smiles.

INT. CELEBRITY HOTEL, LOBBY - LATER

A lion dancer leads the bridal party in. Nai Nai is at the head of the family, greeting guests.

Billi watches as Nai Nai works the room. Nai Nai gives Billi a stern glare to remind her of her duty. Putting on her best smile, Billi calls out to relatives with forced enthusiasm.

BILLI

[Hello uncle! Hello auntie!]

Nearby, Nai Nai catches up to Little Nai Nai.

NAI NAI

[Have you picked up the test results from the hospital? Weren't they supposed to be ready yesterday?]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[Not yet, I'll go tomorrow.]

NAI NAI

[Tomorrow's Saturday! Now we won't be able to get it until Monday!]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[So I'll get it Monday! Stop worrying! You're fine!]

INT. CELEBRITY HOTEL, BANQUET HALL - DAY

Plates of CRABS exit the kitchen. Waiters set the crabs on tables. Kids run amuck as Nai Nai goes from table to table greeting guests. Hao Hao and Ami also greet guests.

On stage, SUN AO (early 40's) and his wife NICO give a toast. Both are tipsy and exuberant.

SUN AO

[We are very happy to have you all back in Changchun! Doesn't matter if you are in America or Japan or anywhere else... We are all one and the same! Citizens of the planet earth, of the Milky Way galaxy, of the universe! The only thing you should all know is that no matter how far you go, even if it's to the moon! You will always have a home here in Changchun. We will always, always welcome you.]

NICO

[Please, let's all have a toast so you know when you come home to Changchun, you know that you'll always eat well, drink well and be merry! That way, you'll come back often!]

As her family eats, Billi stares at the mountain of food in front of her with no appetite.

Mic feedback alerts the room that someone has taken the stage, though they're reluctant to stop eating.

INT. BANQUET HALL, STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Uncle Haibin clears his throat.

UNCLE HAIBIN

[Keep eating, keep eating, I don't mean to interrupt your meal. As the eldest son, let me say a few words on behalf of myself and my brother.]

Their attention is dispersed as Uncle Haibin launches into his speech.

UNCLE HAIBIN (CONT'D)

[It's been over 25 years since my brother and I have both been in China at the same time with our families. I'm very happy to welcome Aiko to our family. Perhaps next time, when we return again, we'll bring a new baby.]

Uncle Haibin's voice drifts as he struggles to stay focused.

UNCLE HAIBIN (CONT'D)

[My little brother and I haven't been around, and all these years, we've had to rely on all of you to take care of our ma. Chen Ping... you've been here all these years, by our mother's side, treating her like your own. I'm very grateful to you. To all of you... I want to thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

(long beat)

But the person I want to thank the most...]

His face quivers. Billi leans in, holding her breath.

The entire room suddenly gets quiet. The awkward silence is underscored by the sporadic SOUND OF CHAIRS AND UTENSILS.

UNCLE HAIBIN (CONT'D)

[The person I want to thank the most... is...

(his voice breaks)

My mother. Forgive us for not being around, Ma. Everything I am, everything I've become...]

The dam ruptures with force. Tears stream down his face.

UNCLE HAIBIN (CONT'D)

[... is because of my Ma!]

Uncle Haibin's shoulders shake as he sobs uncontrollably on stage. Uncle Haibin had warned her about this very thing, and now he's the one falling apart.

Billi watches in disbelief.

UNCLE HAIBIN (CONT'D)

[Ma, you are the best mother in the entire world.

(he bows)

Thank you, Ma.]

As he finishes, scattered applause fills the room.

Billi turns to Nai Nai, who dabs the moisture from her eyes with a handkerchief. It's hard to tell what she's thinking.

Billi scans the rest of the room. HUNGRY GUESTS, including Mr. Li and Bao, shove food into their mouths. She leans over to Haiyan.

BILLI
Does everyone know?

HAIYAN
I think most people don't know. But
I'm not sure.

A giant shrimp suddenly appears in front of Billi's face on
Nai Nai's chopsticks.

NAI NAI
[Eat more, eat more!]

INT. BANQUET HALL - LATER

Aiko wobbles slightly on stage as she delivers a toast. She
speaks in JAPANESE, smiling broadly as Auntie Ling
translates.

