

Where Emperors Go to Die

By

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FADE IN:

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT.

1

The screen starts black and silent. The lights come on like a showroom floor, revealing an oddly lit load of passengers.

MING (Chinese Male 42) has a window-seat, he motionlessly stares out at the city lights below.

With a jerk, he nervously taps his fingers on the arm rest.

The plane dips down and lands rough, the tires screech, its passengers bounce as the plane levels. Everything smooths out, as the reverse thrusters roar.

INT. AIRPORT RESTROOMS- NIGHT.

2

Again, the screen is black and silent. The lights come on, a spot light centered on Yao Nan (Chinese 32) as she stands motionlessly looking into a mirror.

With a jerk, she plucks at her eyelashes then smooths out a few shallow wrinkles near her eyes. She pouts.

The intercom announces "*The arrival of flight 743, from the United States.*" Yao Nan grabs her purse and rushes out.

INT. PEKING INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT- NIGHT.

3

The large expanse of the airport is devoid of people; it's cavernous walls spread wide, it's austere lights glare down upon the frail figure of YAO NAN as she slowly crosses.

She silently waits outside customs, noise erupts out around her as groups of matching HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS rush out. The mood lifts as parents raise their eyes to search for their children ceremoniously.

Yao Nan holds back her smile when MING exits the gate, talking enthusiastically on his phone. She takes in his airs and graces, Ming is nothing short of perfect in posture and physique.

Ming sees Yao Nan and ingratiates himself with a smile. She gingerly takes his arm and in turn smiles.

Yao Nan bubbles, Ming mouth's "Hello" to her. As they walk away everyone's attention follows this *movie star couple*.

FADE DOWN

EXT. BEIJING- NIGHT MONTAGE

4

The darkness of Beijing inundates Ming and Yao Nan's taxi as it swipes through the littering of lights that brings them deep into the suburbs. Every facade, every alley, the same as they turn and twist through it's complex network.

INT. YAO NAN'S APARTMENT- NIGHT

5

Yao Nan and Ming enter her eclectically decorated apartment holding carry-on bags and restaurant leftovers. He's in the midst of saying...

MING

I could have spoken with the manager, I think he would want to know how poor his chefs are doing.

YAO NAN

Everyone knows...restaurants start out great, and then after a while, the food and service turns worse and worse.

Ming sets things down and sits on the edge of the bed while Yao Nan cleans up, keeping her back to him.

MING

Well then, we just won't go to the same restaurant twice, ever again.

YAO NAN (CHUCKLES)

Sure... but we will soon run out of restaurants.

MING

In Beijing? Don't be stupid.

YAO NAN

We'll have to move to a new apartment every month?!

MING (NODDING)

I think I can do that...

Ming counts on his fingers and mouths some numbers.

MING (CONT'D)

How about every 2 months instead?

YAO NAN

Sure.

Yao Nan smiles smugly before turning back to cleaning.

Ming goes into the bathroom.

INT. YAO NAN'S BATHROOM- NIGHT

6

He examines himself in the mirror, plucking out gray hairs. Yao Nan secretly watches.

YAO NAN (CONT'D O.S.)

How about we watch a film? I have a few rom-com films I want you to see.

MING

Why?

He spends more time just studying his face in admiration.

YAO NAN (O.S.)

So it's okay?

MING

I'm honestly not a movie person.

Ming grabs a pair of toenail clippers and exits.

INT. YAO NAN'S APARTMENT- NIGHT.

7

He sits on the bed and begins clipping away. Yao Nan stops putting up laundry and grabs a broom.

She comes to sweep up the clippings when Ming snatches a pair of underwear she was still holding.

MING (CONT'D)

Are these for me?

He stands and begins to playfully model them.

MING (CONT'D)

I don't think they will fit!

Yao Nan blushingly laughs, and snatches them back. She takes a few steps away, but Ming grabs her by the waist and pulls her down to the bed next to him.

MING (CONT'D)

Come, have a seat.

YAO NAN

No! You're such a
embarrassment.

Yao Nan escapes and stands up, again Ming pulls her back.

MING

Yao Nan...I have a present for
you.

Yao Nan pouts.

YAO NAN

It better be great!

