

Love, Ah Ma

By

Phoebe Z Ho

INT. LIVING ROOM/BEDROOM - DAY

Cut-aways of items that are telling of a birthday preparation.

Balloons strewn across the living room floor. Study table covered in scrap paper and buntings. A calendar with a birthdate marked out. White birthday dress/gown hung up by the cabinet. Photographs of MEI QI (20 years) and AH MA (75 years).

A conversation between Mei Qi and Ah Ma is audible (off screen).

MEI QI (O.S.)

...There's also Janice and Fadli who said they're coming... Ah ma, do you think there will be enough food? I don't know there's time to bake anymore...

AH MA (O.S.)

Who else did you invite?

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Mei Qi and Ah ma are busy in the kitchen. Their necks craned over a table full of cupcakes; icing the cupcakes.

The amicable duo chat, evidently comfortable with one another. Mei Qi sits with her legs crossed up on the chair, a child-like demeanor.

MEI QI

Oh! I invited Stephanie and Amanda too! Do you remember them? You used to bring me down to playground to meet them everyday... Ahh!

Mei Qi exclaims. She loses her focus while animatedly answering Ah Ma, squeezing icing off the cupcake. We catch them in a moment of laughter. Ah Ma reaches over to fix Mei Qi's mistake, turning her accidental stroke into the stalk of a flower.

Mei Qi watches serenely as Ah Ma salvages her mistake, as a smile registers on both their faces.

Ah ma pours sprinkles onto the cupcake; the bottle is emptied.

(CONTINUED)

AH MA

Ai yo, I'll go down to buy somemore
sprinkles

Ah ma gets up to exit the kitchen.

AH MA

Mei Qi, by the way, Ah ma has to go
to the doctor's this Saturday

MEI QI

Oh how come? Should I wait for you
to start the party?

AH MA

No need, don't wait for me

MEI QI

But you'll still be there for my
party right?

Ah Ma pauses at the doorway of the kitchen and answers with
a reassuring smile.

AH MA

Of course, Ah ma will always be
there

Ah ma steps out of the kitchen. A moment later, we hear a
loud bang. Mei Qi is startled, stands bolt upright.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mei Qi dashes from kitchen into living room.

Ah ma is collapsed on the floor. Mei Qi rushes toward Ah Ma
and shakes her.

MEI QI

Ah ma!... Ah ma are you okay?!

Mei Qi is frantic, scrambles to the the house phone and
dials her father.

GIRL

Pa! Pa, Ah Ma fell down.. this time
she's not answering!

Ah ma is out cold, though a serene smile is fixed on her
face.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

(pan over, match cut) Mei Qi sits slumped next to the house phone, staring into the abyss.

MOTHER (50s) and FATHER (50s) converse intensively.

MOTHER (O.S.)

I contacted some of her close friends already, in case they don't see the obituary. Oh, and I also told Mei Ling... She asks if she should fly back

Mei Qi is seemingly indifferent to her parents' converse.

FATHER

It'll be expensive... but I think she shouldn't miss this. Anyway, I've called up the Casket. They should be able to receive the body tomorrow. We can hold the wake on Saturday, and have the funeral...

Mei Qi perks up at the mention of Saturday, and interrupts.

MEI QI

But Pa, this Saturday is my birthday party

FATHER

What! You're still thinking about your party?! This is not a time to celebrate.

MEI QI

Ah ma would've wanted me to...

Her father does not compromise and is firm.

FATHER

... Ah ma's body will rot ah if we wait for you to have your party!

MEI QI

no but I

FATHER

Don't be crazy. The wake is this Saturday - final. You better not be disrespectful. You say ah ma doesn't mind? ...Over my dead body!

(CONTINUED)

Father looks a little unsteady at saying that. Mother shoots him a disapproving look.

FATHER

Choy ah, choy. (touch wood)

Father flustered by the argument. Girl is silenced. A call from the house phone intercepts and ends their conversation.

FATHER

Eh, Ah bee. Yeah.. Stroke. Old age
ah... these things cannot
unpredict...

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Mei Qi is on a rampage in her bedroom, tearing down all her birthday preparations.

Mei Qi crushes birthday invites, sweeps her study desk clear of materials and dumps them in the bin; flustered and emotional.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Deathly silence at the kitchen table. The remaining trio (Mother, Father, Mei Qi) eat dinner. One seat is empty - Ah ma's seat.

(After dinner; jump in time) Mei Qi opens the fridge to keep some left-over food. She stalls at the sight of a baking tray; the cupcakes Ah Ma and her were decorating. She takes the tray out of the fridge, and holds it above the bin, hesitant.

She hovers a cupcake over the mouth of the bin, on it is written/piped halfway in chinese "Birthday([U+751F][U+65E5][U+FF09]..". Instead of dumping it, she stuffs it into her mouth. Then she gorges herself with the cupcakes, one after another (it's too painful and great of a waste to throw them), and sobs. Coloured icing smears around her mouth.

Ah ma stands next to her and laughs.

AH MA

Meimei, what are you doing! If you eat everything there won't be enough for the party! Look, I got the sprinkles that we need!

(CONTINUED)

GIRL

Ah ma, what are you talking about,
this is not the time to have a
party.

AH MA

What are you talking about?

MEI QI

Ah Ma! Why did you have to choose
this timing to go? Why couldn't you
wait till after my 21st?

Chunks of cupcake drop out of her mouth as she talks,
sobbing.

AH MA

What are you talking about, I'm
right here!

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ah Ma wipes the tears off Mei Qi's face. She pulls
the birthday dress over Mei Qi's head, tucks Mei Qi's hair
behind her ear and gazes at her.

GIRL

Ah ma, you said you'd always be
there for me

(intercut) Ah Ma pulls up fairy lights from the bin and
wraps it around Mei Qi.

AH MA

But I have been. For 21 years Ah ma
has watched you grow up.

(intercut) They is estatic in the moment and twirl around
the room together.

GIRL

Ah Ma, don't go. Stay.

We see the girl twirling around alone (dimly lit room) in
her birthday dress and fairy lights.

INT. FUNCTION ROOM - NIGHT

(Slow motion) Balloons part, revealing a lavishly clad room. Girl stands in the middle of room, and turns to face the camera. She is all smiles, dolled up in a white gown and thick make-up. A floral arc (chrysanthemums) frames her from behind.

She mouths "Thanks for coming!". People around her clap and throw confetti.

EXT. FUNERAL PARLOUR - NIGHT

(Match cut) Girl sits (centre of the frame) at a round table, prying open peanut shells with a forlorn expression on her face. She wears a plain white shirt (standard funeral decorum). Chrysanthemum flowers form an arc in the background, flanked by condolence bouquets. Languid, solemn atmosphere as others encircle the casket in the background (vaguely visible) and sit dispersed around other tables in the parlour.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

(match-cut) Girl pours a cup of water for herself by the kitchen table. Her parents enter the kitchen, behind her.

MOTHER & FATHER
Happy Birthday to you...

Mei Qi turns around to see her Mother and Father enter the kitchen, singing, birthday cake cradled in hand.

AH MA (V.O.)
Mei Qi, today you are twenty one
years old.

Mei Qi breaks out into a smile.
I've watch you grow up into such a
sweet and beautiful girl

The three of them stand around the kitchen table; just as Ah ma and the girl had done so when they were baking. Mei Qi blows the candles, and cuts the cake.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Girl sits by her study table, and reads a birthday card.

AH MA (V.O.)
I'm so proud of you

She tacks it up on the board by her table.

AH MA (V.O.)
...Happy Birthday. Loving you
always, Ah Ma.

FADE TO BLACK.