AIKO
*I'm very happy to be here to
celebrate with you all. Hao Hao is
very nice, good man. I promise to
always treat him well. And, we
hope... maybe next time, we will
bring back a baby.*

Hao Hao blushes. Everyone laughs.

INT. BANQUET HALL, BACK AREA - CONTINUOUS

The unaffected LION DANCER smokes a cigarette.

A BORED WAITER sits nearby on her iPhone.

INT. BANQUET HALL - LATER

Nai Nai escorts Hao Hao and Aiko from table to table,
toasting guests.

INT. BANQUET HALL, GENERALS TABLE - LATER

GENERAL ZHU, GENERAL FU and GENERAL MU sit around Nai Nai,
reminiscing about the good ol' times. Haiyan and Uncle Haibin
are also at the table. Everyone chain smokes around her.

As Billi approaches, Nai Nai motions to her.

NAI NAI
[This is my granddaughter.]

GENERAL MU
[Oh she's quite pretty!]

GENERAL ZHU

[Married yet?]

Billi's smile tenses up as she stares at the shroud of smoke around Nai Nai.

Nai Nai herself seems unbothered.

NAI NAI

(to Billi)

[I used to work with these grandpas in the army. They're all very important officials in the government now!]

GENERAL FU

(laughing)

[We're long retired now!]

GENERAL ZHU

(to Nai Nai)

[Hey Little Ting, I see you're limping. Is that still from the bullet you took in the war?]

NAI NAI

[You still remember that?]

GENERAL ZHU

[How could I forget it? Tell you the truth, I had it all figured out. After the war, I was going to ask you to marry me. But then you got injured, and Little Wang carried you off and that was the end of that. Sly motherfucker.]

Nai Nai blushes and Billi clocks this.

GENERAL FU

[That was a lifetime ago! Now, you're confessing your love?]

GENERAL ZHU

[Well if I don't say anything now, I'll take it to my grave. Isn't that right, Little Ting?]

NAI NAI

[Little Ting? I'm old Ting now!]

General Mu turns to Billi.

GENERAL MU

[It's rare for you to come back, child. Take the opportunity to talk to your grandmother.]

Billi nods. Nai Nai gestures to the stage.

NAI NAI

[Go on. Go say a few words.]

Billi looks at Nai Nai, remembering her earlier words. Gracious. Generous in spirit. She takes a deep breath.

INT. BANQUET HALL, STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Billi hesitantly makes her way up to the stage. She takes the mic, but nobody's paying attention. She meets Nai Nai's encouraging gaze and starts.

BILLI

[Hello everyone. As you all know, I left China when I was very little.]

She pauses, searching for words she hasn't said in a long time, if ever.

BILLI (CONT'D)

[My Chinese isn't so good. I'm sorry...]

A guest shouts "It's great! Express yourself!" from off stage followed by a few chuckles.

BILLI (CONT'D)

[OK... um... I almost didn't come back this time. I uh...was very busy with my work. But I still came back.]

Billi looks at her parents, Uncle Haibin. All eyes are on her.

BILLI (CONT'D)

[In America, we don't have many family. I miss all of you. I'm very happy to be here. I'm very happy to celebrate with you all.]

She looks out at Nai Nai, beaming with pride.

BILLI (CONT'D)

[And I just hope... that you're happy too.]

Scattered applause as Billi leaves the stage. Thank god that's over. But then she remembers something and quickly runs back up -

BILLI (CONT'D)
 [Oh, and uh...]
 (yells offstage to
 Haiyan)
 Dad, how do you say
 congratulations?

HAIYAN
 Gong xi!

BILLI
 Gong xi Hao Hao and Aiko!

The room bursts into applause.

INT. BANQUET HALL, STAGE - LATER

Billi and Dad sing a karaoke duet of the Fugee's version of "Killing Me Softly".

INT. BANQUET HALL - LATER

ON STAGE. Aiko and Hao Hao sing a Japanese karaoke song. They're both incredibly off key.

MAIN TABLE. Jian and Little Nai Nai watch the awkward performance in silence. Jian senses the weight of Little Nai Nai's grief amidst all this celebration.

JIAN
 [Auntie, you've spent so long
 taking care of your sister. You
 also have to take care of yourself
 and consider what's next for you.]