MING

Of course!

Ming goes to his luggage and quickly pulls out a gift wrapped in American Christmas paper.

He sets them on Yao Nan's lap. She giggles with excitement and bounces as she tears open the wrapping on one of them.

Ming has bought her a tablet. She smiles brightly in acceptance.

YAO NAN

You can't even buy these here
yet!

Yao Nan grins really big, then angrily stomps her foot.

YAO NAN (CONTD)

Is this a bribe?

MING

For what?

Ming gawks at her, waiting for the act to drop.

YAO NAN

Don't you think this is awkward?
We haven't seen each other in a
year.

MING

It hasn't been a year, calm
down. Aren't you happy that we
are together now?

YAO NAN

Of course...

MING

Just come out and tell me, what have I done wrong?

YAO NAN

You've barely spoken with me in months.. When you are gone, I think about how you must have forgotten me.

MING

See, I haven't done anything wrong. You've over thought things again. How can I forget you?

Yao Nan shrugs and gets up. Ming kisses her hand.

MING (REPEATED)

How could I forget this. And this...

Ming continues kissing up her arm, shoulder and face, repeating his line. Yao Nan smiles playing bashful.

YAO NAN

But would you love me if I didn't have a body?

Ming pauses to laugh at her.

MING

I can't imagine that...but yes... I would.

YAO NAN

You sound like it's a joke?

MING

Isn't it?

YAO NAN

No?

MING

Let's not do this, lets not argue my first night back.

Yao Nan pouts again, making a whimpering noise. Ming kisses her lips.

YAO NAN

Is that all...?

MING (WHISPER)

Yao Nan, I can love you forever, if you just tell me how to make you happy?

He begins to caress her breasts and unbutton her shirt.

YAO NAN (WHISPERED)
I... don't know... I'm not
unhappy.

MING
I can tell, you aren't happy.

YAO NAN
What makes you happy?

MING
You do.

Ming's voice trails off as he falls into his lust.

MING (CONTD)
Give me a family, we can be
happy.

A blue light, races across her face, striking her eyes.

YAO NAN
I don't know ..

Yao Nan lays back ceremoniously, her eyes glimmering faintly with an eerie cast as she spreads open her legs.

INT. FACTORY-DREAM

8

We move through the rafters of an old, brick factory that has long been abandoned. The air is filled with silver dust, drifting and twirling in the breeze. Along both walls are sets of medical beds, made of pale blue plastic; on these beds, lay identical figures of women lying on their backs, knees raised in a birthing position

As we come down closer, we can see clearly that these figures are not humans but robots, and they have the same face as Yao Nan. Their mouths are forever stretched open in the howls of labor pain, their eyes are made of honeycomb diamonds, skin of tin, and their hair hard plastic.

All of them are covered with dust, unused for a long time. Near the end of one row we hear the sound of rushing liquid. As we come upon this last figure, small lights flip on, and the machine starts up.

INT. YAO NAN'S APARTMENT- MORNING.

9

Yao Nan and Ming both awake from this dream, they anxiously look over at each other as if strangers.

Without word, Ming stands up, takes his phone, and goes into the bathroom, shutting the door. Yao Nan rolls over.

INT. YAO NAN'S BATHROOM - MORNING

10

Ming grooms himself in the mirror while waiting for someone to pick up.

QI JI

Hello?

MING

Hello, Qi Ji?

QI JI

Of course Ming, it's me.

MING

Sorry, did I wake you?

QI JI

Of course you did. I wouldn't have picked up if it wasn't you.

MING

That's good to hear... so you're not mad?

(a beat)

QI JI

I didn't think you would call. I've missed you.

MING

Me too. I just got back.

QI JI

Did you get my messages?

MING

No? Is something wrong?

Qi Ji beckons his concern.

QI JI

Not exactly. I have to see you.

MING

I don't know if I'm ready yet.

QI JI

Ming...there has been a
miracle. We must see each other.

MING

Miracle?!

QI JI

Remember the old cafe, near our
college? Let's meet there.

MING

No Qi Ji, I don't think I'm
ready. Forget I called you. I
can't come.

QI JI

Tonight, okay. I'll be there at
7, I know you will be too. Love
you.

