

The Last Deer
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FADE IN

EXT. SMALL CITY - NIGHT

SUPER: CHINA, 1959.

DREAM SEQUENCE. The wind howls and the rain pounds down as a stooped elderly Chinese woman walks out of an ethereal bank of fog. The buildings are black indiscernible hulks as she moves past.

Her face, like the buildings, is blacked out but her eyes are wide open with fear. Her POV reveals a torrent of water rushing past carrying a log with it. A blinding spotlight suddenly shines down from the heavens on the log.

The woman moves into the water until it laps at her knees. Her POV follows the log as it veers toward her and then, suddenly, it rolls.

The woman SCREAMS. The log is not a log but a dead woman with her arms outstretched frozen in death. A dead little boy with his arms outstretched floats near the woman and then moves away. They wear similar scarves and there's a sense they should be together.

The woman SCREAMS again.

INT. LAOLAO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

SUPER: SAN FRANCISCO, THE PRESENT.

The apartment is neat but small. We move from the front door, past an urn on a table with a Joss Stick in front of it, past the kitchen where three bags of rice are stacked in a corner and into a bedroom as a woman SCREAMS.

A Chinese woman, MEI-HUA, also known as LAOLAO (grandmother), 80, jolts upright in bed and escapes her nightmare. She PANTS heavily and her face drips sweat.

INT. LAOLAO'S APARTMENT - DAY

Laolao is emotional as she sits on the floor of her dark closet. She pushes aside one box and pulls another toward her. She stares at the second box as her bent and wrinkled fingers tug at the yellowed tape that binds it shut.

INT. LAOLAO'S APARTMENT - DAY

Laolao carries one of the scarves from the nightmare, a dried up bouquet of flowers with an old pink ribbon and two 8x10 framed photographs, wrapped in brown paper, to a Nordstrom bag sitting on the sofa beside an open suitcase. She places the two wrapped photographs, scarf and dried flower bouquet inside the Nordstrom bag.

Laolao sadly looks at the urn. She reaches for it.

EXT. LAOLAO'S APARTMENT - DAY

Two Chinese women, PEARL, 50, and her daughter, JILL, 20, approach Laolao's apartment door.

JILL

Do you think Laolao will be ready?

PEARL

I doubt it. She's moving slower every day.

Jill is giddy.

JILL

I'm so excited.

Jill gently TAPS on the door. They hear a faint voice from the other side.

LAOLAO (O.S.)

It's open, come in.

JILL

I think she said, 'come in'.

Jill turns the handle and opens the door. Laolao sits on top of her suitcase on the floor near the door eating an apple with the Nordstrom bag in her lap.

LAOLAO

You are late, now we might miss the airplane.

EXT. BAYSHORE FREEWAY, HIGHWAY 101 - DAY

Jill, Laolao and Pearl ride in the backseat of a taxi as it passes cars on the freeway and eventually takes the SFO ramp turnoff.

INT. SFO - DAY

Laolao rides in the front seat of the electric transporter beside an African American DRIVER. She clutches her Nordstrom bag. Pearl and Jill ride in the back with the luggage.

INT. SFO, GATE - DAY

Laolao, Jill and Pearl sit in the gate waiting area. Laolao continues to clutch the Nordstrom bag.

PEARL

(to Laolao)

I appreciate the trip, but only two days notice...?

JILL

Thank you for taking us to China, Laolao, I always wanted to go there. How come you never went back before now?

LAOLAO

Because I had to raise your mother and work in our restaurant. Pearl, I sell restaurant two days ago, now I have money, so we go to visit and say good-byes I never had chance to say.

PEARL

I'm just saying that a little more notice would have been nice. But, mother, don't you wish father was alive to go with us?

Laolao taps the Nordstrom bag.

LAOLAO

He is with us. And, this not a perfect world... world does not always give notice.

Jill does an eye-roll.

JILL

Grandfather!... Waigong?! He's in that bag?! Oh, my God!

LAOLAO

What?! Jill, it's a good bag. He would not mind. (chuckling)

Laolao brings the bag to her ear.

LAOLAO (CONT'D)
I don't hear him complaining, do
you?

Jill cracks up.

LAOLAO (CONT'D)
You know your Waigong was a good
man. Hard worker... and very sexy.
(giggle)

Laolao stares out the window at the airplanes landing and
taxiing, and remembers as we go to --

FLASHBACK

EXT. SMALL CITY - DAY

SUPER: CHINA, 1957.

An open air market outside a mercantile bustles with
customers. All sorts of vegetables are displayed beneath
hanging plucked chickens and hogs.

MR. LEE and his WIFE work the hand-crank register as they
ring up purchases.

Laolao, as MEI-HUA, 18, carefully selects tomatoes and places
them into a small sack. She stands in line for Mr. Lee. He
looks inside the bag.

MR. LEE
Aah... my best tomatoes... very
good.

Mei-Hua hands Mr. Lee some money. He cranks the register and
deposits the money in the till.

In the bed of a large truck, QUON, 20, unloads bags of rice
to men on the ground. He's shirtless and sweaty on the hot,
sunny day.

LAOLAO (V.O.)
First time I ever see your Waigong,
I get the goose bumpies all over
me. What a handsome man. Big
muscles too.

When Quon sees Mei-Hua, he stops unloading the rice. She
coyly averts her eyes.

Quon jumps down from the truck bed and loads a bag of rice onto his shoulder. He looks for Mei-Hua but can't see her. He moves away from the truck and catches a brief glimpse of her leaving the mercantile area.

Quon brushes past people and hurries after her.

QUON

Hello!

Mei-Hua stops. She blushes and lowers her eyes but doesn't turn around.

Quon slows.

QUON (CONT'D)

I have seen you at Lee's market
many times.

Mei-Hua doesn't look at him as he approaches from the rear.

MEI-HUA

Really? I have never seen you.

Quon is cocky.

QUON

How can you say you have never seen
me when you do not look at me now
but yet you stop to talk with me?
Do you always stop to talk with
strangers you have never seen?

Mei-Hua whirls around to face Quon but after looking into his eyes, lowers hers.

MEI-HUA

I see you at the market because
your big truck stinks and makes me
ill.

QUON

My truck does not stink.

MEI-HUA

Then maybe it is you that makes me
ill.

Mei-Hua turns her back to him. Quon moves around to face her.

QUON

Would you stand here speaking to me
if I made you ill? I do not think
so.

She raises her eyes to meet his. Both smile. He hands her
the bag of rice.

QUON (CONT'D)

(nervously)

I am embarrassed, rice is all I
have to give you. I carried Mei
flowers with me for two weeks but
didn't see you.

MEI-HUA

I don't believe you.

EXT. MERCANTILE - DAY

The passenger door to the truck opens to reveal a bouquet of
dried pink and red flowers tied together with a dirty pink
bow lying on the floor.

Quon is embarrassed as he hands the bouquet to Mei-Hua.

QUON

I am sorry I did not pick fresh
ones today.

Mei-Hua touches her hand to his lips to quiet him. She looks
around, quickly plants a brief kiss on his cheek and rushes
away carrying the bag of rice and the wilted flowers.

Quon calls after her.

QUON (CONT'D)

Will you go with me to the park on
Sunday?

MEI-HUA

My family is very traditional, it
is up to them.

She glances back over her shoulder before disappearing around
the corner of a building.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Quon's truck enters the bustling park filled with blooming
cherry trees, swans on a postcard lake and families milling
around enjoying the sun.

Quon drives the truck, Mei-Hua is by the window and her FATHER sits between them.

The bed of the truck is filled with Mei-Hua's MOTHER and young COUSINS, all boisterously enjoying the outing.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Quon and Mei-Hua walk side by side slowly down a path toward a small bridge over the narrowest part of the lake.

They are followed in a line by Mei-Hua's father, mother and cousins.

Quon points to a mother duck being followed by her six ducklings and then points at Mei-Hua's family following them. Both LAUGH.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Quon is shirtless. He dips a sponge into a pail filled with water and soap suds. At the front of the truck he uses the sponge to scrub road grime off the grill.

Out of sight, Mei-Hua struggles on a small stepping stool to climb onto the truck bed.

QUON

Mei-Hua, where are you? I need the hose.

MEI-HUA

I am cleaning the truck bed.

Mei-Hua, devilishly, pulls excess hose onto the bed and sneaks toward the cab.

QUON

I need the hose to rinse off the soap. Hurry before it dries.

Mei-Hua peeks over the cab, hose ready to squirt Quon. But Quon isn't there. She looks around. No Quon.

QUON (CONT'D)

What are you doing?!

She's startled and whirls to see him standing at the back of the truck.

MEI-HUA

I was going to rinse off the soap
like you asked.

Mei-Hua looks demonic as she turns the hose on Quon and
squeezes the nozzle handle. Nothing.

QUON

(playfully)

You tried to squirt me!

MEI-HUA

I would never do that, Quon. Why
is nozzle broken?

QUON

I don't know.

CLOSE ON Quon's hands beneath the truck bed crimping the
hose.

Mei-Hua holds the nozzle to her face, Quon releases the
crimped hose and she squirts herself. He LAUGHS.

She feigns anger.

MEI-HUA

Why did you do this to me? I hate
you!

Quon can barely speak as he is doubled over in laughter.

QUON

What?! You were going to squirt
me!

Mei-Hua turns the hose on Quon, runs the length of the bed,
jumps off and chases/squirts him until the hose goes taut and
yanks her off her feet.

Mei-Hua lies in a heap. Quon stops laughing. Worried she's
hurt, he rushes to her.

QUON (CONT'D)

Mei-Hua. Mei-Hua, are you hurt?
Mei-Hua?

Her face is on the ground but we see a smile forming. She
rolls to her back and turns the hose on Quon. He pulls the
hose away from her and they lock eyes.

They kiss.

INT. MARRIAGE HALL - DAY

The hall is filled with wedding guests. Mei-Hua is dressed all in red and her head is covered by a red head-kerchief. Quon is dressed in red and wears an ornate red headdress.

Mei-Hua's head is bowed but her eyes sneak glimpses of Quon.

EXT. MARRIAGE HALL - NIGHT

The guests are noisy as they celebrate by throwing FIRECRACKERS into the air and drinking wine. They also shout congratulations.

INT. MARRIAGE HALL - NIGHT

BRIDAL CHAMBER. Still dressed in red, Quon sits on the ornate bed decorated in red. Mei-Hua stands before him dressed in her wedding outfit.

Quon rises and slowly approaches Mei-Hua. He lifts back her red head-kerchief. A tear runs down one of her cheeks. He wipes the tear away and looks at her with a quizzical expression.

MEI-HUA

It is a happiness tear, my husband.

Quon slowly and tenderly kisses her on both cheeks, neck and lips. She responds. His hands search for the clasp in the back.

A horn HONKS (O.S.)

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DAY

The truck drives down a lonely forest road dangling crepe paper and tin cans.

EXT. ZHANGJIAJIE NATIONAL FOREST PARK - DAY

The setting sun highlights the spectacular quartz mountain peaks standing like lonely, magnificent sentinels in the fog. Quon's truck drives past.

EXT. LESHAN GIANT BUDDHA - DAY

Mei-Hua sits on one of the Buddha's toes waving at Quon as he looks into the viewfinder of his box camera.

Mei-Hua pretends to SNIFF the toe and makes a face like it smells.

EXT. POTALA PALACE - DAY

The sun sets on the incredible palace, bathing it in an orange glow as Quon's truck drives away. Mei-Hua is asleep with her head rested against his shoulder.

EXT. RESTAURANT, ALLEY - DAY

Mei-Hua sits in the truck driver's seat and playfully HONKS the horn.

Quon is in the back of the truck unloading rice to two COOKS.

MEI-HUA
Hurry, my husband, I am hungry!

Quon LAUGHS and continues to unload.

QUON
(to the cooks)
I never knew how much a woman could eat.

A cook slides one bag of rice from the truck bed onto his shoulder.

COOK
My wife was the same when there were two of them. All the time eat.

The cook leaves Quon bewildered.

QUON
Two of them?

He gets it, jumps down from the truck bed, runs to the driver side and leaps onto the running board.

Mei-Hua playfully HONKS the horn again. Quon nervously asks the question.

QUON (CONT'D)
My wife, are you pregnant?

Mei-Hua LAUGHS.

MEI-HUA

Do I have to be pregnant to be hungry?

Quon shows his disappointment. The horn HONKS and Mei-Hua nods her head repeatedly.

MEI-H

Yes! I am pregnant and hungry!

Quon throws open the door and embraces her. She HONKS the horn and LAUGHS.

EXT. OPEN AIR MARKET - DAY

Two very pregnant women, Mei-Hua and LING, 20, walk through the market. They have idle chatter and laughter we can't hear as they select vegetables from the bountiful displays.

Quon unloads his truck in b.g. Mei-Hua turns and smiles at him. He smiles back as he throws rice bags to the men on the ground.

LAOLAO (V.O.)

Those were wonderful times. We had vegetables, meat, lots of rice and two wonderful friends, Si and Ling. Si also had a truck. And we had bags of rice stored in our home. You never know when you might need a bag of rice.

INT. QUON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ten bags of rice are stacked in a corner of the room. The old bouquet of dried flowers is tacked to the wall.

A sweaty and pained Mei-Hua is on the bed in the corner of the small room. A MIDWIFE, 40, attends to her as she GROANS, pushes and tries to deliver the baby.

Mei-Hua shouts at Quon.

MEI-HUA

I hate you! You never do this to me again, husband! Owwww!

Quon sits at the small table occasionally glancing toward Mei-Hua when she SCREAMS.

A baby CRIES.

The midwife hurriedly cleans the baby as Quon stands and inches toward the bed. The midwife hands the bundle up to Quon.

MIDWIFE

Please give welcome to your healthy baby.

Quon is in a state of shock as he takes the child in his arms. Tears are in his eyes and a broad smile brightens his face.

QUON

I have a baby!

Quon goes into an impromptu jig, spinning in a circle.

KNOCK!

Quon flings open the door to see SI, 20, also holding a bundled newborn.

SI

A daughter! Quon, my friend, I have a daughter!

QUON

They are almost twins!

SI

Yes, twins!

Si bursts into the room and runs to the midwife, Mei-Hua and Quon, displaying his daughter. He's exuberant. The two proud men dance and hug each other as Ling slowly enters the room and sits on the bed beside Mei-Hua, laughing and watching their husbands.

MEI-HUA

(to Ling)

I think I want to have another baby.

Another KNOCK!

When no one answers Mei-Hua struggles to the door and opens it. Her mother is the first to enter and embrace her. She wraps the scarf from the nightmare around Mei-Hua's neck. She then wraps a smaller matching scarf around the baby's neck.

Mei-Hua's father bows slightly to her as he enters the room followed by eight cousins, 4-12 in age.

The father briefly takes the baby before Mei-Hua's mother swoops in and snatches it. The baby is celebrated and passed from cousin to mother to cousin.