LITTLE NAI NAI
 (nods)
 [You don't need to worry about me.
 I'm very rational about all this.
 After she's gone, I can go be with
 my husband in ShenZhen. All these
 years, working out there alone has
 been hard for him too, but he's
 almost retired. And then he and I
 will be able to take ourselves on a
 world tour!]

Jian's not fooled by her feigned cheerfulness, but plays along.

JIAN

[You can come visit us in
America...]

Little Nai Nai's performative smile grows wider.

LITTLE NAI NAI

[Definitely! I've always wanted to
see your house!]

JIAN

[We'll take you around the country.
Wherever you want to go.]

Little Nai Nai nods a little too eagerly.

LITTLE NAI NAI

[I can even go visit Haibin and his
family in Japan. See, I've thought
things through very clearly. You
don't have to worry about me.]

As Little Nai Nai turns back around to face away from Jian,
her smile drops. The effort of these performative emotions
takes its toll.

INT. BANQUET HALL, STAGE - LATER

A MOTHER DAUGHTER DUO does a choreographed K-pop dance.

INT. BANQUET HALL, TABLE - LATER

The entire family flaps their arms like birds. This is a
drinking game. Joyful and exhilarating, the game allows them
all to forget for the time being.

Hao Hao keeps messing up the game so he drinks. He drinks,
and drinks and drinks.

INT. BANQUET HALL - DAY

ON STAGE. A YOUNG CHINESE WOMAN sings a melancholic Italian
opera.

In the middle of the room, Hao Hao bawls uncontrollably.
Seeing this, Gu Gu runs up to him. A few TEEN GIRLS also
huddle around him.

Gu Gu locks eyes with Billi and waves frantically. Billi
rushes over, searching the room for Nai Nai. Nai Nai is
distracted by a conversation with Mrs. Gao.

TEEN GIRL #1

[What's wrong Hao Hao? Why are you sad?]

GU GU

[He's fine. It's OK.]

Gu Gu's eyes well with tears.

TEEN GIRL #2

[Why are you crying Hao Hao? Don't cry...]

As she says this, Teen Girl #2 begins to cry. This gets Teen Girl #1 crying too. It's contagious - the louder one girl cries, the louder the other girl cries.

Gu Gu dries her tears, annoyed by the hysterics.

GU GU

[Why are YOU crying?]

TEEN GIRL #2

[I don't know...]

TEEN GIRL #1

[I don't know either!]

INT. BANQUET HALL, BACK AREA - DAY

Billi tries to console Hao Hao. They can't communicate, but it's a tender moment.

INT. BANQUET HALL, PORTRAIT BACKDROP - DAY

Nai Nai is surrounded by the entire family, posed for a portrait. Uncle Haibin sets up the camera on a tripod.

Nai Nai notices Hao Hao's face - it's red and puffy from crying.

NAI NAI

[What's the matter Hao Hao? Did you drink too much?]

Tears leak down Hao Hao's face.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

[You can't take a wedding photo with the groom crying. What are you crying about?]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[He's fine. He's just happy. Those are tears of joy! Isn't that right, Hao Hao?]

Hao Hao nods weakly.

UNCLE HAIBIN (O.S.)

[OK, everybody look at the camera!]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[Will you take one with my camera too? Sis, where is it?]

NAI NAI

[I gave it to Mrs. Gao. It's in her purse.]

LITTLE NAI NAI

[Where is she?]

NAI NAI

[I sent her to the hospital to pick up my test results.]

Little Nai Nai's face drops and Billi clocks this. Uncle runs into the photo -

UNCLE HAIBIN

[On the count of three, everybody say 'eggplant!']

Everyone says 'eggplant' with a forced smile. The camera goes off with a flash. Billi and Little Nai Nai's faces are frozen in a look of shock.

As the rest of the family stays frozen in a smile, Billi awkwardly excuses herself from the group photo. She begins to run.

EXT. CHANGCHUN STREETS - DAY

Billi sprints through the city with all her might. She stops momentarily to catch her breath and her thoughts catch up to her actions.

There's no time to think. She takes off running again.

INT. THE PEOPLE'S HOSPITAL, LOBBY - DAY

Billi runs inside, asks someone for directions.

INT. THE PEOPLE'S HOSPITAL, SECOND FLOOR - DAY

Billi bolts up the stairs and frantically searches for Mrs. Gao. She spots her and runs up to her.