Ming hangs up the phone, as he says this he stares off in
a daze.

INT. YAO NAN'S APARTMENT- MORNING

11

Yao Nan is listening at the door.

MING (O.S.)

Love you too.

(A BEAT)

She rushes back into bed.

The toilet flushes and Ming steps out smiling. Yao Nan
face is buried in her pillow. The soft sound of her
crying.

MING (CONTD)

That was work...I'll have to stay
late today. Sorry, you know, I
need to catch up on everything
I've missed out on.

Ming turns back and closes the door.

LAO AYI (V.O.)

He must not be serious. A good
man would have met your
parents. It's been almost two
years.

V.O. BRIDGES SCENES

INT. REAL ESTATE AGENCY- DAY.

12

Yao Nan sits next to LAO AYI (57), a broad shouldered, square jawed, no-nonsense woman; and Meng Meng (20), an unremarkable woman. They are all in uniforms and eating box lunches with co-workers.

MENG MENG

Wrong, it's been over two years now.

Yao Nan feints shame.

MENG MENG (CONTD)

I know men these days, if he hasn't asked for marriage, it's because he never will. He probably has a girlfriend in America.

A group of male co-workers chortle.

YAO NAN

I visited him in New York!

Lao Ayi points at Yao Nan.

LAO AYI

Don't defend him! There is something wrong for sure. If something doesn't work, it's broken.

INT. OFFICE- DAY.

13

Ming, dressed in a designer gray suit, swiftly walks through the expanse of an over-decorated office.

YES MAN #1

Ming, welcome back. We are really proud of your work in America.

YES MAN #1 gets up from his work and races towards Ming to shake his hand. Others in the office take notice and stand up too.

Ming smiles back and takes the time to greet them back.

INT. REAL ESTATE AGENCY- DAY.

14

MENG MENG

He's the perfect guy- handsome, rich, a hard worker in the international world. A Chinese gentleman...

LAO AYI

But divorced.

MENG MENG

Who isn't these days. It's
stranger that he's not
remarried. You'd be a princess
if you married him.

LAO AYI

A princess! Ha!

YAO NAN

But it hit him really hard,
that's why he took the job in
America. He's not ready to move
on.

INT. OFFICE MEETING ROOM- DAY.

15

Ming sits in a meeting room. He is giving a lecture to a group of attentive suits. He has a PPT up with lots of English words and diagrams.

MING

This technology isn't new, the use of subliminal learning within cognitive development fields has been around for decades. What we will talk about today is the use of vitamins, as a brain steroid, to boost development in post adolescent brains.

Ming smiles and looks at the crowd.

MING (CONTD)

Don't worry guys, it's not mad science, our bodies have done this naturally for years.

RONG (68), a knotty older man, looks obviously bored and walks out during the presentation. When he leaves, many follow.

INT. REAL ESTATE AGENCY- DAY.

16

From across the room comes a high, parrot like voice.

MALE REAL ESTATE WORKER #1

You girls aren't thinking right. There are too many leftovers in Beijing.

MENG MENG
Be quiet! Yao Nan is very
beautiful.

Angered, Lao Ayi gets up and leaves.

MALE REAL ESTATE WORKER #2
That just makes it worse, don't
you know. Marry a reliable wife,
screw a beautiful mistress.

Male Real Estate Worker #2 doesn't laugh, but some of the other men do. Meng Meng shakes her head, glowers at them, and rudely points her chopsticks at them.

MENG MENG
You bastards!

INT. OFFICE - DAY.

17

Ming swaggered towards a group of cubicles. Many look up, smile, and wave, save ZHANG (37), who keeps on working.

MING
Hey, Zhang, is this how you greet
your old friend.

ZHANG
I know you're there Ming, but I
don't want to kiss your ass.

MING
Since when was saying hello
kissing ass?

Zhang looks up at him and stares.

ZHANG
Wow!!! I forgot how ugly you
were!

They share a laugh. Zhang reaches into his cubicle and pulls out a present, then tosses it pathetically to Ming.

MING
What's this?

ZHANG
You open it, it's called a
present.

MING
I didn't bring anything for you.

ZHANG

Drop such formalities.