All surround the two babies. Mei-Hua leans back against the door and smiles as joy engulfs the room.

INT. QUON'S APARTMENT - DAY

SUPER: TWO YEARS LATER.

Mei-Hua puts a coat on her child, PING, now two. She wraps the scarf around the child's neck and then the matching scarf around her neck.

While she smiles at the child and makes baby noises, Mei-Hua has lost some of her zest.

NOTE -- The child's gender is not mentioned in the narrative.

There's only one bag of rice in the corner. Laolao is somber as she speaks in V.O.

LAOLAO (V.O.)

There was much rain and all crops were washed away. Times were tough for us. Our rice supplies were almost gone.

EXT. COUNTRY - DAY

Laolao speaks in a somber tone in V.O. as a heavy rain and fog nearly conceal Quon and his truck while he loads several pigs into the back.

LAOLAO (V.O.)

Farmers did not have the grain to feed their livestock so they sold many in the big cities and ate the rest. Rice was not being harvested because of the rain so your Waigong took the livestock to the markets. He wasn't paid much. Sometimes he was given a pig. But pigs do not pay for the gasoline and he had to sell his truck.

INT. QUON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment is dark except for the fire in the wood burning stove. Ping plays on the floor with a ball.

Mei-Hua ladles soup from a small kettle into a soup bowl. She is sad as she sets the bowl on the table in front of Quon.

He doesn't pick up the spoon. He sadly looks into the bowl. Mei-Hua takes his hand in hers and kisses it.

QUON

I don't know what to do...

Mei-Hua kisses his hand again, leans in and briefly kisses his lips.

MEI-HUA

You are our husband and father...
you will know the right thing for
us and that is what you will do.
I have been thinking that maybe I
could get a job doing laundry for
the rich family in the big house.

Quon is emphatic.

QUON

No! My wife minds our child, not
rich people's laundry.

MEI-HUA

That is your stupid pride! Just
until you get a job and the crops
grow once again.

QUON

No. No more talk about this.

Mei-Hua picks up Ping and feeds the child some soup. Quon is sullen as he pushes his soup aside and walks out of the apartment.

EXT. MERCANTILE - DAY

The skies are dark and the fog is thick. Heavy rain pounds down as Mei-Hua and Ling carry their bundled children while looking at the mostly bare shelves.

Only a handful of shoppers look at what produce is left. All of the shoppers are gaunt and sad in appearance.

MEI-HUA

My Quon heard of a job driving a
truck up to the North. He is a
good driver, I am sure they will
hire him.

Ling looks sadly at her friend before placing her hand on her back in a consoling gesture.

LING

There is no job, Si went there yesterday. The owner decided to drive the truck himself.

Their sad faces move among many sad faces.

EXT. MERCANTILE - DAY

Mei-Hua and Ling sit on a bench across from the mercantile as people come and go to the mercantile without buying from the meager stock.

MEI-HUA

My husband says the man who bought his truck told him that people are dying from starvation throughout China but not as bad in the big cities.

LING

We are lucky to have hardworking husbands. That will not happen to us.

MEI-HUA

I worry, don't you?

LING

Why should I worry? My breasts are filled with so much milk I can feed my family and yours... maybe entire city.

Both LAUGH. Mei-Hua's laugh is short and strained as she watches a grossly thin woman staring at the pitifully small selection of vegetables.

INT. QUON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mei-Hua sits at the table nursing Ping. Quon is despondent as he puts more wood into the stove's fire. A pot of water boils on the stove.

Quon takes a tin cup, dips it into the near-empty last bag of rice and comes out with an overflowing full cup.

QUON

There was no job driving a truck.
We need to eat less. Only one half
cup a day.

Quon tips the cup of rice and pours half the contents back
into the bag.

MEI-HUA

Things will get better, husband, I
am sure you will soon buy another
truck and deliver rice to Shanghai
again. I believe that.

QUON

I am sorry you married me...

Mei-Hua SHOUTS as she grabs him and embraces him.

MEI-HUA

I am not! I love you, Quon! Your
child loves you! It is not your
fault there is a famine and so much
rain.

His pain is too much. Mei-Hua studies him carefully. He
feels shame and moves away from her as a tear slides down one
of his cheeks.

EXT. MANSION - DAY

Mei-Hua sits nervously in the foyer of an incredible mansion.
Ping sits quietly on her lap.

A man SERVANT enters the room.

SERVANT

Follow me.

Mei-Hua stands and picks up Ping.

SERVANT (CONT'D)

Leave the child.

MEI-HUA

But, the child will cry.

The servant is impatient.

SERVANT

Then the child will cry but no
children allowed in the study.
Impossible.

A snobbish woman, XIAO-HONG, 50, enters the foyer.

XIAO-HONG
Do you wish a job?

Mei-Hua bows and then stands erect.

MEI-HUA
I do, Madaam.

XIAO-HONG
Then you must ween the child and
leave it here.

MEI-HUA
It is impossible to ween my child
because my milk is the only food I
have to give.

XIAO-HONG
What wages do you require?

MEI-HUA
Wages?

XIAO-HONG
Wages.

MEI-HUA
No wages, only food.

Xiao-Hong circles Mei-Hua and Ping, scrutinizing both of them.

XIAO-HONG
Is it a foolish person who places a
hungry rodent inside her pantry?
For it is the hungry rodent who
would be the first to steal food.

MEI-HUA
Only if the rodent is short-sighted
and is content with only one meal.

XIAO-HONG
But will the rodent be logical when
the other mouths it has to feed cry
out for more food?

Xiao-Hong approaches Mei-Hua and stands inches from her face.

XIAO-HONG (CONT'D)
I think not. Good day.

Xiao-Hong whirls and walks out of the foyer as the servant opens the door. Mei-Hua stands with tears in her eyes watching Xiao-Hong leave.

EXT. MERCANTILE - DAY

There are dark skies and fog as the rain pounds down.

Ling and Mei-Hua hold their babies close under one umbrella as they look at where the shelves filled with produce and other goods used to be. There is no food.

MEI-HUA

I applied for a job at the big house but was compared to a hungry rodent and thief.

Ling wraps a consoling arm around Mei-Hua.

A few people stare disbelievingly at the empty spaces once crammed with goods. Everyone wears a look of helplessness. The grossly thin woman is back. Her expression is desperate. She approaches people with her palm outstretched, begging. Everyone avoids her.

Mei-Hua and Ling turn and walk slowly through the downpour.

LAOLAO (V.O.)

That is when my friend Ling and I realized how bad things really were and how horrible they could become.

Ling and Mei-Hua slow when they see something contorted on the ground. The closer they get, the easier it is to see through the rain and fog.

LAOLAO (V.O.)

A body. We saw the first body that day.

They stand over the body of a middle aged women lying on her back with blank eyes looking upward through the rain toward the heavens.

EXT. QUON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Ling and Mei-Hua are disconsolate as they stand on the balcony looking out at the torrents of water rushing through the streets. They jostle their children as they speak loudly over the pounding rain.

MEI-HUA

We are new parents, this should be
a time of joy, not worry.

Ling's baby, MIN, laughs as she is jostled.

LING

It is good being a child, you do
not know the parents' worries.
Don't you wish to be a child again?
I do.

Mei-Hua nods 'yes'.

MEI-HUA

But even more I want my child to
live and be a child.

INT. QUON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The mood is somber as Mei-Hua and Ling sit on the edge of the
bed nursing their children in the dark room.

MEI-HUA

Ling, we must make a vow between
us.

LING

What kind of vow?

MEI-HUA

If one of us becomes dry, the other
will nurse both children for as
long as possible.

LING

It would be my honor to feed your
child.

MEI-HUA

And my honor.

LING

But, how long can one nurse if
there is no food for her to eat?

They sadly stare at each other.

MEI-HUA

Do you have rice?

Ling averts her eyes and slowly shakes her head 'no'.

LING

We have had no food since
yesterday.

The enormity of that statement hits Mei-Hua hard. She goes to the limp bag of rice in the corner and dumps all the contents onto the table.

Mei-Hua spreads out the rice and then draws a line down the middle. She pushes the rice on one side of the line toward Ling. Ling is humbled by the gesture and wraps her arms around Mei-Hua's shoulders.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Rain falls as the flickering flashlight gives minimum light to a young sapling.

Si holds the willow tree as Quon girds it with a knife at the five foot level.

Candles in the dark distance appear to magically float through the woods as their holders look for trees with bark.

Quon uses pliers to pull a strip of bark from the top to the bottom. He slices the bark strip off at the bottom and hands it to Si who quickly stuffs the bark under his coat while looking to make sure he isn't seen.

Not far away a flash of color races past.

Suddenly, Si chases after it. The flashlight dimly lights his path.

Si sprints through the dark. He dodges trees. His eyes dart as they seek another glimpse of the prey.

He comes to an abrupt stop and carefully scans the area. Another brief flash of color and the creature is gone.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Si and Quon walk out of the forest as other men search with their candles and some flashlights for trees with bark.

QUON

Don't make eye contact... be sad...
we found no bark. I hear men have
killed men for less.

SI

I would kill to save my family.

Two men with candles move close to Quon and Si, watching them closely. The men eventually leave and go back on the hunt for bark.

SI (CONT'D)
 (softly)
 I think I saw a deer.

Quon gives Si a quick glance and says nothing.

They continue to plod away from the forest and pass several corpses grotesquely twisted in death.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Rain pours down.

People resemble eerie spirits as they wander aimlessly through the rain and fog.

Si and Quon walk through the street. Quon grabs Si and comes to a stop.

SI
 What?

Quon nods in the direction of something three meters in front of them on the ground leaning against a utility pole.

QUON
 I think it's P'eng. He did not
 look well yesterday.

Si moves in for a closer look. He strikes a match and looks into the face of a grey corpse, mouth open wide and eyes looking into space.

Si blows out the match and walks away.

SI
 None of us look well.

More corpses are in the periphery.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Quon shines the flashlight on an elderly woman curled up dead in the fetal position at the bottom of the external stairs.

They step over the body and slowly climb the stairs. A gaunt CHILD, 6, barely has the strength to reach out her trembling upright palm in hopes that she'll be given a scrap.

Quon reaches inside his clothing and uses his knife to cut off a piece of bark. He hands it to the girl who slams the bark into her mouth and chews furiously while slowly bobbing her head in thanks.

They climb the stairs.

EXT. QUON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Quon has his hand on the doorknob to his apartment when Si leans in and WHISPERS.

Neither sees the elderly woman with black scarves covering her head and body lurking in the shadows. We learn she is XING-RU.

SI
(emphatically)
I saw a deer.

QUON
There are no deer, birds or
anything else left in that forest.
Everything has been killed and
eaten.

SI
Do you have bullets for your old
rifle?

QUON
I think two or three. You're
hungry, your eyes are playing
tricks.

Si walks toward the next apartment door.

SI
Tomorrow night bring your rifle. I
did see a deer.

Si walks to the next apartment door and enters. Quon enters his apartment. The shadow that is Xing-Ru flows out of the dark recesses and down the stairs.

INT. QUON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Quon goes to the wood burning stove. He opens a stove lid and sees a small fire burning. He drags a pot of water from a cold burner to the one with fire.

He takes the bark from inside his clothes, cuts it into small pieces and drops them into the pot.

There's movement on the bed against the far wall. Mei-Hua rolls over and looks at Quon.

MEI-HUA

Husband, did you find food?

QUON

Only bark.

Mei-Hua pulls back a blanket to reveal Ping suckling.

MEI-HUA

I can no longer fool our child. I am dry. What do we do? We have no food and we have no money. Ling still has milk and will feed our child in the morning. But then what do we do?

Quon is saddened but tries to project positive.

QUON

Si saw a deer tonight. We'll go out again tomorrow night with my rifle.

She nods, glances at a photograph on the opposite wall, closes her eyes and covers Ping with the blanket.

The photograph is of Quon, Mei-Hua and Ping in happier times. They are dressed in traditional clothing, Quon sitting on an elegant chair and proudly holding Ping on his lap while Mei-Hua stands at his shoulder.

INT. SI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Si washes his face in a basin while Ling removes a teapot from the stove. She holds Min on her hip. She places the teapot on the lone table then removes a small pot of rice from the stove.

LING

My husband, this is all of the tea. Mei-Hua shared the last of their rice. What will we do tomorrow?

Si expresses some hope.

SI

I saw a deer in the forest, maybe
it will be on our table tomorrow.

LING

I still have milk but Min continues
to lose weight, I worry about her.
She needs more than broth made from
bark.

SI

Don't worry, the deer will solve
our problems. We at least have
bark and some rice tonight.

LING

Xing-Ru visited me today...

SI

The shaman? She's a wugu, she
casts harmful spells. Why do you
listen to her? No one likes her.
I don't want her in our home, she
causes trouble.

LING

I cannot turn her away, she is my
father's cousin.

SI

Then when I see her I will turn her
away.

LING

She said that all dogs and cats in
the city have been eaten... even
the rats. She says she can help us
and bring us food.

SI

No more talk about that crazy
woman.

Ling pours some tea into a cup. She scoops rice into two
bowls. Si pushes his bowl toward Min.

SI (CONT'D)

Feed this to my Min.

LING

But you need your strength to hunt.

She pushes the bowl toward Si but he pushes it back.

LING (CONT'D)

You are a good father, our Min is so lucky. It will be better for us. After tomorrow it will be better. We will have the deer.

Si picks up the tea and savors a sip.

INT. SI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Si lies in bed next to Ling. Min is in a small crib near the foot of the bed.

Ling stares at Si.

LING

There are no better husbands than you.

Ling snuggles up to Si and turns his face toward her.

LING (CONT'D)

You give up your rice for your family... but you can't go hungry. Min and I cannot lose you. Please do this one thing I ask you out of so much love. My breasts are full... take your nourishment from me. There is so much milk, husband, Min will not miss it. Please.

Ling exposes one of her breasts and pulls Si's head down toward the nipple. He resists.

SI

No...

LING

There will still be plenty. I love you husband... you must take my gift to you.

Slowly his head moves down. He hesitates at the nipple before suckling. Ling smiles and closes her eyes as a few tears slip between her eyelids.

INT. QUON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mei-Hua and Ping are in the bed.

Quon is in his pajama bottoms and undershirt. He sits in a corner with the old Japanese Model 38 rifle across his lap. He rummages in a box, pulling out old socks and some trinkets before his hand emerges with a single bullet.

Showing his inexperience, Quon clumsily fumbles with the bullet before loading it into the breech. He rummages some more and comes up with the second bullet. He loads it.

INT. QUON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Quon rolls over in bed and looks at Mei-Hua. She's sleeping with Ping's head on her shoulder.

Quon exits the blanket and sits on the bed. Mei-Hua
WHISPERS.

MEI-HUA

I am sorry that I have no breakfast
to fix you.

Quon gives her a reassuring PAT on the shoulder.