MRS. GAO
[Oh, what are you doing here?]

BILLI
(out of breath)
[Did you get it?]

MRS. GAO
[The test results? Yea.]

BILLI
[Where?]

Mrs. Gao digs into her purse and pulls out a document. She hands it to Billi, scanning the panic on her face.

MRS. GAO
[What's the matter? What's it say?]

Billi looks up at Mrs. Gao, confused.

BILLI
[I don't know. I can't read Chinese. Didn't you read it?]

MRS. GAO
(blushes)
[I... I can't read.
(beat)
I never went to school.]

Despite her relief, Billi softens with sympathy.

BILLI
[Come on, let's go.]

INT. COPY CENTER - DAY

The test result document is scanned into a computer.

Billi, Little Nai Nai and Mrs. Gao huddle over the COPY CENTER OWNER as he tries to doctor the results in his computer.

COPY CENTER OWNER
[What should I write?]

LITTLE NAI NAI
[Just write benign shadows.]

COPY CENTER OWNER
[Benign shadows? What's that?]

LITTLE NAI NAI
[It means... it's not fatal.]

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The entire family gathers around Nai Nai as she examines the document. Time slows. Nai Nai nods, as if she knew all along.

NAI NAI
[See. I told you I was fine!]

EXT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT - DUSK

The family walks in epic slow-motion as a single unit.

Little Nai Nai, Aiko and Hao Hao. Uncle and Auntie. Haiyan and Jian. Billi is framed in the center.

They're all in this together. There's no turning back.

EXT. CHANGCHUN - DUSK

It's dark and the city is still asleep. A light comes on in one window.

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - DUSK

Nai Nai opens the closet door and grabs a RED ENVELOPE. She hands it to Billi.

BILLI
[Don't give me money, Nai Nai...]

NAI NAI
[Take it, child! Take it! I gave one to Hao Hao so I want to give you one too.]

BILLI
[But... I didn't get married.]

NAI NAI
[Even more reason! You're all on your own, with no one to support you. And I can't be of much help to you. I'm sorry. I wish there was more I could do to help you.]

Nai Nai's eyes well with tears as she grapples with her helplessness. She pushes the envelope into Billi's hand.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
[Take it, my child.]

Billi nods, emotional.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
[And don't spend it on anything
practical like rent! Buy yourself
something nice...]

Billi smiles.

BILLI
[I don't want to leave, Nai Nai.]

NAI NAI
[You'll be back.]

Billi fights back tears.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)
[I know you're always thinking of
me. But you don't need to worry.
I'm fine. I've been taking the new
medicine and I feel much better.]

BILLI
[Really?]

NAI NAI
[You have work to do. You have so
much ahead of you. I'm proud of
you.]

Billi diverts her eyes, something clearly on her mind. After
a beat, she decides to be honest.

BILLI
[I didn't get the grant.]

NAI NAI
[Really? You just heard?]

BILLI
[Last week. I didn't tell you
because...
(beat)
I didn't want you to worry.]

Nai Nai considers this and nods.

NAI NAI

[I'm not worried. You'll be fine. Child, I've walked the path of life and I have a piece of advice for you. Whatever you encounter in life, you must fight to stay positive. Your journey ahead is still long and you will have difficulties, but when you encounter something catastrophic, you have to think it through with an open mind and find the light. Don't be a bull ramming its horns into the dark corner of a room. You'll get stuck. Your mind is incredibly powerful. Where your thoughts go, your body follows. You must keep your perspective... and keep going forward.]

Billi nods as she absorbs Nai Nai's advice.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

(beat)

[You've always been fearless. So I know you're gonna be fine.]

Billi puts her head on Nai Nai's shoulder.

BILLI

[Are you really OK, Nai Nai?]

NAI NAI

[Yes! Why would I lie to you?]

There's a knock on the door as Little Nai Nai opens the door.

LITTLE NAI NAI

[Taxi's here. Come on.]

Billi and Nai Nai savor this moment, side by side. Mrs. Gao passes them in the doorway, sweeping.

INT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT, STAIRWELL - MORNING

Chaos and commotion as Billi, Jian and Haiyan attempt to say goodbye. It's impossible, so instead of goodbye, they shout at each other, everyone overlapping.

JIAN

[Ma, don't come down!]