Ming tears it open, inside are two identical, delicate wine glasses with gold adornment.

MING

Wow, this is for a girl right? Maybe you gave me the wrong thing, and your girlfriend has mine?

ZHANG

That's for Yao Nan and you. She's a good woman, and you should marry her. Old men with no children...

Zhang shakes his head as a joke, but Ming isn't amused.

MING

So you've gotten close to her when I was gone?

ZHANG

Not too close...but yes, in the few times we met, I felt she is a rare catch. Beauty outside, and once you look, some inside too.

The side of Ming's lip begins to twitch nervously. He hands the glasses back to Zhang then covers up his mouth.

MING (CONTD)

How about you give it to her?

Zhang smirks, but sober when he realizes Ming is serious.

ZHANG

What?

MING

Think about it. She's not right for me. Maybe you should be the one to...

ZHANG

Don't play games. Please give it to her and say it's from me, for both of you.

Ming smiles.

MING

No worries. It was simply a trick. This means I can trust you.

Zhang looks annoyed.

ZHANG

A glass is nothing special, it's what you put into it that matters. Always keep these full Ming.

Zhang hands Ming the glasses again.

MING

I like wine personally. Okay, I'm off!

Ming walks off before shouting.

MING (CONTD)

Lets go out for drinks, I'll give you your gift then!

EXT. REMODELING BUILDING- DAY.

18

Yao Nan face is topped off by a fashionable helmet. She drives an electric bike through narrow allies to arrive at an apartment building in the midst of remodeling. The buildings are cocooned in green tarps. Ribbons wrapped around the building read:

"Danger: Work in Progress."

All along the building's side are stacks upon stacks of windows ready for installation.

INT. REMODELING BUILDING - DAY

19

Yao Nan stops to stare at door 4-3.

The door's lock suddenly slides open, startling Yao Nan. She rushes off.

One flight up, she unlocks the door of 5-1.

INT. OLD APARTMENT- DAY.

20

Yao Nan sorts through a dirty, broken up mess of an apartment.

She puts on a mask and sweeps up chunks of tiles, greasy house wares, and abandoned toys.

INT. LAB- DAY.

21

Ming lies in a chair with a futuristic helmet on, this helmet is covered in small access holes and has a thick arm connected to it that spirals back into an array of wires.

LAB BOYS study the readouts and write out notes furtively. Ming appears sanguine.

LAB BOY 2 (HUSHED)
Results in this lobe are lower
than expected, should we change
the parameter?

LAB BOY 1 (HUSHED)
That's what he said.

LAB BOY 2 (HUSHED)
Okay, I'll begin administration
of the new k-12
compound. Monitor his central
lobe for bleed through, I don't
want this to cause a
destabilization.

LAB BOY 1 (HUSHED)
I think they just want results at
this point.

Lab Boy 2 leaves the monitors, and pulls out a case of syringes. He goes to Ming's left side and plugs the needle into one of the holes on the helmet.

He injects the fluid into Ming's skull.

LAB BOY 2
Tell me if there is any
discomfort.

MING
It feels horrible, thank you.

Ming's P.O.V as the image goes blurry and wavers. The rooms twists and sways.

Ming's looks down at his body as faint pulses of light rhythmically sway from under his skin.

FADE OUT:

EXT. XIDAN CAFE- NIGHT.

22

Ming sits in front of the large window, the seat next to him is empty, but has a coffee.

He frequently looks up and runs his hand through his hair. Ming (C.U.) starts to practice lines. Quietly, in a whisper he speaks to himself.

MING (QUIETLY)
I can't love you.

He then gives a warm smile, his eyes filling with a tender emotion.

MING (CONTD QUIETLY)
But...I love you. I love you?

He continues to practice these lines when Qi Ji (39), a simple beauty, enters the frame and knocks on the glass.

INT. XIDAN CAFE- NIGHT.

23

Qi Ji sits next to Ming.

QI JI
I knew you would come, I could hear it in your voice.

MING
I'd like to think I'm not that predictable.

Qi Ji arranges herself carefully on the seat as Ming nervously fidgets.

MING (CONTD)
Wow... You've let your hair get long again.

QI JI
It's good to see you too, but you look the same. You never age.