QUON

I heard that rice will be delivered
today at the school field. I will
go and get our share.

MEI-HUA

Husband, I am so scared our child
may not be with us much longer.
Ping is so weak.

He knows she's right but all he can do is gaze into her sad eyes with his equally sad eyes.

Quon leans across the bed and gives Ping a long kiss on the cheek.

EXT. SI'S APARTMENT - DAY

Rain POUNDS down. Quon KNOCKS gently on the door. Si opens it slightly. He's been crying.

SI

Let me get my coat.

The door closes.

Si returns and exits the apartment as he wipes tears from his eyes.

QUON
What's troubling you?

They walk toward the stairs.

SI
My little Min used to always like to laugh when I kissed her feet. She would laugh until she gasped for breath and then she would kiss me on my mouth. That is what we did every morning since she was a year old. She did not do that today... she needs food to make her laughter.

QUON
I know... my child has also lost laughter. Mei-Hua fears it may be close to our child's time.

SI
Are we the lowest of fathers to let our children go down this path? How much more pieces of Min will I lose until I have lost all of her?

They stop. The little girl on the stairs the previous night lies across the stairs blocking them.

SI (CONT'D)
Please excuse us.

No response.

Quon squats down and removes a scarf from the girl's face, exposing her dead, opened eyes. He looks up at Si.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Quon carries the dead girl by her upper body while Si carries her feet as they descend the final stair. A torrent of water rushes past in the street. Several bodies float past.

They SHOUT over the rain and the rushing water.

SI
What should we do with her?

Quon looks to his left and sees the elderly woman from the night before being pushed by the water from a pole and into the main part of the torrent.

Si sees the same. Nothing needs to be said.

They carry the girl to the edge of the torrent and swing her back and forth twice before letting her go.

QUON

It is good she died here and will
always have this water in the
afterlife.

EXT. THE SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Rain pounds down. Hundreds of people fill the schoolyard surrounding an old truck.

Si and Quon are at the back of the crowd and stand on their tiptoes to see. The crowd surges and SHOUTS at the truck DRIVER and his two frightened LOADERS.

MAN 1

Our families are dying!

MAN 2

Give us food!

MAN 3

Where is the rice?!

The truck moves slowly through the crowd. The driver waves his hand to move the crowd while continually HONKING the horn.

Quon turns to a SLIGHTLY BUILT MAN.

QUON

They were supposed to bring food.

The man is angry.

SLIGHTLY BUILT MAN

Twenty bags! That is all they had!
The bags were torn and the rice was
eaten raw before it could hit the
ground! What will happen to us?!

Quon releases the man when he sees Si turn and stomp angrily away. In b.g. angry men rock the truck back and forth. The shouts grow in volume to an ear-splitting roar.

Quon catches up to Si.

SI

We are not waiting on anyone to
feed us... we will feed our
families ourselves!

Quon walks faster in order to keep up.

INT. MERCANTILE - DAY

The rain pounds on the tin roof. The dimly lit store is
packed with dry goods such as blankets, beds, ewers, mirrors,
doorknobs and saws.

Si is at the counter holding a watch in the face of the
owner, Mr. Lee. Quon nervously looks on.

SI

You know me Mister Lee... and you
knew my mother and father. My
daughter Min is starving... my wife
Ling is weak.

MISTER LEE

I have no food to give you. A mob
raided my store and took
everything. My family is also
starving. I have no rice or seed.

SI

Three bullets are all I want for
this watch. It is worth three
bullets.

Mr. Lee takes the watch in his hand and scrutinizes it. He
abruptly hands it back to Si.

MISTER LEE

It's only worth one. Very cheap.
Why do you need bullets?

SI

I already have two... I need three
to kill my entire family. We will
not starve to death.

MISTER LEE

But you ask for three which would
leave you with two bullets left
over.

Si looks at Quon.

SI

For my friend and his wife.
They've already lost their child,
otherwise I would ask for four.

A glint of sympathy and Mister Lee reaches beneath the counter and comes up with three bullets. He hands the bullets to Si while putting the watch into his pants pocket.

MISTER LEE

Go. May your last journey be a
good journey.

Mr. Lee bows, turns and walks into the office behind the counter where his wife and children sit watching.

EXT. MERCANTILE - DAY

Rain continues to pound down. Si is driven as he strides ahead of Quon.

QUON

Why did you trade your watch for
the three bullets? And why did you
say my child has died?

SI

Sympathy to get more for the watch.
Two bullets are for practice to see
if you and gun shoot straight.
Three are to be shot at the deer...
I figure you will miss at least
one, maybe two.

A body is carried past in the swift torrent.

INT. QUON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Mei-Hua sets Ping standing on the floor. She's apprehensive.
Ling holds Min.

Ping doesn't have the strength and PLOPS down on the floor.
Ling gives reassurance to Mei-Hua.

LING

The child's just tired.

Ling sets Min standing on the floor. She immediately PLOPS
down on her rear. Both children reach for their moms and
begin to CRY.

Mei-Hua frantically scoops up Ping. She's CRYING as she turns to Ling.

LING (CONT'D)
We're losing our babies. What are we going to do?!

MEI-HUA
We'll be brave and wait for the deer.

The two women come together in an embrace with their children between them.

EXT. QUARRY - DAY

The monsoon-like rain continues and the eerie fog creeps in. Quon and Si are in a large rock pit open at one end. A tree branch leans against the sheer rock wall one hundred meters on the other side of the pit.

Quon stands with the rifle to his shoulder as he looks down the barrel through the open sights. His POV reveals rain running down the sights as the rifle barrel sways on and off the targeted tree branch.

BOOM!

Gravel explodes one meter to the left of the branch.

SI
(sarcastic)
Our deer can sleep easy tonight.

QUON
(defensively)
I never shot this before, it was my father's.

SI
We only have four bullets left and I no longer have a watch to trade for more. You have to do better.

Quon lies down on the wet rock, positions himself, aims the rifle, looks through the sights and, BOOM!

Water and rock explode one meter in front of the branch.

SI (CONT'D)
Your shot is in line with the target. Better, but not good enough.

EXT. QUON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Mei-Hua leans against the door while holding Ping. She's looking out at the rain and torrents rushing through the streets.

She watches a long black car wend its way through the flooded streets and stop at the apartment stairs.

The man inside the car waves her to him. She ignores the overtures.

The man gets out of the car. He's the servant from the big house. He SHOUTS up to her.

SERVANT

My master has a job for you.

Mei-Hua smiles. She's excited. She walks with Ping to the top of the stairs. The servant opens the rear door to the car exposing a flat box filled with tomatoes, lettuce, apples and peaches.

She walks down the stairs and looks at the bounty. She CRIES out of happiness.

MEI-HUA

We need that food so bad. We are starving. What about my child?

SERVANT

You may bring your child.

MEI-HUA

(anxiously)
When do I begin my new job?

SERVANT

Now.

Mei-Hua nervously looks around.

MEI-HUA

I do not know... My husband has gone to the forest, I should ask him.

SERVANT

You will be home before he is... I am sure.

Mei-Hua's eyes lock on to the flat of vegetables and fruit. She climbs onto the rear seat next to it.

The Servant closes the door and then enters the driver's door and starts the motor.

MEI-HUA

Sir, my child is very hungry could you spare us an apple?

SERVANT

You want to be paid before you have done your job? Very irregular.

MEI-HUA

It is for my child.

SERVANT

(gruffly)

One apple. I will watch so you do not take more.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The rain continues to pound and the fog gives an eerie look to the land.

On the outskirts of the city, Si and Quon walk past dead people in the street and groups of emaciated men with hollow eyes wandering, looking for something to eat. We see the tip of the rifle barrel barely sticking out beneath Quon's coat.

Quon stops and looks through the falling rain and fog at the dark forest looming directly in front of them. He's worried. This is it. Live or die.

INT. LONG BLACK CAR - DAY

The Servant continuously eyes Mei-Hua in the rearview mirror and gives her contemptuous looks.

In the back seat, holding Ping, she takes an apple, wipes it on her clothing and takes a small bite. She removes the piece from her mouth, takes off the peel, breaks it in two and inserts a piece of the apple into Ping's eager mouth.

The car stops as Ping voraciously chews the piece of fruit.

SERVANT

We are here.

EXT. MANSION - DAY

Mei-Hua carries Ping into the grand foyer as the servant holds the door open. The foyer is dimly lit.

Xiao-Hong is dressed in black as she enters the foyer. She is curt.

XIAO-HONG

Give your child to my servant and
come with me.

Mei-Hua is reluctant.

MEI-HUA

The child will cry if I am gone
long.

XIAO-HONG

You will not be long... give him
the child.

Mei-Hua hesitates.

XIAO-HONG (CONT'D)

Do you want the food? If not, then
leave. Now!

Mei-Hua reluctantly hands Ping to the servant.

XIAO-HONG (CONT'D)

Follow me.

Xiao-Hong opens another door and leads Mei-Hua out of the foyer.

INT. MANSION HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The moment the door closes behind Mei-Hua, she hears Ping's CRY (O.S) echoing down the hall.

When Mei-Hua slows, Xiao-Hong grabs her by the wrist and pulls her down the long hallway.

Every step is painful for Mei-Hua as Ping's CRIES grow louder. She slows but is yanked further down the hall to a door.

Xiao-Hong opens the door and drags Mei-Hua inside the dimly lit room. The drapes are closed. A small flickering candle is on a table in the corner of the room near the large bed.

XIAO-HONG
Take your clothes off.

MEI-HUA
I will not.

XIAO-HONG
Then your family will starve. It
will be on your conscience.

MEI-HUA
Why must I be naked to do your
laundry?

Xiao-Hong LAUGHS loud and boisterously. Ping CRIES.

XIAO-HONG
Do my laundry?! You naive girl! I
brought you here for my husband.

Mei-Hua realizes what's going on and slowly backs away.

MEI-HUA
No. I am a married woman and a
mother.

XIAO-HONG
And it is your responsibility to
feed your husband and child... I am
giving you that chance. Remove
your clothes!

A side door opens and the fat HUSBAND enters the room wearing
only a monogrammed towel wrapped around his waist.

He slowly walks around Mei-Hua undressing her with his eyes.
He stops in front of her. He likes her. He smiles
lasciviously. Ping SCREAMS.

He reaches out and removes her coat. She's terrified and
backs away. He takes her by the blouse, yanks and POPS open
the buttons. Tears flow down her cheeks.

He clumsily removes her bra, letting it drop to her side. He
drops his towel and pulls her close.

INT. MANSION BEDROOM - DAY

Blankets cover Mei-Hua and the husband. He's on top of her
sweating, panting and moaning as he moves. She lies on her
back as tears pour down her cheeks.

Ping SCREAMS from the foyer.

INT. MANSION BEDROOM - DAY

The husband is exhausted as he lies on his back in the bed. He ogles Mei-Hua as she fastens her bra. She is ashamed.

HUSBAND

I will send my car for you again.

Mei-Hua quickly finishes dressing and walks out of the room.

EXT. MANSION - DAY

Xiao-Hong holds the door open for Mei-Hua. Eyes on the ground, Mei-Hua goes to the black car. The servant holds open the rear door. Ping is on the back seat CRYING.

Mei-Hua hesitates before entering. Her POV reveals Ping with arms outstretched but not the flat of fruit and vegetables.

She turns and stares into the servant's eyes.

SERVANT

You thought that you would have everything?! (laugh) You were always only going to get one apple. Please get in and I will take you and the child home.

Mei-Hua enters the car, holds Ping and CRIES.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

The deluge of rain increases in ferocity and pounds down upon the bodies scattered through the street.

In the distance, wisps of fog move in. Coming in with the fog is the bent figure of Xing-Ru, slightly dragging her left leg behind her. She's wrapped in layers of coats and soggy blankets. An unobtrusive, stained gunny sack dangles from a filthy cord around her waist.

Her deep black eyes occasionally peer out from under her wraps and stare at a body, analyzing it and then moving on.

A slight movement at the moment of death from a woman on the ground catches Xing-Ru's eye. She hobbles to the body and stands over it. She unsympathetically watches the final death throes as the fog moves in and engulfs them both.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Quon and Si squat down behind some brush.

QUON

Is this the place?

Si scans the area with a dim flashlight. The beam stops on the sapling they de-barked the night before.

SI

I'm certain. See the small tree?

Si sits on a folded paper he takes from his coat. Quon kneels and points the rifle outward. He rests it on the bush.

Their expressions are grim as their eyes search the darkness.

INT. QUON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ping and Min lie on the bed. Ling comforts Mei-Hua as the women embrace.

LING

You did what was right trying to save your family. You have done nothing wrong. The rich people took advantage of your love for Quon and Ping... may they go to hell.

(beat)

I would have done the same.

EXT. QUON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

It's extremely dark as the bent silhouette that is Xing-Ru KNOCKS softly on the door. There's a subtle fullness to the once limp gunny sack.

She KNOCKS again.

INT. QUON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mei-Hua, holding Ping and wearing the matching scarves, opens the door. Ling sits on the bed holding Min.

No one is outside. Only darkness. As Mei-Hua starts to shut the door, the dark presence of Xing-Ru steps into view. Her appearance is grotesque, devious with darting, scheming eyes.

XING-RU

Please invite me in to your home.

Mei-Hua hesitates and, when she looks back at Ling, Xing-Ru enters the apartment.

INT. QUON'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Xing-Ru removes the gunnysack from her shoulder and drapes it over a chair before she sits. She deliberately looks at Mei-Hua and then Ling.

XING-RU

You both do not look well.

LING

We are fine, our husbands are hunting a deer and we will eat soon.

Xing-Ru CACKLES.

XING-RU

A deer?! All of the animals are dead. They are fools to waste their time and energy they do not have. And your babies? Are your babies well?

Ling and Mei-Hua nod 'yes'. Xing-Ru beckons with her hands to bring the children close.

XING-RU (CONT'D)

Show them to me.

Ling stands and shows Min to Xing-Ru. Xing-Ru pushes the blankets aside and pinches Min's thigh.

XING-RU (CONT'D)

She's lost much weight. Bring that one to me.

Xing-Ru motions for Mei-Hua to bring Ping to her. Mei-Hua pushes aside the scarf and opens the blankets but Xing-Ru doesn't touch the child.

XING-RU (CONT'D)

Your child is dying.

Mei-Hua quickly re-wraps Ping.

MEI-HUA

You do not know that! You cannot
look at a child for a moment and
say it is dying! Leave my home!
Now! You go!

Mei-Hua rushes to the door and holds it open.

XING-RU

Why banish me from your home when I
have something that will save your
child's life?

Xing-Ru removes the gunnysack from the chair and holds it on
her lap. Mei-Hua softens and moves close.

MEI-HUA

What do you have?

XING-RU

Meat.

Ling stands and moves close to Xing-Ru while holding Min.

