

清晨的西天寺一点没有墓园该有的寂静, 几步之遥的工地上, 两架巨兽般的机器正在吼叫, 敲敲打打的工人们已经热得脱掉了外套, 只穿着腥红色线衣。符马却冷得直缩脖子, 大姑妈也往脖子里加了条蛇纹般的围巾, 小声嘟囔着: “这种地方, 总是比城里冷。”大姑父东张西望地找厕所。符马掏出烟, 似乎没睡醒的小叔叔接过一根, 侧身就着符马的火头。

奶奶被小姑妈挽着最后一个下车, 手上一枚挺大的老式金戒指直晃眼, 刚刚出门前她还很顶真地挨个儿检查了大家一番: 无论男女, 身上都要带样“小金物件儿”、“压一压”。小叔叔忘了, 被逼着在脖子里挂了一条女式绞花细金链。其实在平常, 作为老人, 她

PARADISE TEMPLE HAD none of the tranquility a graveyard ought to have in the early morning light. Two monstrous engines were roaring on a construction site just a few paces away, and the clanking, hammering construction workers had already gotten hot enough to strip down to their scarlet cotton undershirts. Fu Ma, meanwhile, was hunching against the cold. Da Guma, his father’s sister, had wrapped a snake-print scarf around her neck. “These places are always colder than in the city,” she muttered. Her husband was looking around in search of a toilet. Fu Ma fished out a pack of cigarettes, and Xiao Shushu, his father’s younger brother, took one sleepily and leaned over to get a light from Fu Ma.

Grandmother—his father’s mother—was the last one to get out of the car, supported by Xiao Guma, his father’s other sister. A massive, old-fashioned gold ring glinted on Grandmother’s hand, and she looked around appraisingly at the assembled family members before stepping out. All of them were wearing something gold—to “weigh them down” in the graveyard—except for Xiao Shushu, who had forgotten and was left with no choice but to put a woman’s braided gold necklace around his neck. Grandmother usually

懂得看晚辈脸色行事、必要时装装糊涂。只上坟这桩事,她讲究,几乎一出正月就开始查老皇历、择挑相宜之日,并要求所有的人除了上学的小孩都要把这半天给空出来,隆重程度堪比过年。不过怎么可能呢,大家多忙啊。比如这次,符马爸爸出国去了。还有大姑妈家女儿,说是有个重要面试。

奶奶环视了一圈,皱起眉:“搞什么?这里怎么也是工地?”

奶奶的大媳妇、也就是符马的妈妈正对着手机谈床上用品,拿腔拿调地讲着普通话,为了价格上一个零头,跟对方搞了三四个来回。一千人都垂着眼皮在听,符马扭头掐了烟……终于,妈妈卷着舌头面露微笑:“那张总咱回头再聊哈,下次有业务再照顾哈。”一

knew enough, as an older person, to consult with the younger people in the family before going ahead with things, and to play dumb when necessary. When it came to visiting the graveyard, though, she was very particular. She would begin consulting the traditional calendar at the start of the lunar new year, selecting an auspicious day and insisting that everyone—except for the children who were still in school—take a half-day off, the proceedings scarcely less lavish than a New Year’s celebration. Not that it ever worked out exactly as she wanted—people were busy. This time, for instance, Fu Ma’s father was out of the country, and Da Guma’s daughter said she had an important job interview.

Grandmother looked around, wrinkling her brow. “What’s this? Construction, even here?”

Her daughter-in-law—Fu Ma’s mother—was talking into her phone about bed linens in careful newscaster Mandarin, haggling back and forth with the customer over some minor issue of price. The others listened, eyelids drooping, and Fu Ma lit his cigarette. Finally, his mother laughed, curling her tongue. “We’ll talk again, Manager

合上手机, 她变回南京土话, 对奶奶解释:

“你们还不晓得啊, 报上登了, 原先的石子岗火葬场要搬得啵, 就是搬到西天寺, 这块盖的就是新殡仪馆! 不得了噢, 以后这块墓地肯定要大涨。”她是随便什么事都能想到价钱上去。

“那也好, 老头子喜欢交朋友, 这下子, 他这边倒热闹了。”奶奶看看工地。大家也跟着看, 眼光往半空中移移, 好像那里已经竖起根大烟囱、并缓缓升腾起了青白色的烟。

各式小贩这时早围上来, 卖菊花、炮仗、青团、纸别墅、纸汽车什么的。大家都富有经验地毫不理会、只管往前。奶奶对祭品早有安排, 她提前半个月便在家叠好所有的金元宝和银元宝, 并一家家打电话分派款项: 红绸

Zhang—do keep me in mind the next time there’s an opportunity.”

Snapping her phone shut, she reverted to Nanjing dialect: “You hadn’t heard? It was in the papers—they’re moving the old Shizigang crematorium to Paradise Temple. That’s where the new building’s going to go. How do you like that—graves here are bound to get more expensive.” In any situation that came up, her mind would go to what it would cost.

“Just as well,” Grandmother said. “The old man always liked making friends. It’ll be nice and lively here.” She looked at the building site. The others looked too, their gazes hovering in mid-air as if the smokestack were already sticking up into the sky, with slow puffs of pale smoke rising from it.

By now the group had been surrounded by vendors proffering chrysanthemums, firecrackers, sticky cuffweed cakes, paper mansions, cardboard sedans and the like. The family members knew enough to ignore these and walk straight ahead. Grandmother had already taken care of planning the grave-offerings: she had set aside stacks of gold and silver grave-money at home a month in advance, and

带子、香蕉(指定要国产的小米蕉)、红富士、金南京、洋河大曲、烛台与香什么的……她的语气像在做什么公益动员: 每个人都要参与进来, 准备一样小东西, 哪怕就是个打火机也好。

小舅落在后面, 推却不过, 从小贩手里买了一簇柳枝, 耷着肩跟上来。离婚后的舅舅越来越少参加家庭活动。去年中秋, 他曾带回过一个相处中的大胸女人。这次上坟, 又形单影只了。

phoned everyone to tell them what to bring: red silk ribbons, bananas (she specified Chinese-grown plantains), red Fuji apples, Nanking cigarettes (the ones in gold boxes), Yanghe liquor, candlesticks, incense—sounding a little like a public service worker as she reminded them that everyone would have to do their part and bring something small, even just a lighter.

Fu Ma’s uncle on his mother’s side, Xiao Jiu, lingered behind the group. Unable to resist the vendors, he bought a willow twig, then ran forward, his shoulders slumping, to join the others. He had been taking part in more and more family events since the divorce. The previous year, he’d brought a big-breasted girl he was dating along to the Mid-Autumn dinner, but for the grave visit he was alone again.