NAI NAI

[I'll come down with you, come on.]

LITTLE NAI NAI
[Sis, you don't need to go! It's cold outside!]

HAIYAN
[Ma, don't catch a cold!]

NAI NAI
[I'm coming, I'm coming! Hurry up let's go!]

Nai Nai struggles down the dingy stairwell despite everyone's urging.

EXT. NAI NAI'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Billi and Nai Nai hug goodbye. Both struggle to maintain composure.

BILLI
[Don't cry, Nai Nai.]

NAI NAI
[I'm not crying. You don't cry.]

BILLI
[I'm not crying.]

Billi smiles as convincingly as possible.

BILLI (CONT'D)
[I'll be back to see you.]

NAI NAI
[Yes, I know. You'll be back. I'll see you very soon. Go on, let's not drag this out anymore. It hurts my heart.]

JIAN
[Ma, take care of yourself.]

NAI NAI
[Stop it. Don't make a scene. Just go. Hurry up or you'll miss your flight!]

They're all back to shouting.

JIAN
[Go upstairs, Ma! It's chilly! Hurry and go!]

HAIYAN
[Ma, go upstairs!]

NAI NAI
[I will after you get in the car.
Go on or you'll miss your flight!]

They get in the car, but Nai Nai doesn't leave. She limps after the car as it pulls away.

INT. TAXI - MORNING

POV from the back windshield. Nai Nai stands at the end of the alley, watching as the car drives away. She waves as her squat figure gets smaller.

Little Nai Nai tries to get her sister to leave, but she doesn't budge. She remains in the same spot - watching, waving, her heart in her throat. The car turns the corner and just like that, Nai Nai's gone.

Billi turns around, numb with grief. To her surprise, she sees Jian weeping silently. There are no words.

INT. TAXI - LATER

Haiyan is asleep in the front seat. After what seems like endless silence, Billi finally turns to her mother.

BILLI
Mom... if one of you guys got
sick... in America... what should I
do? Would you want me to lie to
you?

JIAN
Definitely not! Are you crazy?

Billi and Mom both chuckle through their tears. At least they're on the same page about something.

JIAN (CONT'D)
Do you regret that we brought you
to America?

BILLI
Of course not.

Another long pause as Billi considers Mom's question.

BILLI (CONT'D)
Do you? Leaving I mean.

JIAN

I don't regret, but... it's complicated.

Outside the car, the sun is rising and the city begins to wake.

JIAN (CONT'D)

You know... when I was still living in China, when you were very young, I visited a blind psychic. He told me I'd have three children. He said there's a lot of water in my life. Water means talent, so a lot of talent. But my water is long and flowing - a river, so I cannot keep any of it.

POV of long empty highways to the airport.

JIAN (CONT'D)

But my daughter, he said. She is also water but she is big ocean water. So my river will flow into her.

BILLI

What if I can't be your ocean?

JIAN

It's not whether or not you can be. The psychic said you already are. If you believe it, then it's true.

BILLI

Well he was wrong. You didn't have three children.

JIAN

No, he was right. I was meant to have three. But it was China. We couldn't. You were first. So you were it.

Billi's heart swells with compassion.

INT. TAXI - LATER

Mom and Dad are fast asleep. They're weary and vulnerable. They're human.

INT. BILLI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Billi walks into the dark apartment with her suitcase. Despite being a small studio apartment, her place now feels enormous.

Empty. Silent. Nothing but her own shadows.

EXT. STREET, NYC - NIGHT

Billi strolls down the sidewalk, the weight of the world on her shoulders. Overwhelmed by emotion, she appears to be on the verge of breaking down.

She stops in the middle of the street. Strangers walk around her, absorbed in their own lives.

As Billi stands there amidst the chaos of the city, a different energy suddenly overtakes her. Instead of crumbling, she lifts her chin and inhales deeply.

Then, with all the life force in her, with the spirit of Nai Nai, she shouts -

BILLI

HA!

EXT. NAI NAI'S NEIGHBORHOOD, CHANGCHUN CHINA - DAY

Our familiar peach-colored buildings surround a LARGE TREE. Billi's voice echoes loudly into this shot - echoing across the globe.

BIRDS scatter from the tree, flying off into the distance as a unit, the pattern of their formation silhouetted against the sky.

THE END