LING

You have meat? Where did you get
meat? No one we know has meat.

Xing-Ru stands and limps her way to the stove. She slides
the pot on the stove closer to her. She lifts the lid and
looks at the water sloshing inside.

XING-RU

Meat is everywhere if you know
where to look. Would you like me
to make you beef broth? Before it
is too late for your children?

Ling reaches inside the gunnysack and pulls out a forearm
with the hand still attached. She drops it and SCREAMS.

Mei-Hua and Ling are horrified as they back away from Xing-
Ru.

MEI-HUA

You are a cannibal!

XING-RU

Cannibal?! (cackle) Yes. But I am
neither hungry or starving to
death. This is your children's
chance at life. I am not the only
one in our city eating the dead.
Think about it carefully.

There's something about Ping that draws Mei-Xing's attention.

XING-RU (CONT'D)

Give me that child.

Mei-Hua backs away. She looks down at Ping. The child wears a smile. She kisses the child on the cheek. She has a curious expression. She kisses the child again. Her expression turns to one of horror.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Quon and Si sit behind the brush in the rain. Quon's rifle rests atop the brush.

Quon SHIVERS and raises his coat collar to cover his neck.

They speak in WHISPERS.

QUON

This is a waste of time. You never saw a deer.

SI

I know what I saw.

QUON

If you did see the deer, how much did it weigh? Is there enough for both our families?

SI

It weighed ten kilos.

Quon relaxes and sits back on his haunches.

QUON

Both families could eat for a week on five kilos.

SI

It has been so long since I tasted deer.

QUON

My Mei-Hua will make it last by creating a stew. Then she'll boil the bones into a broth and we'll have that for many days. She is a wonderful cook.

Suddenly, Si touches Quon.

QUON (CONT'D)

What?

Si takes his dim flashlight and shines the weak beam toward a tree. Nothing.

SI

I thought I heard something. Tell me more about the broth, my stomach feels full thinking about it.

QUON

And, if you eat your share of the deer too fast, we will share our broth with you. That is what good friends do.

The men go silent and sad.

SI

What if there is no deer?

QUON

I don't know what I will do.

SI

Did you believe Mr. Lee when he said that he had no food?

QUON

No. Did you see his family in the office? None of them have ever missed a meal. The children were fat, as was his wife.

SI

He lied to us, but I would lie too.

QUON

What kind of food do you think they are eating?

SI

Rice. Maybe they have tomatoes. Remember all the fine tomatoes he used to bring in from the West? I bet he has some. If I had tomatoes I would can them and we would eat forever.

A noise. Both tense up. They peek over and through the brush. POV reveals a man slowly walking past. They watch as he disappears into the darkness to the right.

QUON
Water chestnuts.

SI
Water chestnuts?

QUON
Water chestnuts. Mr. Lee always
sold the best and biggest ones.

SI
Do you think he is canning those
with the tomatoes?

QUON
Maybe. I want my child to grow up
and have a store just like Mr.
Lee's... and never be hungry like
us.

SI
When we were working we drove our
trucks all over China. It is such
a great freedom we had. Mr. Lee is
stuck in the same place every day
living like a caged rodent.

QUON
A caged rodent but a rodent who is
never hungry. A fat rodent.

SI
I would take my freedom and life on
the road to being caged and full of
food.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

The rain continues to fall. Quon and Si are asleep sitting
with their heads facing downward.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

A Chinese water deer slowly emerges from the darkness
sniffing and biting at a small piece of bark left on a tree.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Si awakens, YAWNS and looks around. He wipes the rain from
his face and stares out into the dark forest. He sees
something. He leans forward, straining his eyes.

Si slowly reaches for the flashlight. He turns it on and the dim beam settles on the deer chewing on a tree's bark. The animal's eyes glow red.

Si gently shakes Quon awake. Quon looks at Si as Si points over the brush toward the deer.

Quon readies himself behind the rifle and aims.

SI
(whisper)
Have good aim. Our families are
depending on you.

QUON
Why do you tell me that? You make
me more nervous.

Quon wipes the rain from his face and blinks as he stares down the open sights. His POV reveals the cute deer innocently looking back at him.

Quon shifts his weight, gets comfortable and readies to shoot. His POV reveals the barrel of the rifle moving back and forth almost uncontrollably. His breathing is rapid, almost gasping for breath. The rifle sways even more under the influence of "buck fever".

Si grabs the rifle and steadies it. Quon nods appreciatively, deep breathes, aims and FIRES.

The deer doesn't move.

SI
You missed.

QUON
If I had missed he would have run
away. He's still there. Maybe
he's dead.

SI
He can't be dead, he is still
chewing bark.

QUON
Nerves do that when you are dead.

SI
He is alive, shoot again.
(grumbling)
Nothing chews when it is dead.

Quon aims and FIRES.

The deer leaps into the air.

QUON
I got him!

SI
You missed again! Give me the gun!

They're desperate. Si grabs hold of the rifle but Quon pulls it from his grasp. Quon stands and aims as the deer slowly moves away. BOOM! Another shot and the deer runs.

Quon is frantic as he breaks cover and runs after the deer. He brings the rifle to his shoulder and awkwardly FIRES an impossible shot while on the run. BOOM!

Quon runs after the deer, chased by Si.

SI (CONT'D)
You are a lousy shot!

Quon stops and PANTS for air. Si PANTS as he joins him.

SI (CONT'D)
I knew you were a bad shot. You waste all our bullets and we have nothing. No deer. Nothing. What do our families eat tonight, your rifle?

Quon is beside himself as he SQUEALS and pushes Si away. Quon runs back in the direction he came.

Si watches Quon run and then shines the fading flashlight beam on the ground.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Quon CRIES as he stumbles and lurches his way through the dark. He trips over brush and falls to the ground.

Lying on the ground he looks at the rifle. He grabs it and angrily tosses it ten feet away.

He stares at the rifle.

Slowly he gets to his feet and goes to the rifle. He picks it up and studies it. He slowly puts the barrel into his mouth.

Quon pulls the trigger. CLICK! It's empty. His shoulders heave as he CRIES. A complete failure at everything, he drags his rifle as he walks and then runs out of the trees.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Quon hurries through the rain swollen streets. He rushes past a couple dead bodies on his way to his apartment building. He's completely distraught when he stops and leans against a building.

Quon wipes his face and looks out through the rain at a glowing white light coming from the mercantile. He stares angrily at the light.

EXT. MERCANTILE - NIGHT

Quon is a shadowy figure moving along the mercantile wall past window after window that has been carefully sealed with dark curtains or tar paper.

Moving toward the last window, Quon hears children LAUGHING. At the last window he discovers a small tear in the tar paper. His POV, through the tear in the paper, reveals a little GIRL, 8, happily raising her chop sticks to her mouth with a large clump of rice.

INT. MERCANTILE - NIGHT

The office behind the cashier counter is dimly lit with a kerosene lamp. Mr. Lee sits at the table with his wife, the girl and a SON, 10. They are LAUGHING as they dip their chopsticks filled with rice into bowls of soup filled with vegetables and egg noodles.

The son stops laughing.

Mr. Lee notices and turns in the direction the boy is looking. Quon bursts out of the shadows and points the rifle at Mr. Lee.

Quon is raging.

QUON

My family is starving, my child is almost dead...

MR. LEE

Your friend said your child already dead. Go away. We have done nothing to you. Leave my home!

Quon shoves the rifle barrel against Mr. Lee's chest.

The wife stifles a SCREAM with her hands.

QUON

You have so much but lie and say
you have nothing.

MR. LEE

I have to care for my family. That
is what you would do. I know you
would! You do not think so now but
that is what you would do.

Quon dips his hand into the steaming bowl of rice and scoops
a handful into his pocket. He WINCES from the scalding pain
but does it again.

MR. LEE (CONT'D)

Now you go!

Rice sticks to Quon's hand as he grips the rifle and pokes
Mr. Lee.

QUON

Open your safe.

MR. LEE

You are not hungry, you are a
thief!

Another poke of the rifle.

QUON

Open it.

Mr. Lee goes to the safe. He kneels down and turns the dial.
He stops, cranks down on the handle and opens the safe door.

QUON (CONT'D)

Sit with your family.

MR. LEE

You are nothing but thief!

Mr. Lee SPITS on the floor in Quon's direction.

Mr. Lee returns to the table and his family. The wife and
daughter quietly CRY. The son rushes to sit in Mr. Lee's
lap.

Quon moves papers aside until he sees the stacks of yen. He
grabs a stack of yen and counts out a bunch on top of the
safe. He stuffs the counted money into a pocket and returns
the rest to the safe.

QUON

I take only the value of the rifle,
nothing more. So that you know I
am not a thief.

Quon places the rifle atop the safe.

QUON (CONT'D)

The rifle is yours now. It almost
shoots straight.

Quon BOLTS past the stunned family and out the back door.

Mr. Lee runs to the safe, grabs the rifle and follows.

WIFE

Husband, no! He gave us rifle for
money!

At the back door Mr. Lee brings the rifle to his shoulder,
CLICKS off the safety, looks through the open sights as Quon
runs through the heavy rain into the night and pulls the
trigger. CLICK. Empty.

Breathing fast, Mr. Lee rushes toward the counter and fumbles
with the bullets that are stored beneath the register. He
loads a couple bullets, rushes to the door and looks out.
Nothing moves except a couple dead bodies pushed by the
water.

He closes the door.

INT. QUON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Xing-Ru is seated on the ground with her back against the
wall. Mei-Hua and Ling stand over her. They are raging mad.

The two babies are wrapped in blankets, as if dead, on the
bed.

Ling, Mei-Hua and Xing-Ru are startled when Quon bursts
through the door letting in wind and rain. He's frantic.
He grabs Mei-Hua by an arm and drags her to the bed. He
thrusts a baby into her arms. She almost drops it.

Laolao speaks in solemn tones in V.O.

LAOLAO (V.O.)

I had never seen Quon look like
that... he looked crazy. I was so
scared. Maybe he knew my dark
secrets.

Quon spins her around to face him. The baby utters a slight SQUEAL that only Mei-Hua hears. The sound stuns her.

QUON
Bring only what you and the baby
need... hurry!

Quon releases her, runs to the door and looks outside. Mei-Hua is overwhelmed. She opens the child's blanket and holds it to her ear. Her heart pounds. She's not sure if the child is breathing. Did she imagine the squeal?

Quon grabs a handful of diapers and thrusts them into her stomach. He grabs her coat and slings it over her shoulders.

LING
What is wrong? Where is my
husband?

Quon ignores Ling.

QUON
Hurry, wife, hurry!

Mei-Hua stuffs the diapers inside her coat.

QUON (CONT'D)
Hurry!

MEI-HUA
What is wrong with you?! Where are
you taking us?!

Mei-Hua heads for the door but turns back. Quon grabs her and forces her toward the door but she breaks away. She's CRYING as she snatches the photograph of her, Quon and Ping off the wall. She grabs the old bouquet off the wall.

MEI-HUA (CONT'D)
I must have these, husband!

He's like an enraged animal as he tugs her toward the door.

EXT. QUON'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Rain pounds down. The door opens and Quon exits first, looking in all directions. Mei-Hua follows, holding the baby tight to her chest and under her coat.

Quon grabs her and rushes her to the stairs.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Quon holds Mei-Hua's arm tight as he leads her through the streets and scattered bodies. She tries not to look at the grotesquely frozen forms but her eyes continue to go back to them.

She desperately glances at the baby in her arms.

She walks past a dead woman and sees the small form of a male toddler lying dead on its back without a blanket. She WAILS.

Quon grabs her but she sits down and continues to WAIL. He drags her over the soggy ground while his eyes frantically search the darkness looking for Mr. Lee.

QUON

We don't know them! What is wrong with you?! We have to go!

MEI-HUA

No! I must do something, husband!
I will disobey you! Let me go!
What if this is our child?! Let me go! It needs its mother!

QUON

It's dead!

MEI-HUA

But its soul lives!

Quon is shocked by Mei-Hua's ferocity and releases his grip. She stands and slowly removes a blanket from her child.

With a religious solemnity and ritualism, Mei-Hua carefully wraps the dead child in the blanket and places it within the stiff arms of its dead mother.

Mei-Hua stands over the mother and child and brings her hands together in prayer. Quon sees the tears flowing down Mei-Hua's cheeks. He gently tugs at her arm and softly speaks to her.

QUON

We must go. You have done what was right. But, please, my wife, we must go.

Mei-Hua slowly moves away from the scene constantly glancing back at the dead mother and child.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN - NIGHT

Rain comes down hard. Quon wraps his arm around Mei-Hua's shoulders in a protective posture as he rushes her past the dead and the near dead. People's sunken, hollow eyes follow them as they jog through the apocalyptic setting.

Quon WHISPERS as his eyes scan every stranger, looking for a potential threat.

QUON
Our child?

Mei-Hua doesn't know. Her expression though is one of deep guilt.

The child makes a weak cry. Quon is concerned and slows to a walk. Mei-Hua's face has a sign of hope. She tugs at the blankets and exposes the child's face.

QUON (CONT'D)
My pocket... there is cooked rice.

Mei-Hua looks up at Quon.

QUON (CONT'D)
Put rice into the baby's mouth
before it's too late. Hurry.

Mei-Hua reaches a hand into a pocket and brings out a handful of sticky white rice.

As they walk, Mei-Hua opens the blankets and places some rice on the toddlers lips. She gently forces the rice into the mouth and manipulates the child's jaws, helping it chew.

Quon can't see the child due to the blankets, and it is being shielded by Mei-Hua.

Panic overtakes Mei-Hua. Is the rice too late? She looks up at Quon and back to the baby. Finally, the child's jaws and lips move in a chewing motion.

Mei-Hua EXHALES in relief. Quon tugs at her arm and they move faster until they are in an exhausting trot.

MEI-HUA
(breathless)
Husband, where are you taking us?

QUON
To Shanghai. I have a friend I
delivered the harvest rice to.

They disappear into the downpour and incoming fog.

EXT. ROADSIDE - NIGHT

A small abandoned hut with a crumbled front wall sits beside the road. Quon leans against an inside wall watching the rain. He sees two bodies in a barren field on the other side.

Mei-Hua and the child sleep together on the floor near trash and broken plates.

Quon picks up the child and a fresh diaper from a small stack of diapers. He removes his coat and sets it on the floor. He sets the baby on it and, as he begins to unwrap the child, Mei-Hua explodes off the floor.

She snatches the baby into her arms and holds it protectively away from Quon. She quickly re-wraps it.

MEI-HUA

No, husband... I clean baby... that is my job. You feed us and take us to Shanghai. That is your job.

Quon is dumbfounded. He watches as Mei-Hua lays down, deliberately positioning herself between Quon and the child in a protective fashion.

QUON

I apologize for taking you from our home.

MEI-HUA

There is no food there. You are right to take us to where there is food. When the famine is over we will return.

