

Cheng Nuo

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SCENE 1:

INT - AH MEI'S HOME: DINING AREA - NIGHT

Ah Mei sits quietly at her small round fold able dining table in her small studio apartment. It is neatly packed with old newspapers, a ceramic cup, a bottle of boiled water, a table mirror, a calendar and an old radio.

The table mirror is by the side, leaning against the stacks of newspaper. Ah Mei picks it up, parts the leg of the mirror and stands it on the table. She walks away from the table and into the kitchen behind her.

Ah Mei returns and places a bowl of rice and a fish delicacy on the table. She arranges the table neatly opposite where she originally sat.

She then returns to her seat, picks up a comb. She unbuns her tied scarce and thinning hair and begins to comb. Slowly combing her hair by the side downwards, looking into the mirror, and sporadically taking a glance behind her to see if there was anyone. Silence pierced the apartment.

Suddenly the silence breaks. MS MAY NG, Ah Mei's neighbor reprimands Ah Mei at the front door.

MAY NG

*Ah Mei! You always make my blood
boil! Can you don't put your
laundry outside my window? Can you
move it somewhere else? Ah Mei, I
know you are still awake! Wake up
and open the door!*

Ah Mei stops combing her hair. Looks at the door. Talks to herself and whispers.

AH MEI

*Go away lah you crazy bitch...
Leave me alone. You see, I so old
still want to bully me. Everyday
you come and harass me. Go away!*

Ah Mei hears bamboo poles and the laundry stands falling to the ground with somewhat inaudible grumbling of Ms Han.

MAY NG

*(Inaudibly/ Muffled)
Crazy old lady. Wash so many
clothes for what? You think this
one dhoby ah?*

INT - AH MEI'S HOME: KITCHEN SINK - NIGHT

Ah Mei throws the food away into the dustbin and tosses the dirty dishes into the sink and she begins to sob emotionally.

She heads back to the table, takes the calendar off the wall. She sobs in desperation, holding the calendar tightly in her hands, slams it on the table, takes a red marker and strikes off the day. We see "7th Month" written in Chinese. Caps the marker and throws the marker towards the front door.

AH MEI
Go and die you bitch!

Black.

SCENE 2:

EXT - AH MEI'S CORRIDOR - EVENING

Ah Mei opens the gates of her house. Once again, lifting the laundry basket out of the door and it finally lands with a thud as the plastic meets cement. She heaves, resting her hands on her knees. She stretches her back a little and massages her tired arms. Relentless, she resumes to hang her damp laundry. As she hangs her laundry, she whistles a familiar old Chinese love song (the chorus).

A young boy, JADEN, runs along the corridor. He teases Ah Mei as he passes her.

JADEN
Crazy old woman... Crazy old woman...

His mother, MS PHUA, 33, is Ah Mei's neighbour. She pulls Jaden away and fixes a forced smile towards Ah Mei and scurries away with her son. Ah Mei looks at the small commotion for a moment and then almost immediately tends to her laundry.

EXT - AH MEI'S CORRIDOR - EVENING

Her neighbor, peeps out through her window to see what Ah Mei is doing. She gets slightly agitated. May begins to whine and rant to her husband who is obviously nonchalant about it and ignores her.

(CONTINUED)

MAY NG

*Look at this old woman, so weird.
Hanging laundry in the evening
again... Throw away your husband's
clothes la! Don't bring bad luck to
the people around you!*

Ah Mei, oblivious to the whines, continues to patiently hang one damp laundry at a time. Another neighbour, MS LEE, walks past Ah Mei carrying a plastic bag and a papier mache car.

LEE

*Ah Mei, laundry again? A lot more
this time.*

AH MEI

Ah, yes, yes. How are you Ms. Lee?

LEE

*Doing alright, same old. Err... I'm
going to go pray and burn. You want
to -*

AH MEI

*Tsk. I tell you already, I don't
want to burn.*

LEE

*But Ah Mei, tonight is the final
night to burn already....*

AH MEI

*Aiyah. You want to go pray go... I
don't care. Go and leave me alone!*

Ms Lee is taken aback by Ah Mei's escalation of emotions. She strides away, shocked. Ah Mei resumes hanging her laundry. She mumbles something inaudibly.

AH MEI

*You see I so old already still want
to tell me to do things. Burn lah,
pray lah. For what? Ah Kow ah...*

SCENE 3:

INT - AH MEI'S HOME: DINING AREA - EVENING

Ah Mei walks back into the house, closes the gate and places the empty laundry basket in the kitchen. She takes her time in the kitchen and eventually walks out with a nail clipper and sits on her dining table.

She places the nail clipper on the table, picks up the radio and scans it again. This time, the song she whistled earlier starts to play on the radio. She pauses. Stares at the radio for a while. Ah Mei then stands up, places the radio back on the table. Hastily she takes an umbrella, opens it and straps the umbrella on the seat rest of the dining chair.

Ah Mei heads back to the dining table and begins to trim her fingernail very slowly and carefully. Strangely, only the fingernail on her left hand's pinkie finger is left uncut while the other fingers are already quite trim. The song continues to play and she hums along with the tune.

Suddenly, there is a seemingly inaudible chant outside her house. She looks up, frowns and scoffs. And hums even louder. Then time stands still.

It is quiet for a moment. A low voice from OS speaks.

VOICE

Ah Mei, I am back.

Ah Mei's eyes widens. She freezes. She looks in front of her, eyes bright and wide open - staring intently, brows seemingly frowning. Tears begin to swell, her face shakes, no longer able to control her muscles. A hand appears and reaches out to her cheeks. Her eyes softens, tears roll down her cheeks. She lovingly caresses the rough hand of an old man with her cheeks.

AH MEI

You are really home.

Ah Mei places her palm on the hand but only to realise it has disappeared. She opens her eyes, looks straight, looks down, and slowly moves her hands back to the table. A slight pause.

The hand reappears and it lands on Ah Mei's shoulders. She smiles. Ah Mei turns from her seat and rises. The house lights up magically. She slow dances with the mysterious old man.

VOICE

I have always been home.

(CONTINUED)

The voice sings to the last chorus of the song, in time and in tune with the song on the radio, with increasing volume. They resume their dance with much more passion. Soon after, the house begins to dim again and Ah Mei falls to her knees and sobs.

AH MEI

*You promised you won't go, you
promised!*

The song on the radio ends. Quiet.

SCENE 4:

INT - AH MEI'S HOME: DINING AREA - DAY

Ah Mei comes home from the market. She prepares fruits and some food on a bowl. Finally, she removes the calendar from the wall and replaces it with a picture of a man. She smiles.

END