MING
I got you a coffee.

QI JI
Thanks, but I shouldn't right now.

MING
How have you been?

Qi Ji gives a half smile.

QI JI
Good, really good.

MING
How's mother doing?

QI JI
She is the same as when you left,
still mad at you.

Ming shrugs it off.

MING
Well, considering what I did; I
can accept that.

QI JI
How was America?

MING
There isn't much to say actually.
It was *nice*, everything is
modern, not very many people, but
life is too slow there. I missed
Beijing, I missed all the
connections I have here. The food
was the only *really* bad thing,
truly *awful*!

They share a laugh.

QI JI
I'm glad your sense of humor is
still there. It's been awhile
since anyone made me
laugh. Mother's not funny.

MING
No, she's not.

QI JI
So... how about your father, is
he still an ass?

MING
Of course.

Ming laughs awkwardly loud.

QI JI
Did you get what you wanted from
the trip?

MING
What was that?

Qi Ji asks this rather plainly.

QI JI
To get away from me?

MING
There are many things I want to
get away from? Don't you think it
was good for both of us?

QI JI
I respect your honesty, but no, I
hope still that you are going to
come back home tonight...yet I
sense that you won't be.

Ming drinks his coffee.

QI JI (CONTD)
There's something important I
want to show you.

Qi Ji stares at Ming intensely.

MING
Your miracle?

QI JI
I need to know if you can still
love me?

MING
Do you really think I hate you?

QI JI
I've never lied to you, have I?

MING
I know you can't lie to me. So
no... you haven't.

QI JI
Ming... look.

Qi Ji unzips her large coat, revealing she is pregnant.
Ming's lip begins twitching.

MING
That's not possible.. you
shouldn't be pregnant!

QI JI
It's ours.

MING
What?! How?!

QI JI
I don't know? I told you, it's a
miracle! I was seeing some
doctors about our problem, and
then one day, I'm pregnant.

MING
So you had a procedure?

Qi Ji shakes her head.

QI JI
They can't explain it.

Ming stares coldly at her.

QI JI (CONTD)
Listen, I promise; you are the
only one, I have ever been with.

Ming shakes his head in disbelief.

QI JI
Believe me!

MING
How can I... accept this? I'm
not a fool!

QI JI
No!

Qi Ji begins to cry, a few people look at them so Ming
leans close to whisper to Qi Ji.

MING
You've cheated on me, maybe let a
doctor examine you too
closely?! I will bring divorce
papers by to have you sign. Is
that understood!?

QI JI
No... You can't divorce me, I'm
pregnant! It's ours.

MING (WHISPERED)
I won't be married to a whore,
good bye.

Ming storms out. Qi Ji chases after.

EXT. XIDAN SHOPPING AREA- NIGHT.

24

Ming races past the busy sidewalks of Xidan, through the chaotic crowd.

Qi Ji follows, but stops to zip up her coat, she looks about, too late to see Ming.

QI JI (CONTD)
Ming! How can you abandon me!

Some people look at her. Ming watches from the dark shadow of an alley.

He turns into the alley and runs.

EXT. XIDAN ALLEY- NIGHT.

25

Ming comes to an indomitable wall, and leans on it, his mouth begins to twist in a grimace. He looks as if he is about to shout, his face contorting, struggling against his will.

He turns around and buries his head in the crook of his arm. A faint yell echoes out, growing in decibel and chorus, erupting forth from his spirit, then it stops as abruptly as it came.

Ming turns away from the wall, his face cold, and completely stoic: he appears **inhuman**; his breathing is heavy and hisses like steam. His eyes have an odd, swirling light to them, dim and surreal.

He slowly walks the rest of the length of the alley.

EXT. XIDAN- NIGHT.

26

Ming emerges from the other side of the alley near a jewelry shop.

People swarm about him, but no one notices his transformation. He seems to loom above them.

He enters the jewelry store.

INT. YAO NAN'S APARTMENT- NIGHT

27

Yao Nan sits alone on the edge of her bed. Her place is dim, gray-blue light spills in from outside, and an eerie quiet hangs in the air, reinforcing her isolation.

For a beat we just see her frozen, doing nothing.

Her phone rings and she snaps out of the daze.