QUON

The rice in my coat we now all eat, I stole from Mr. Lee. I am ashamed. I am a thief.

MEI-HUA

You had to feed your family, Mr. Lee will not miss a small amount of rice.

Quon plops down beside her. He holds up a handful of yen.

QUON

I'm sure he contacted the
authorities. We can never go home.
They must be searching for me.

Quon lies down with his head on Mei-Hua's shoulder. He and
the child both seek her comfort.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Air China flight 7209 for Shanghai,
China is now ready for boarding.

INT. AIRPORT GATE - DAY

Jill aids Laolao toward the skyway, followed by Pearl.

JILL

Dark secrets?! Can you tell me
what they were?

Laolao looks guilty as she glances back over her shoulder at
Pearl who carries the Nordstrom bag and her own carryon.

LAOLAO

One secret was the rich man who
took my body for an apple.

JILL

You were a prostitute for an apple.

LAOLAO

A grape. I would have been a
prostitute for a grape if I thought
it would save my family.

Jill wraps her arm around Laolao.

JILL

I would've done the same.

LAOLAO

Be patient, you will know all my
secrets by the time we reach
Shanghai.

JILL

Didn't seeing all those bodies
creep you out?

LAOLAO

Bodies were a way of life during
the great famine.

(MORE)

LAOLAO (CONT'D)

When you see bodies every day it is hard to be what you call "creeped out".

They hand their tickets to the ticket agent and begin the walk down the ramp.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Jill has the window seat, Laolao the middle seat and Pearl the aisle. A STEWARDESS hands blankets and pillows to Laolao, Pearl and Jill.

Laolao looks at Jill for clarification.

LAOLAO

Are these free?

JILL

Yes, Laolao, they give them to you in case you want to take a nap.

LAOLAO

Nice blanket... do I have to give back?

Jill CHUCKLES.

JILL

Yep. At the end of the flight... unless you can stuff it in your Nordstrom bag with Waigong.
(laughs)

Satisfied, Laolao spreads out the blanket with Pearl's help and props up her head with the pillow.

PEARL

Comfy, Mother?

Laolao nods her assent and smiles.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

The plane accelerates, Laolao grabs onto Pearl with one hand, closes her eyes and hides her face behind Jill's back.

The plane lifts off. Laolao says a short PRAYER in Chinese.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Stewardesses are busy in the cabin distributing meals and drinks. Laolao sits with a blanket across her lap and pillow behind her head. She takes a piece of apple from the Nordstrom bag, unwraps it and begins to eat.

LAOLAO

Much better than boat we took from Shanghai.

JILL

Didn't they feed you on the boat?

LAOLAO

You must be joking. No food on boat, only what we have. And, we did not have much.

FLASHBACK

EXT. DESOLATE ROAD - NIGHT

It's a light rain as Quon leads the way followed by Mei-Hua carrying the baby. Both are tired and struggling.

MEI-HUA

Husband, I must rest.

Quon comes back to her and reaches for the child.

QUON

I will take the child and make it easier for you.

Oddly, Mei-Hua turns away, shielding the child.

MEI-HUA

It is my job, you take us to Shanghai and feed us.

Quon motions toward a sparse row of bushes.

QUON

We'll rest there.

He leads them around and behind the bushes. He suddenly stops when he sees a couple bodies.

Quon leads Mei-Hua away as she looks over her shoulder.

QUON (CONT'D)

We will find a better place.

They emerge back onto the road and continue the journey.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Mei-Hua and Quon sit in a field leaning up against concrete debris. Quon hands her his coat. She reaches in and comes out with a very small amount of rice.

MEI-HUA

Rice almost gone, husband.

Quon stands and points to lights in the distance.

QUON

There's a city, maybe they have food.

MEI-HUA

We will go with you.

QUON

No. You rest and save strength. I will return soon.

Quon walks away and soon disappears into the night. Mei-Hua is noticeably nervous as she rocks the baby in her arms and hums a LULLABY.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Mei-Hua holds the baby in her arms and stares lovingly at its face.

MEI-HUA

You are a special child. You are.
You have defied death and won. You
are Quon's and my special gift.

Mei-Hua leans and kisses the child.

MEI-HUA (CONT'D)

I will always love you and protect
you. And then, I will love you
more.

Mei-Hua kisses the child again.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

A weary Quon walks slowly into the city. There are no bodies. He sees dogs idly walking about.

He enters the first store. It's a mercantile. Lights are on and a few customers mill about. They stare at the emaciated, gaunt and filthy Quon.

He's stunned by the activity and the bounty of rice and processed chickens hanging by their feet.

INT. MERCANTILE - NIGHT

Behind the counter the anxious CLERK eyes Quon warily. Quon has four jars of peach preserves and several "bing" (flat bread).

The clerk cranks the register and holds out his hand.

CLERK

You pay now.

Quon nervously looks around, reaches into a pant pocket and comes up with a handful of yen. The clerk relaxes and smiles at the sight of the money.

QUON

Why does your city have so much
while my city two days away has
nothing?

CLERK

Closer to the big city, the more
prosperous. Always that way.

Clerk stuffs everything into a large paper sack. Quon glances at the hanging chicken and tons of preserves stacked neatly on the shelves, takes his sack and leaves.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Mei-Hua tears off a small piece of bing, scoops some peach preserves out of the jar with her fingers and smears it on the bing. She stuffs the treat into the child's mouth.

The child chews fast. Mei-Hua smiles in thanks to Quon and he returns the smile.

LAOLAO (V.O.)

Quon bought peaches, he knew
peaches were my favorite. I think
it was his way of apologizing for
taking us from our home and robbing
Mr. Lee.

EXT. SHANGHAI - DAY

Quon leads Mei-Hua and the child on a path next to a canal where small boats ferry people. She holds the child tight and watches the boats motor past.

EXT. SHANGHAI - DAY

In the shadow of a large ship being loaded with cargo by cranes, Mei-Hua stands off to the side and watches Quon argue with a MAN in the shadows. They shout over the dock noise.

MAN

You joke! You have to pay more!
Others pay more!

QUON

Where is the ship sailing to?

MAN

America. I always charge more for
boat to America. San Francisco.

QUON

(desperate)

I have a cousin there. He will
give me the extra money and I will
send it to you.

MAN

What, you tie my money to seagull
and tell the bird to fly back to
Shanghai?! (laugh) Go back to
where you came from, you are
wasting my time.

Quon grabs the man's arm as he turns to leave.

QUON

Please. I cannot go back. I think
the authorities look for me. I
must get my family out of China.

Quon holds out the yen. The man looks at Mei-Hua holding the child in the shadows and then back at the yen. He nods, 'yes', snatches the yen and walks away.

Quon waves Mei-Hua to him.

INT. SHIP'S HOLD - DAY

500 desperate Chinese men, women and children are crowded together in an open bay deep within the bowels of the ship. The conditions are deplorable. We can almost smell the stench. Quon clutches the bag of food tight against his chest as he leads Mei-Hua down the steep ladder.

At the bottom of the ladder Quon takes Mei-Hua's hand and pulls her through the tightly packed crowd. They curiously look at tin pails placed throughout the bay. Then a woman BARFS into a pail.

Mei-Hua grimaces as the crowd surge presses against her. She raises the baby high on her shoulder to protect it.

Quon sees a small opening near pipes running horizontally three feet off the deck. He leads Mei-Hua to the spot.

PANTING, exhausted, they both lean against the pipe.

EXT. CARGO VESSEL - DAY

The ship is led from the docks by two tugboats churning up the sea as they struggle to move the behemoth vessel.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

DREAM SEQUENCE. Rain pounds down as the stooped elderly woman wades waist deep into the rushing water. She struggles to remain standing as dead bodies float past.

Her POV reveals in the distance the same log floating toward her. The lady smiles and moves as quick as she can toward the log. She stops it.

Braced against the current the elderly lady flips the log over and finds a dead Laolao with her arms outstretched but the boy child is not there.

The woman frantically looks around for the child. Nothing.

The current increases and she struggles to hold the dead Laolao. She sees a dead boy child floating in the distance. She strains to drag Popo to the child and reunite them.

The child comes close and the woman stretches but misses. The child glances off her fingertips and rushes downstream.

The elderly lady loses her grip on Laolao and goes under the water.

Laolao SCREAMS O.S.

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

Jill is asleep in her window seat, Laolao is in the middle seat and Pearl is in the aisle seat. Laolao comes out of her nightmare and SCREAMS.

Jill wakes up and attempts to calm the incoherent and struggling Laolao. Laolao is delirious.

LAOLAO

The child... the child is getting away! Help! Help me!

Pearl awakens and tries to soothe Laolao.

PEARL

Mother, it's okay, it's just a dream.

JILL

Laolao, you're with us... we're in the airplane. Everything is okay.

Laolao gathers her senses and looks around at people looking at her. She bursts out CRYING.

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

The cabin is dark. A few overhead lights brighten book pages and laptops.

A stewardess hands a China cup and teapot to Pearl who sets it on her tray.

PEARL

Thank you. I'm sorry if we disturbed anyone... it's her first flight.

STEWARDESS

It's okay. Maybe the tea will calm her.

The stewardess leaves as Jill wraps her arms over Laolao's shoulders and draws her close.

JILL

Rest Laolao and go to sleep on my shoulder.

Pearl moves the tea bags up and down in the teapot, closes the lid and pours the tea into the cup.

PEARL

Let her sip some of the tea first.

Pearl holds the cup to Laolao's lips. Laolao takes the teacup in both hands and sips. She speaks in a soft voice.

LAOLAO

It is always the same nightmare. I am in my old city walking through the rain as the water around me gets deeper. This time deepest ever, to my waist.

A sip of tea.

LAOLAO (CONT'D)

I see a log and the log always turns over and it is actually a dead woman who reaches for a dead child.

JILL

How long have you had that dream?

LAOLAO

For many years. But this time it was different. For the first time, it was different.

PEARL

How was it different?

LAOLAO

This time the child wasn't that close to the woman. I tried to reach him but the current was too fast and he floated past.

PEARL

What about the woman?

Laolao takes a sip of tea with an unsteady hand.

LAOLAO

When the log that is always the woman turned over... for the first time the woman was me.

JILL

So, you were both women. No wonder you screamed. Were you dead?

LAOLAO

Yes.

JILL

Both of you?

LAOLAO

No. Just the one that was the log.

JILL

Dreams fascinate me. They have secret meanings. Hmm. Maybe that means the real you still has a chance to save the little boy.

Laolao studies Jill.

LAOLAO

Maybe. That is what I hope. But I would also like to save a little girl.

Jill looks at her with a quizzical expression. Laolao closes her eyes.

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

Pearl is asleep. Laolao holds the teacup to her mouth and sips. Jill is wrapped up in blankets leaning against the window watching Laolao.

Laolao speaks softly.

LAOLAO

(sotto voce)

My son slipped away.

Jill thoughtfully studies Laolao as the old woman sets down the teacup, wraps herself in the blankets and appears to quietly cry.

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

Jill and Pearl are in the back of the plane waiting in a small line for an available rest room.

JILL

No, mom, that's what she said, I heard her. "My son slipped away."

PEARL

It probably meant nothing. She had just come out of a nightmare.

The door to a rest room opens, a person exits and Jill quickly goes inside. The OCCUPIED sign comes up.

Pearl wonders as she looks out a window into the black sky.

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

Jill is in the window seat. Laolao is asleep. Pearl returns to her seat. Jill's POV reveals the Nordstrom bag under the seat in front of Laolao.

Jill WHISPERS to Pearl.

JILL

I wonder if Waigong is having a good first flight.

Both chuckle.

Jill tugs at the bag.

PEARL

What are you doing?

JILL

I feel like one of those apple pieces Laolao has in the bag.

Jill opens the bag, rummages through it and comes out with a wrapped piece of apple. She triumphantly holds it up.

JILL (CONT'D)

Ta-Da!

Jill starts to return the bag but stops. She pulls out one of the wrapped photographs.

PEARL

Put it back. Laolao will show it to us when she thinks the time is right.

JILL

A little peek?

Jill carefully pulls back some old tape yellowed by age until she exposes part of a large ship.

JILL (CONT'D)

It's a picture of some big boat.

She continues to pull back the paper until the complete photograph is exposed. The photograph is of Laolao, as Mei-Hua, holding a toddler. She appears very stressed. Quon is several feet away and his expression is of extreme anger.

Jill points at the principals in the photograph.

JILL (CONT'D)

Mom, this must be you... Aw, aren't you cute. And this is Waigong and here's Laolao. Waigong looks very mad and Laolao looks scared.

Laolao awakens.

LAOLAO

Jill, you a nosey one. Ever since you were born your nose always where it doesn't belong.

JILL

Sorry Laolao, I was curious.

Laolao takes the photograph in her hands and gives it a long sad stare.

LAOLAO

You said I looked scared? I was very scared. And your Waigong he was very angry. We both had good reason to look like we did.

JILL

Who took the picture?

LAOLAO

Waigong's cousin when we first stepped onto the dock in San Francisco.

(to Pearl)

Do you remember your Uncle Wang? You called him Uncle Big Eyes... his eyes always bug out. He drank too much.

PEARL

I kind of remember him. Why did father look so angry?

Laolao has tear-filled eyes as she looks into Pearl's eyes.

LAOLAO

This part of story is very hard to tell but it must be told and that is why I brought you on this trip. I am sorry if you are hurt by what I say but it is time for the truth.

Pearl's expression is one of worry/confusion as she turns to face Laolao and whatever is coming.

PEARL

Mother, you're scaring me.

Laolao stares at the photograph and back at Pearl as we go to --

FLASHBACK

EXT. CARGO VESSEL - DAY

The big ship has cleared the harbor. The three tug boats release the tow lines and slow as the ship gets under way.

The ship slowly sails away as the deck crews bring the tow lines onboard.

INT. CARGO VESSEL - DAY

Quon dips a piece of bing in the peach preserves and hands it to Mei-Hua. They are huddled close together in their little nook by the pipes.

Mei-Hua has the child inside her coat. She covers them both with a blanket when they eat.

Quon scoops preserves onto his bing as unobtrusively as he can. His eyes always scan for someone looking to take their food.

A MAN, 40, is off to the side behind several other people. His eyes are glued to Quon as he eats.

LAOLAO (V.O.)

It was a dangerous time for us. We escaped authorities that might be looking for your Waigong but now we had to watch for anybody on the boat looking for food. And, all of them were looking for food.

The man approaches Quon with his hand outstretched.

QUON
 We have a baby. Our food is for
 our baby...

The man grabs at Quon's hand that holds the bing. They struggle and go to the deck. Mei-Hua SCREAMS.

Carrying the child under her coat, Mei-Hua stands and repeatedly kicks the man in the side.

MEI-HUA
 You crazy! Let go of my husband!

More kicks to the man's side and head. The man gets the bing and breaks away. He runs into the crowd chased by Quon.

Mei-Hua comforts the CRYING child.

Quon returns. He's agitated and PANTING.

QUON
 I lost him in the crowd.

MEI-HUA
 Good.

They are agitated as they settle into their nook as others watch them.

INT. CARGO VESSEL - DAY

Quon and Mei-Hua sit closer together. Their eyes scan everyone close by.

Quon pulls a blanket over their heads.

UNDER BLANKET. Quon holds a piece of bing to Mei-Hua's lips and she takes a bite. She rips the bite in two and places one part into the child's mouth.

INT. CARGO VESSEL - NIGHT

UNDER BLANKET. Mei-Hua and the child are alone. Both are asleep.

INT. CARGO VESSEL - NIGHT

Quon walks through the hordes of sleeping, standing and sitting people.

He carefully steps over a child and looks to the far side of the vessel. He sees five hanging sheets.

He continues to the sheets. The closer he gets the more offensive the odor is. He scrunches his nose at the stench.

He pulls back one sheet and sees a woman squatted over a large tin pail.

Quon goes to the next sheet and finds the pail unoccupied. He goes behind the sheet, drops his pants and squats over the pail.

INT. CARGO VESSEL - NIGHT

UNDER BLANKET. A hand slowly moves back the blanket to expose Mei-Hua and the sleeping child.

The man who stole the bing is back. He looks around and then PATS Mei-Hua's coat and pants.

She slightly opens an eye, sees the man and closes the eye. Sweat forms on her brow as the man PATS the child. Nothing.

The man PATS her again. His expression is one of anger as he backs out from under the blanket, lowers it and leaves.

INT. CARGO VESSEL - NIGHT

Mei-Hua's forehead is covered in sweat. Her breathing is short and rapid.

The blanket is lifted. She SCREAMS and punches until Quon gets control of her wrists.

QUON

Mei-Hua, stop! Mei-Hua, it is me,
Quon.

Mei-Hua CRIES and buries her face into his chest.

MEI-HUA

That bad man, he come back. You
don't leave us again... you go to
relieve yourself, we go too.

Quon holds her tight as his eyes search the crowd for the man. Many eyes are locked on him and Mei-Hua because of her scream.

INT. CARGO VESSEL - NIGHT

UNDER BLANKET. Quon sleeps with Mei-Hua in the middle and the child on the other side.

Mei-Hua stirs and opens her eyes. She looks at the sleeping child. She gently nudges Quon.

MEI-HUA

Husband, let me out that way so I
do not wake baby.

Quon is sleepy.

QUON

Why?

MEI-HUA

I have to relieve myself.

Quon takes his time sitting up and raising the blanket. Mei-Hua climbs out and stands as Quon lowers the blanket back onto himself and the child.

INT. CARGO VESSEL - NIGHT

Mei-Hua is paranoid as she wends her way through the crowd. She doesn't see the man walking parallel to her on the other side of the crowd. The man's eyes are focused on her.

Mei-Hua bows slightly as she passes by another woman. She steps over a sleeping little boy and his mother. She pauses and stares at the boy. Something about the child evokes deep emotions in Mei-Hua.

The man has stopped and watches Mei-Hua through the crowd. She resumes her trek to the sheets. He follows.

INT. CARGO VESSEL - NIGHT

A sheet is pulled back to reveal a man standing and urinating. Mei-Hua averts her eyes and bows her head in apology.

Mei-Hua goes to the next sheet. She pulls it aside and reveals a woman squatting over the pail.

Mei-Hua goes to the next sheet shadowed by the man at a distance. She pulls back the sheet exposing an unused tin pail. She unbuttons her coat and pulls the sheet closed behind her.

INT. CARGO VESSEL - NIGHT

Mei-Hua squats over the pail. Her POV reveals a man's feet and sandals beneath the sheet on the other side. She doesn't think anything of it.

The sheet vibrates as if hit by a puff of wind. She looks up and the man looms over her.

MEI-HUA

You go away! I am relieving myself.

The man approaches her.

MAN

I want your food. I am starving.

MEI-HUA

I do not have food, leave me alone!
You go!

The man feels her coat and touches her breast. She lowers her eyes in shame.

MAN

I will not stop touching you until I have food. Give me food.

Mei-Hua tears up and shakes her head "no".

MEI-HUA

I have a child... child needs food more than you.

The man touches her other breast.

MAN

Is it in the lining of your coat?

Mei-Hua closes her eyes and lowers her head as she shakes it "no".

PUSH IN on her face as she softly WHIMPERS. She opens her eyes and the man is gone.

INT. CARGO VESSEL - NIGHT

Mei-Hua frantically rushes through the crowd. Her eyes are glued on the distant area where she and Quon stay. She slams into a woman and knocks her to the deck. Mei-Hua helps the woman up and profusely apologizes.

MEI-HUA

I am so sorry. Please forgive me.

Mei-Hua continues. She brushes past people and is pushed back. She stumbles.

FLASH POP -- The man hides behind some people.

She sees him. She moves faster. She is near panic. She's getting closer to where Quon is.

Suddenly, there's Quon standing in front of her. She's desperate to get to him. Mei-Hua sprints into his arms and wraps her arms around him. He doesn't respond.

She CRIES. Her words are broken and delivered in GASPS.

MEI-HUA (CONT'D)

That man... he touched me! That man...

Quon pushes her away and SHOUTS in her face.

QUON

Where is my baby?! Where is my Ping?!

She backs up but he follows. His face is inches from hers as she continues to retreat.

She's confused and hurt. She doesn't understand. Quon grabs her by the shoulders and shakes her.

QUON (CONT'D)

I want my son! What have you done with my son?!

Mei-Hua sinks to the floor and goes to her knees. She WAILS and bends down so that her forehead is on the filthy deck. Quon squats down and raises her face to meet his. He squeezes her cheeks hard. Her face has grime smeared on it. Tears run down her cheeks.

QUON (CONT'D)

I go to help you. I change the baby's diapers... and the baby is a girl! Why is it a girl and not my Ping?! Tell me!

Mei-Hua blurts out words between WAILS and GASPS.

MEI-HUA

You were hunting the deer... The deer was going to save Ping and us.
(MORE)

MEI-HUA (CONT'D)

You were gone. I needed you. Our Ping needed you, but you were gone. When you came home you were shouting and dragging me from our home... I was afraid to tell you all that happened.

Quon takes her shoulders in his hands again. His voice becomes low, almost a growl.

QUON

What happened to my son?

Mei-Hua GASPS an answer.

MEI-HUA

He took his final breath in my arms.

Mei-Hua positions her arms like she is holding a baby and looks at her arm as if she is looking at her child.

MEI-HUA (CONT'D)

He was looking up at me. He was smiling. I was happy because no one dies smiling, do they? I saw his smile and knew everything would be okay, that you would kill the deer and all of us would live.

Mei-Hua does a rocking motion with her arms. She HUMS a lullaby for an extended beat.

MEI-HUA (CONT'D)

His smile told me that he liked my song. I continued my song. His eyes were open. His smile was big.

Emotion wells up inside of Mei-Hua and she blurts out her pain.

MEI-HUA (CONT'D)

He was so beautiful and I felt so much love for him at that moment that I had to kiss him.

She simulates kissing the child. It's all she can do to finish her tale.

MEI-HUA (CONT'D)

I kiss him. I feel that he is cold. I kiss him again and he is still cold.

(MORE)

MEI-HUA (CONT'D)

His eyes are open and he's smiling
and I think, 'what a good baby I
have, to put up with being cold'.

Mei-Hua sits back on her haunches and raises her voice.

MEI-HUA (CONT'D)

Then I notice his smile does not
change and his eyes do not blink.
They did not blink, Quon. Our
son's eyes did not blink! It is
then I know that our beautiful son
is gone. Our son is gone!

Quon stands and stares at her, angry, disbelieving. Then he
turns and walks away through the crowd. She SOBS and her
forehead touches the deck.

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

The reading lamp above her seat shines down on Laolao as she
WEEPS. Jill and Pearl look at her with stunned expressions.

The silence and yet to be asked questions are deafening.

Pearl slowly shakes her head back and forth in a confused way
attempting to grasp what was said. Pearl speaks haltingly.

PEARL

But... if you had a son... who am
I?

No response.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Mother?

LAOLAO

Min. You are my friend Ling's
daughter, Min. But I always love
you like you are mine... Waigong
too came to love you like you were
his. We treated you the best we
could... we send you to university
and you become a professor...

Pearl angrily interrupts.

PEARL

Why did you let me live this lie my
entire life? You could have told
me and sent me back to my real
mother.

Those words noticeably hurt Laolao.

LAOLAO

I became your real mother. Maybe
Ling and Si died in the famine like
my Ping died and my mother and
father. We didn't know and we
never heard from friends that they
were alive... so, you became ours.

Pearl stands. Laolao grabs hold of Pearl's hand but Pearl
pulls away and strides toward the rear of the plane.

Laolao turns to Jill.

JILL

Then I guess we aren't related
either.

Laolao desperately clutches Jill's hand.

POPO

I treat you the best way I know how
to treat a granddaughter and I
cannot love you anymore than I do.
Please, no matter what else is said
on this trip, let me be your
grandmother... or else I will have
no one in this world.

Jill and Laolao lock teary eyes and then Jill pulls Laolao to
her.

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

Laolao is alone in the middle seat blowing her nose into a
tissue.

We move down the aisle toward the rear of the plane. Pearl
and Jill stand in the small alcove near the rear door. Pearl
looks out the small door window at stars.

JILL

Jeez, mom, I don't know what to
say. Wow! Talk about dropping a
bomb on us.

No response.

JILL (CONT'D)

Mom, it was the times. The famine.
Your parents probably died.
(MORE)

JILL (CONT'D)

Laolao and Waigong could have abandoned you but they didn't.

Jill wraps her arms around Pearl's waist and rests her head on Pearl's shoulder.

JILL (CONT'D)

I'm trying to see this through Laolao's eyes. Her child had died, she thought you were dead and then there's Waigong who believed he was being chased by police so he dragged her off to Singapore.

PEARL

I don't know what to think... or to say.

JILL

Me either.

PEARL

All my life Laolao and Waigong preached, "Honesty is the best policy". I heard that my entire life from them and yet they couldn't be honest with me.

JILL

What were they supposed to say, "your parents are dead get used to it?" What would that have done to you? Maybe you would have gone crazy, ran off and got a tattoo on your butt of a dove holding olive branches in its beak.

Pearl turns to Jill and smiles.

PEARL

A tattoo of a dove with olive branches on my butt?

JILL

Just guessing how girls rebelled in the old days. Mom, she's an old lady.

Pearl opens her arms and engulfs Jill.

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

Laolao sits alone in her middle seat crying. She reaches down and picks up the Nordstrom bag. She pulls out the wrapped photograph. She holds it in her arms close to her chest. Finally, she kisses it and tears away the wrapping paper.

When the last of the paper is off, she turns it over and reveals the photograph of her, Ping and Quon that she took off her apartment wall the night they fled to Shanghai.

Laolao kisses Ping and keeps the photograph to her lips. She MUMBLES while crying.

LAOLAO

My dearest Ping, all I have of you
is an old picture and long, long
ago memories. I pray that wherever
you are you remember me like I
remember you.

Laolao is jostled. She slowly raises her head.

JILL

Grandmother... Laolao, can I get to
my seat?

Laolao barely manages a smile as she leans back and Jill climbs over to her seat. Jill looks at the photograph.

JILL (CONT'D)

Can I see it?

Laolao hands it to her.

JILL (CONT'D)

Wow, you and Waigong look so young
and so happy. Is this Ping?

Choked with emotion, Laolao can only nod 'yes'.

JILL (CONT'D)

He's beautiful.

LAOLAO

Waigong and I thought so. Thank
you.

A hand reaches across Laolao.

PEARL

Can I see?

Laolao nods 'yes' repeatedly as Jill hands the photograph to Pearl. Pearl sits in her seat and turns to Laolao.

PEARL (CONT'D)

I'm angry that you didn't tell me sooner but I have to thank you for being the great parents you and Waigong were.

Pearl leans over and kisses Laolao on the forehead.

LAOLAO

I was young, I was scared...

PEARL

I know... I know. Get some rest and let me try to digest all of this.

Laolao lays her head on Pearl's shoulder as Pearl eyes the photograph in her hands.

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

Laolao awakens and leans into Pearl who is sleeping.

LAOLAO

I must relieve myself.

Pearl stirs and gets her bearings.

PEARL

I'll go with you.

Pearl stands and they exit their seats. Pearl helps the unsteady Laolao walking down the aisle.

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

Pearl leans against the plane wall. The rest room door opens and Laolao exits. Pearl starts up the aisle.

LAOLAO

Please, come here.

PEARL

Are you okay?

LAOLAO

(sheepishly)

There's more I must tell you.

Pearl is exasperated.

PEARL

Oh, God, I don't know if I can take any more.

LAOLAO

You must know everything. I told you how I had kissed Ping and he was cold.

Pearl slowly nods 'yes' as we go to --

FLASHBACK

INT. QUON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mei-Hua holds the child tight looking at it with a horrified expression. Xing-Ru's arms are extended toward the child. Ling holds her child close as she moves toward Mei-Hua.

Everyone speaks with a sense of urgency and desperation.

LING

Mei-Hua, what is wrong?

MEI-HUA

He's cold, my Ping is cold and his eyes don't blink.

XING-RU

Give me the child!

Xing-Ru wrests Ping from Mei-Hua. She holds the child to her cheek and places her hand over his face. When she removes her hand, Ping's eyes are closed.

MEI-HUA

No! No! Not my Ping!

Mei-Hua's SHRIEKS are heart-breaking. She drops to the floor and WAILS.

MEI-HUA (CONT'D)

I am a horrible mother! Oh, my Ping look down on me with forgiveness! I am sorry! I am sorry!

Ling kneels beside Mei-Hua and pulls her to her, She has Mei-Hua in one arm and her baby, Min in the other.

Xing-Ru places Ping on the bed and covers his body and face with a blanket.

LING

You were a good mother! You did not create the famine! Ping will always remember his good mother and will look down upon you and Quon with kindness. No one could have done more for him.

Xing-Ru takes the child, Min, from Ling. Ling and Mei-Hua hug each other with both arms and cry together.

Xing-Ru goes into an altered state. Her eyes roll back in her head and she CHANTS in unknown tongues.

Xing-Ru is sinister and evil as she turns her back to the women and, while holding Min, places her hand over Min's mouth. The child's legs and arms flail. Mei-Hua looks up and sees the child's arms flail and suddenly stop moving.

Mei-Hua slowly breaks away from Ling and stands.

MEI-HUA

What is wrong with Min?

Xing-Ru is startled but regains her composure.

XING-RU

I pray for her but I believe she too has left this world. My spirit joined with her's and took her to the other world.

Ling leaps to her feet, rushes to Xing-Ru and rips Min from her arms.

LING

It cannot be!

Ling places her ear next to Min's lips.

XING-RU

Of course it can be! These two came to this world at the same time it is only right that they leave the same time.

LING

You are wrong! My Min is alive, I hear her breathing.

Xing-Ru moves in and takes back Min.

XING-RU
You hear her last breaths, she
will be gone soon.

Ling reaches for Min but Xing-Ru shields Min from Ling.

LING
Give her to me!

XING-RU
You will only have more pain if I
do.

Xing-Ru again slips her hand over Min's mouth but this time Min doesn't flail her limbs. Xing-Ru CHANTS and rolls back her eyes while she lays Min on the bed next to Ping and wraps her in a blanket that covers her face.

Ling and Mei-Hua cling to each other and WAIL.

INT. QUON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A candle on the table is the only light in the room. Xing-Ru, looking more sinister in the candlelight, sits at the table.

Ling and Mei-Hua are at the bed kneeling on the floor. Both cry softly with their hands on their dead infants wrapped in blankets with their faces covered.

XING-RU
Death is not always a horrible part
of life.

Ling and Mei-Hua ignore Xing-Ru. Xing-Ru speaks louder.

XING-RU (CONT'D)
Death is not always a horrible part
of life.

LING
There is nothing more horrible than
the death of my child! Nothing!

MEI-HUA
I don't want you here... leave my
house.

Xing-Ru acts like she doesn't hear what is being said.

XING-RU
Your children have conspired to
give you a gift.
(MORE)

XING-RU (CONT'D)

They gave you their blessed lives
while they were alive and they have
given you their deaths.

LING

Husband was right! You are crazy!

XING-RU

No. I am not crazy. I am aware of
all things that have gone before us
in our mother China. I am aware of
pestilence and pain, joy and
sorrow.

Mei-Hua's head is face down on the bed.

MEI-HUA

Do not speak your craziness
anymore. Leave. Let us grieve.

Xing-Ru stands and walks toward the bed.

XING-RU

China has lasted through many
famines, and China will survive
this one as well. Look at you, you
both are bones and stretched
skin... and could soon follow your
children. I will give you the
secret that will keep you alive.

LING

There is no secret, there is only
real food, not that human arm you
brought here. Our husbands will
return from hunting with a dead
deer and we will eat it, survive
and bury our children.

Xing-Ru SNEERS.

XING-RU

Again I say your husbands are
fools. There is no deer! But
there is an old saying in China
that has been practiced before and
I know is being practiced tonight
in our city and throughout China.

(whispering)

It will save your and your
husbands' lives.

Xing-Ru looks at them with a smug expression.

MEI-HUA

Tell us the saying old woman and
then leave.

Xing-Ru lowers her voice to an evil, snakelike, hissing
WHISPER.

XING-RU

The saying from many ancestors and
many famines long ago is... "swap
children, eat well."

The saying sinks in and the expressions on Mei-Hua and Ling's
faces slowly turn from sorrow to rage.

In unison, Ling and Mei-Hua, stand and physically assault
Xing-Ru. They push her against the table. Xing-Ru falls to
the ground LAUGHING deliriously.

XING-RU (CONT'D)

Yes! Attack me! But you know I am
right!

Mei-Hua covers her ears to block out Xing-Ru's words.

MEI-HUA

I hate you! Leave before we kill
you and you join our children!

Xing-Ru CACKLES as she gets to her feet. Ling and Mei-Hua
wrestle her up against a wall. Xing-Ru's confidence grows in
strength and she LAUGHS.

XING-RU

Your eyes betray you! They say
that you know what I say is true!
You will dine tonight on the flesh
of your friend's dead child and you
will live! Your husbands will
live!

Ling SLAMS her hand over Xing-Ru's mouth.

LING

Stop! Lies! All lies! We will
not eat our friend's child! We
will die! That is what is meant!
It is natural for us to do so...
eating their child is not!

Mei-Hua puts her hands on Xing-Ru's throat and squeezes.

MEI-HUA

Shut your evil mouth! Stop! Stop!

Xing-Ru's eyes roll in her head. Her knees buckle. Mei-Hua realizes she is killing her and releases her grip. Xing-Ru slides down the wall to the floor.

Ling and Mei-Hua stand, menacingly, over her. Quon bursts into the room.

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

The sun rising on the horizon peeks above the distant clouds and sends a small ray of light through the airplane door window.

The ray illuminates Laolao's face as she leans against the bulkhead, her eyes downcast. She avoids Pearl's expression of incredulity.

Nothing is said for an extended beat. Both are subdued.

PEARL

You and my parents were supposed to eat Ping and me?

LAOLAO

I would have died first. Waigong too. My plan was to bury you properly... but you were alive. And my whole life I put all my energies into keeping you alive and healthy.

PEARL

Did Si and Ling eat your Ping?

A beat.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Oh, that's right, you had no contact with them after you left. This is too much.

LAOLAO

I had heard that people did exchange dead children with their friends. Xing-Ru was right about that. It was a sign of love, to give what was most precious to save the life of a dear friend.

Laolao is worn, exhausted and looks much older. Standing apart, the two women quietly cry and look out at the sun rising.

STEWARDESS (V.O.)

As we begin our approach to Shanghai Pudong International airport, we ask that you return to your seats, fasten your seat belts and bring your seat backs to their full upright position.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Laolao sits in the window seat staring in awe at the Shanghai skyline. Pearl is in the middle seat and Jill is in the aisle seat wearing her IPOD earphones, rocking her head to the music.

Laolao's POV reveals the ultra-modern Shanghai Pudong International airport, the Shanghai World Financial Center, the Oriental Pearl Tower, the Shimao International Plaza, the Hong Kong New World Tower and the water that is the East China Sea.

Pearl leans into Laolao and looks out the window over her shoulder.

PEARL

It must look different than it did fifty-five years ago.

LAOLAO

This cannot be Shanghai. Where is this?

PEARL

It is Shanghai.

LAOLAO

But all the beautiful tall buildings...

INT. SHANGHAI PUDONG INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

Clutching her Nordstrom bag, Laolao rides in the elongated golf cart beside the DRIVER through the expansive, modern structure. Pearl and Jill ride in the back with the luggage. Jill's head rocks to the IPOD tunes.

INT. BLACK SEDAN - DAY

The DRIVER steers the black sedan onto a major highway. Pearl and Jill flank Laolao in the rear seat.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The black sedan drives past a beautiful lake reflecting the mountains looming behind it.

INT. BLACK SEDAN - DAY

Laolao is asleep with Jill and Pearl on either side.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

DREAM SEQUENCE. Laolao wades into the rushing torrent up to her chest. She smiles.

Her POV reveals herself floating on the current toward her. Coming in from the side are the bodies of two small children.

Laolao walks in further and reaches for the children. More water rushes in. She misses the children and goes under

UNDERWATER. laolao looks up and sees the children in dark silhouette rising higher and higher above her as the water gets deeper by the second. She closes her eyes and exhales bubbles.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Pearl and Jill are outside the car. Laolao jolts out of her sleep. Her head turns quickly toward the right. Her POV reveals the area where the nightmare takes place.

FLASH POP -- The bodies of the children and Laolao float toward CAMERA.

PEARL

Mother, do you recognize where you
are?

Laolao sits back in the seat and takes some deep breaths as she recovers from the dream.

Jill climbs into the car.

JILL

Do you want to show us where you
lived or do you want to go to our
hotel first?

Laolao's stare goes right through Jill. Jill turns to look at Pearl.

PEARL

I'd like to try and find my
parents... If they're alive.

EXT. HOTEL - DAY

The black sedan is at the entrance of the five story hotel,
sandwiched between two tall office buildings.

INT. LAOLAO'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Laolao stands between the curtains looking out on the city.
She's deep in concentration as her POV scans the city.

She sees tall buildings with a few smaller, older ones mixed
in. She sees the street passing in front of the hotel and
follows it out of town. In the distance she sees the
remnants of a forest.

INT. GRAVEMARKER'S BUILDING - DAY

Laolao sits in a waiting area flanked by Pearl and Jill. The
OWNER approaches her with a large piece of white cardboard.
Smiling like a Cheshire cat, he turns over the cardboard.

Laolao's POV reveals a sketched headstone on the cardboard
with QUON BOW, 1940 - 2009.

In the two top corners of the marker are red roses resting
atop green leaves that wind their way down the stone to the
bottom. Under the dates there are three columns of Chinese
characters.

JILL

That's cool. But it's strange to
see Waigong's name on a headstone.

PEARL

I like it. What do you think,
mother?

Laolao nods her head 'yes' and reaches for Jill. Jill helps
her to her feet.

OWNER

(ENGLISH SUBTITLES)

It will be ready in three hours...
not earlier.

LAOLAO
(ENGLISH SUBTITLES)
You will please deliver it to the
cemetery.

The owner bows his head in agreement. Laolao, Jill and Pearl leave the building as the owner watches them.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Laolao, Jill and Pearl sit on the park bench. In the distance is a small bridge that crosses over the water.

FLASH POP -- Quon and Mei-Hua walk up the bridge followed by her family. All are LAUGHING as they see baby ducks following their mother.

PEARL
I don't want to hurt you, but I
need to find my parents ... I have
so many questions.

Laolao nods her agreement.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Do I look like them? Were they
good people?

LAOLAO
They were our best friends. They
were just like us; hardworking
people who loved their child.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Laolao holds on to Pearl and Jill as they walk through the bustling city. Laolao holds up an arm and points at an old apartment building.

EXT. QUON'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

The building still has the external staircase.

Laolao, Jill and Pearl look up at the second story and the door to Laolao's old apartment. Clothes, draped over the wrought iron railing, dry in the sun.

EXT. QUON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Laolao stands before the door, softly crying. Jill and Pearl are behind her.

FLASH POP -- The door is open, Quon sits at the table smiling, sipping tea while Ping bounces on his knee. Mei-Hua turns and smiles as she cooks rice in a pan on the wood burning stove.

The door flies open and a MAN, 70, wearing boxer shorts and a wife-beater T-Shirt stands before them.

OLD MAN
(ENGLISH SUBTITLES)
What do you want?

Pearl has difficulty with the Chinese.

PEARL
(ENGLISH SUBTITLES)
Hello. My mother used to live here
in 1950...

Pearl turns to Laolao.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Is that how you say 1950?

LAOLAO
We left in 1960 not 1950.

PEARL
(ENGLISH SUBTITLES)
I mean 1960.

The man steps back inside. Laolao cranes her neck trying to see more memories. The door SLAMS shut.

Jill and Pearl try to escort Laolao away but she stands fast and KNOCKS. The man opens the door.

MAN
(ENGLISH SUBTITLES)
Go away!

LAOLAO
(ENGLISH SUBTITLES)
This is where my husband, child and
I lived many years ago, please give
me a moment inside.

The man's elderly wife comes forward, bows to Laolao and opens the door. Laolao enters.

INT. QUON'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Laolao's face lights up. She smiles as she looks at where the bed is.

FLASH POP -- Mei-Hua GROANS and pushes as she delivers her baby to the midwife.

Laolao walks to the stove and looks at it.

FLASH POP -- Mei-Hua nurses Ping as she lifts a tea pot from the stove and places it on the table in front of a smiling Quon.

Laolao looks back at the bed.

FLASH POP -- Mei-Hua lies in the bed with Ping looking at the photograph of her, Quon and Ping on the wall. The photograph is beside the dried bouquet.

EXT. QUON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Pearl and Jill assist Laolao down the stairs. Laolao looks back at the apartment door as the man closes it.

EXT. MERCANTILE - DAY

Laolao, Jill and Pearl stand outside of the Mercantile. It is nearly hidden from the bustling outdoor market in front of it. It is packed with food and customers, even some ANGLO TOURISTS.

JILL

Is this how you remember it,
Laolao?

LAOLAO

I remember it like this and I also
remember it empty.

FLASH POP -- The market shelves are empty of produce and there are only gaunt, grey people staring at the empty shelves.

Pearl and Jill each have one of Laolao's arms as they lead her through the masses of people. Laolao stops in front of peach preserves.

INT. MERCANTILE - DAY

Young LEE, 50, stands behind the counter at the register. Behind him is the office.

Laolao sets two peach preserves jars on the counter beside three pieces of bing.

Young Lee rings up the preserves and bing on a new electric register. He tears off a receipt and hands it to Laolao. Laolao freezes as old Mr. Lee, now 80s, walks into the back office and sits down.

YOUNG LEE
(ENGLISH SUBTITLES)
Is there something else you need?

Laolao doesn't respond. Pearl takes the money from Laolao's hand and gives it to young Lee.

JILL
Laolao, is there something wrong?

INT. MERCANTILE BACK OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE ON Mr. Lee's face as his eyes brighten in recognition.

WIDEN to reveal Mr. Lee seated across from Laolao, Pearl and Jill.

MR. LEE
Ah. Of course I remember your husband.

Mr. Lee stands and gently TAPS his abdomen.

MR. LEE (CONT'D)
He stuck his rifle right here when he robbed me.

LAOLAO
How much?

Laolao unfolds a wad of cash that Mr. Lee eyes greedily.

MR. LEE
He took lots of money and left his old rifle in trade. Rifle not worth much. I tried to shoot him but stupid old rifle was empty.

Laolao SLAPS bill after bill down on the table as Mr. Lee's smile grows with each bill.

Laolao stops but Mr. Lee holds a thumb and forefinger close together, signifying a little more money. Laolao puts down a few more.

Mr. Lee smiles and sweeps the money into his arms.

MR. LEE (CONT'D)
Very good. His debt cancelled.
Tell him so.

LAOLAO
When I see him.

PEARL
He passed away a few years ago.

Mr. Lee appears genuinely sad as he stands and shuffles over to a corner of the room.

MR. LEE
He was thief, but he always
delivered rice on time...

Mr. Lee points to his temple.

MR. LEE (CONT'D)
I remember that.

He reaches behind a bunch of coats and pulls out the rifle. He drags it to Laolao and hands it to her. Pearl takes it.

JILL
What are we going to do with this?

MR. LEE
Don't care, it is yours, you bought
it back. Oh, one more thing.

Mr. Lee leaves the back office and goes to the main counter.

JILL
What's he doing?

Laolao shrugs.

Mr. Lee returns. He holds Si's dusty old watch in front of Laolao.

MR. LEE
I gave his friend bullets for his
watch... watch no good, it never
run.

Pearl's hand trembles as she takes the watch.

PEARL

Do you remember his friend's name... the friend who owned this watch?

MR. LEE

That is a long time ago...

Mr. Lee thinks back. Then he BLURTS out a name.

MR. LEE (CONT'D)

Si... that's correct. His name was Si.

Pearl tears up.

PEARL

Thank you.

Pearl, Laolao and Jill start to walk from the office.

MR. LEE

I think he and his wife still live on West side of city. He worked for me for a while... good worker... lousy watch.

INT. BLACK SEDAN - DAY

The sedan is parked in front of a modest house with other houses built almost on top of it.

Pearl and Jill flank Laolao in the back seat. All are nervous.

JILL

Laolao, what are you going to do?

LAOLAO

I don't know.

PEARL

I'm going to the door. I want to meet my family if they are alive.

Pearl opens the door and exits the vehicle. The car door is open when she looks back at Laolao.

PEARL (CONT'D)

You said we came here for the truth... we need to go to the door to get that truth.

Laolao doesn't move. Pearl leaves the door open and walks toward the house.

As Pearl KNOCKS on the door she is joined by Jill and Laolao.

The door opens to reveal LI-LING, 50. She's neatly dressed and of modest means. She eyes them.

PEARL (CONT'D)

My name is... Pearl... my real name is Min. My parents were Si and Ling. We were separated during the great famine in 1960. Do you know them? Are they alive?

The woman bows politely and opens the door wider.

LI-LING

I am Li-Ling, please come inside.

INT. LI-LING'S HOUSE - DAY

Pearl, Laolao, and Jill sit around the table in the kitchen as Li-Ling pours tea in their cups.

LI-LING

Where have you come from?

PEARL

I was born in this city as was Laolao, but we have come from the United States and the city of San Francisco.

Li-Ling finishes pouring and sits down at the table.

LI-LING

Have you come to stay or are you here to visit?

LAOLAO

I come to bury my husband in the city of his birth. I have brought special things to keep him company in the next life. A marker is being made and we will bury him at three this afternoon.

Jill blurts out the question.

JILL

Did you know my mother's real parents?

Jill's question is seen as rude.

PEARL

It's not polite to ask a question that has already been asked. Li-Ling will give us an answer if that is what she wishes to do.

The silence is deafening.

LAOLAO

If you do know them mention that I have returned the daughter they thought they lost long ago. She was a wonderful child who never caused us any problems, did well in school and has become a teacher at a university. If she had a flaw it was that she did not always brush her teeth twice a day.

They all SNICKER except for Li-Ling who listens without showing any emotion.

Laolao stands.

LAOLAO (CONT'D)

Thank you for the tea, it was as sweet as I remember. We will bury my husband at the cemetery this afternoon. Good day Li-Ling.

Pearl stands. Jill reluctantly stands.

JILL

Wait Laolao. She hasn't told us about Si and Ling...

LAOLAO

It is time to go.

Jill faces Li-Ling.

JILL

We just learned yesterday that Laolao isn't related to us. Our lives have been thrown upside down. We need to know about Si and Ling. If they are dead, tell us. If they are alive... we'd like to meet and know them. Please.

LAOLAO

Jill.

Laolao goes out the door.

EXT. LI-LING'S HOUSE - DAY

The sedan pulls away from the house with Pearl, Laolao and Jill in the back seat.

PEARL
(to the driver)
Pull over up here at the corner.

JILL
What are you doing?

PEARL
I'm going to find our lost relatives.

The sedan pulls over and Pearl exits the vehicle.

PEARL (CONT'D)
I know my way back to the hotel.
Wait for me there.

JILL
Can I come?

PEARL
No.

Pearl nods to the driver and he drives off.

EXT. LI-LING'S HOUSE - DAY

Pearl stands two houses down across the street from Li-ling's house. She waits and fidgets, her eyes never leaving Li-Ling's house. She looks at her wristwatch. It says 1:45.

EXT. LI-LING'S HOUSE - DAY

CLOSE ON Pearl's watch that reads 2:11.

Widen to reveal Pearl watching Li-Ling's house. Nothing is happening so, disappointed, Pearl EXHALES and walks toward the corner, turns right and walks away.

She looks back over her shoulder and sees Li-Ling casting furtive looks as she leaves the house and hurries off to her left.

Pearl follows.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The street is busy with bikes, trucks, cars and pedestrians. Li-Ling moves fast through the crowd, occasionally glancing around.

Pearl follows Li-Ling from a distance of fifty feet.

Li-Ling senses something. She stops and turns around as Pearl ducks into a small bakery.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Li-Ling hurries down the alley and turns right on a dissecting street.

Pearl looks around a corner and then hurries after Li-Ling. She looks down the street and her POV reveals Li-Ling entering a small courtyard.

She follows.

EXT. RETIREMENT APARTMENTS - DAY

Pearl watches Li-Ling from a distance. Li-Ling passes by several doors in the apartment complex labelled RETIREMENT CENTER.

Li-Ling stops at one door and KNOCKS before entering.

Pearl hurries to the center, through the courtyard and to the door. She's nervous and hyperventilating. She places her ear to the door and hears people speaking softly in Chinese.

She KNOCKS. The voices go silent.

Pearl KNOCKS again. Nothing.

Pearl speaks through the door in Chinese.

PEARL

(ENGLISH SUBTITLES)

You have nothing to lose by opening
your door. But you can re-gain
your daughter, Min.

An extended beat.

The door slowly opens. Li-Ling bows her head as she backs up and opens the door all the way.

Pearl is frightened and apprehensive as she looks around the corner and comes inside. She sees two elderly Chinese, Si and Ling sitting at a table.

Ling is the first to stand.

LING

Please, be kind and tell us the truth. We are old and our hearts cannot stand a cruel joke.

Pearl moves closer.

PEARL

I found out yesterday that my name is Min and my parents were Si and Ling.

Si stands and wobbles with his cane.

SI

Impossible! Our Min is dead. Ling was there.

Ling moves closer. She tenderly takes Pearl's face in her trembling hands. She pulls Pearl's face closer as she scrutinizes every inch. She looks deep into Min's eyes and bursts out SOBBING.

Ling embraces Pearl.

LING

It's a miracle! This is my Min, I know her eyes! I know her eyes!

Si shuffles toward Pearl and Ling with the use of his cane. Si takes Pearl's shoulder and turns her toward him. He looks deep into Min's eyes and turns away as he WEEPS.

Ling is deliriously happy, euphoric.

LING (CONT'D)

It is her, Si... it is her!

SI

I know.

Pearl holds out the old watch. Si sees it, takes it in his hand and joins in the embrace. Ling holds out an arm to Li-Ling, for her to join in the embrace.

LING

Min, you've met our daughter-in-law...

Li-Ling joins the embrace.

Through SOBS Si tries to explain what happened.

SI

It was on a rainy night when Quon
and I went hunting for a deer. He
had run back toward the city.

FLASHBACK --

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

The rain pounds down. Quon SOBS as he runs away from Si,
dragging his rifle. Si calls after him.

SI

Quon, come back!

Quon continues to run. Si starts to follow but his dim
flashlight beam reveals a black splotch on a leaf. Si picks
up the leaf.

He shines the light ahead and sees another leaf covered with
the blood. His heart races. He looks back for Quon.

SI (CONT'D)

Quon!

He follows the trail of blood as his flashlight beam
flickers.

SI (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I had found a blood trail from the
deer. I felt awful for the way I
had treated Quon and how I had
called him a lousy shot.

Si follows the blood trail through bushes and down into a
steep gully.

Si holds on to brush as he slowly climbs down into the gully.
With just five feet to go he jumps down, lands and falls to
the ground.

Right beside Si is the small dead deer.

SI (CONT'D)

Quon!

Si sits beside the deer, CRIES and then begins to LAUGH and
then SING.

SI (CONT'D)
 We killed the deer... we killed the
 deer... we...

Then, his face reflects a sense of urgency. He stands and throws the 10 kilo animal over his shoulder.

He begins the ascent out of the gully. He strains and pulls himself up an inch at a time.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Si comes up out of the gully. He's on hands and knees, PANTING. He slips the deer under his left arm and under his coat.

He's exhausted as he walks through the forest. He progresses into a slow jog. He's sweating and PANTING as the rain pounds down upon him.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Fog engulfs the city, the dead and the near dead. Si walks through the fog keeping his eyes downcast as he passes people.

Blood from the deer runs down his left leg and leaves a spotty trail.

Si takes a deep breath and breaks into a trot.

He trots past the mercantile as Mr. Lee stands in the front, holding a rifle by his side, hyperventilating and SHOUTING at a POLICE MAN as he points toward the fog.

MR. LEE
 He robbed us at gunpoint and took
 rice and money.

Si continues running.

INT. SI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Xing-Ru sits at the table. Ling sits on the bed beside Ping, wrapped up in a shroud of blankets with his scarf on his chest. She's crying.

Si bursts into the room.

SI
 We killed the deer! Ling we got
 it!

Si stops. He sees Xing-Ru. Si sets the deer on the table.

SI (CONT'D)
 What are you doing here?! You're
 no good! Get out of my house!

Si grabs Xing-Ru by the arm and drags her to the door. He
 sees Ling crying and the wrapped body of a child. He
 releases Xing-Ru and goes to the child.

Si is confused. He touches the scarf. He looks at Ling.

XING-RU
 Dead! They are both dead! Swap a
 child... eat well. (cackles)

Si grabs Xing-Ru around the throat and roughly drags her out
 of the apartment.

XING-RU (CONT'D)
 There's nothing you can do... I
 took their souls to the other side!

Si throws her onto the second level catwalk. He re-enters
 the apartment and SLAMS the door.

Si goes to Ping. He looks at Ling.

LING
 They left... they took our Min...
 she was dead.

Si SCREAMS with anguish.

SI
 Nooooo!

Si drops to his knees in pain as Ling rubs his back.

LING
 Xing-Ru says friends all over China
 are swapping dead children so their
 friends can live.

Si stands.

SI
 You were not going to eat Ping?

Ling shakes her head.

LING

No. I was going to bury him as I am sure Quon and Mei-Hua would bury our Min.

SI

Why do you listen to that woman? She lies...

Si hears what he just said and rushes to Ping.

SI (CONT'D)

Quick, pour some deer blood into a cup. Hurry!

Si rips the blankets off of Ping. Using the old style artificial respiration technique, he grabs both of Ping's little wrists, brings them to his chest and presses down. He extends the arms and then brings them to the chest again. He's frantic. He does the technique again.

Lings holds the deer and pours blood into a teacup.

Si presses his ear to Ping's lips. Nothing.

He frantically continues to use the artificial respiration technique, again and again and again.

SI (CONT'D)

(panting)

We must save our friends' child.

He stops. He places his ear to Ping's lips.

LING

I'm sure he is gone...

Si interrupts.

SI

Shh... wife.

He listens and then looks at Ling.

SI (CONT'D)

Ping is alive! He's alive! Quick feed him some deer blood. Hurry! It will give him strength.

Ling rushes to Ping and holds up his head as she slowly pours the red liquid into his mouth. He COUGHS. He eagerly drinks some more.

Seeing the child is okay, Si bursts out the apartment door.

EXT. QUON'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Si POUNDS on the apartment door.

SI
Quon, Mei-Hua, your Ping is alive!
Your son is alive!

He POUNDS again and the door swings open. He looks inside and slowly walks in.

SI (CONT'D)
Quon, Ping is not dead! Where is
my Min? She might still be alive.
Quon? Mei-Hua?
(shouting)
Min! Where is my Min?!

The apartment is empty.

Si turns and runs along the catwalk.

SI (CONT'D)
Quon, Mei-Hua where are you? I
want my Min!

Si bounds down the stairs and runs out into the street. He is instantly soaked by the pounding rain.

SI (CONT'D)
Quon, your son is alive! Come
claim your son and return my Min!

Si runs past people as the fog rolls in and engulfs him

SI (CONT'D)
Where are you Quon?! I want my
daughter!

INT. SI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ping sits on Ling's lap sipping from the teacup. He has his color back and looks good.

Si drags himself through the door, a beaten, depressed man.

SI
They're all gone.

Distraught, Si PLOPS down next to Ling. She wraps her arm around his neck and WHISPERS into his ear.

LING

We will always have our daughter in our minds and our hearts. Now, we must welcome our new son.

Ping is all smiles as the new family embraces.

INT. RETIREMENT APARTMENT - DAY

Pearl, Ling, Si and Li-Ling sit in stunned silence. Pearl glances at a clock on the wall. It reads 2:45.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

A small hole is dug in the ground before the headstone Popo ordered.

Helped by Jill, Laolao kneels at the grave with her Nordstrom bag. She removes Waigong's urn. She kisses it and holds it in front of her face.

LAOLAO

I still love you Quon. And I still love our Ping, please tell him so.

Laolao places the urn into the hole.

She takes the photograph of the ship, Quon, Mei-Hua and Min, and places it into the hole.

LAOLAO (CONT'D)

I hope your journey into the next life was better than the one we took on that damn boat.

Jill SNICKERS.

Laolao looks at the picture of her, Quon and Ping before she lowers that into the hole.

LAOLAO (CONT'D)

This is to keep you company with beautiful memories.

She kisses and lowers the dried flowers into the hole.

LAOLAO (CONT'D)

These will help you remember the happy time when we discovered each other.

The last thing she pulls out of the bag is the scarf from her nightmares. She lowers that into the hole.

LAOLAO (CONT'D)

This scarf means so much. It was given to us on the night when our Ping was born. Cherish it as much as I have.

A shadow suddenly looms over Laolao. She looks up and sees a large, dark silhouette of a man blocking out the sun. Li-Ling stands close to him.

The man and Li-Ling kneel down beside Laolao as he lowers a smaller matching scarf into the hole. Laolao can't believe her eyes.

LAOLAO (CONT'D)

That scarf... that was my Ping's scarf...

Laolao looks at the man, recognizes Ping and SOBS as they embrace.

Slowly, Ling, Si, Pearl and Jill kneel down and join Ping, Li-Ling and Laolao in TEARS and embraces.

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Laolao lies on the bed. Jill and Pearl are watching TV in another room. Laolao closes her eyes.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

DREAM SEQUENCE. Stooped and old, Laolao wades into the rushing torrents of water. She sees the log floating toward her. She's frantic. She moves fast into the deep.

She's up to her shoulders when the log floats toward her. She looks around for the floating boy child, but sees nothing. The water rises to her chin.

The log comes close as Laolao desperately tries to stay above water. The log suddenly turns over and becomes a young Mei-Hua holding a young boy child (Ping) and a young girl child (Min).

Water is to Laolao's nose when Mei-Hua stands, holding both children, and walks away on top of the water toward a smiling, waving Quon in the distance. Laolao smiles, closes her eyes and sinks beneath the surface.

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Jill gets up from the TV and walks into Laolao's bedroom.

JILL
Laolao, I can't believe how much
Ping looks like Waigong when he was
younger. Don't you think they look
alike?

Jill PLOPS down on the bed.

JILL (CONT'D)
Laolao, I said...

Jill stops in mid-sentence and looks at Laolao. She knows Laolao is dead and shakes her head "no".

JILL (CONT'D)
Mom...

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

Jill sits in the window seat with her head resting on Pearl's shoulder. Pearl reaches up and turns out the overhead lights.

FADE OUT.

THE END

