

## A Funeral

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"Mama, Mama, Mama! It's Papa," shouted a girl, waving her hand excitedly toward an empty chair near the black cold coffin, right inside which a middle-aged male body lied peacefully.

There was no response from the mother, who now stood absently in the living room, lost in thought. Some tears, quarrelling noises and horrifying screams on that afternoon were still echoing in her ear tunnels just like an unanswered phone call ringing and ringing all the time.

Strangely, right at this moment there was no sign of sorrow in the dining room in this house. Even some splashes of laughter boldly sneaked out through the seam of the door.

It was the two sisters of the dead.

At this moment they were sipping some champagne and chewing beef steak. The sweet fragrant of the red wine sprinkled out of the rising corners of the sisters' mouths, swirling with the happy words spitted out. Their hands were also busily cutting the scarlet rare steak. Like in a wedding banquet, the air in this dining room smelled of celebration.

It was the two sisters of the dead. "Mama, Mama, Mama! Papa, there," the little girl spoke again, still pointing at the empty chair. Because seeing her father, the excitement made the girl's cheeks as crimson as her dark mourning clothes could be. "Gift in Papa's hand," went on the girl, and started to giggle. Then without any hesitation, she just ran toward the chair.

"Tommy. . ." The mother finally said something. "Where's Tommy? Did you see your brother?" But the girl did not stop to answer her mother at all. She just kept running to the chair around which the mother could only see a bunch of withered chrysanthemums.

"Mom, did you see Tommy," asked the mother. Now she positioned her head in the direction where an old lady sat. The old lady did not have any response to this question. Sixty years in this house had already trained her into silence itself. She was now quiet as dead as the one who lied in the grave coffin. Only the moving lips hung on this old lady's face, shivering for the prayer for her son, showed the sign of her still being alive.

"Tommy? Where are you?" The mother began to step out of the door of the house. A strong weird wind suddenly blew on the mother's pale face, messing her untied hair.

It was all dark outside. Only slightly shining brims of the clouds could indicate where the moon was. Just in such a night few days ago, this mother's husband died.

"Just sign here," the mother started to recall the words the two sisters thrown on her on that afternoon when they put the property alienation contract

in front of her. "You won't need that much money. You should return to us the money our father gave to your husband two years ago. *That* is our money. That is *our* money. Don't play any trick."

Stunned by those *defending* words, without any second thought, the mother just hysterically hugged her Tommy, her only boy, afraid that she might lose her last evidence or her only chance to declare the legality of the property in this family.

"Look, we try to be reasonable here. You know, today only three of us can decide whom the money belongs to. You should've also known that two years ago, our father didn't leave us any money. *None!* So now we want *that* back. Your husband shouldn't own all the money our father had."

Though listening on the spot, with eyes wandering, the old lady was so abstracted and silent as if she should have been the one who lied in the grave coffin.

Seconds later, the persuasive words were far strengthened by the contract being shoved much forward toward the mother by one of the sisters. "Please, just sign it. Everything will be fine. Don't get yourself into trouble. *Please.*"

The air froze . . . as solid as the sisters' mind.

Suddenly, "*No!*" screamed the mother.

In the next second the mother just broke down on the floor, tearing the contract into pieces and crying insanely.

Meanwhile, the monstrous volume of the mother's voice, as an unexpected heart beat from a dying person, violently drew the old lady's eyes back. Then she anxiously looked around in the living room. When catching the sight of the black coffin, her breath almost choked her, as if it was the first time she found that she was accompanied with her son's dead body. The old lady wailed.

"Mama, Mama, Mama. Papa, Papa! Mama!" The little girl stood at the door yelling at her mother and pointed inside. The excitement of the girl's voice waked the mother back to the present.

"Did you see Tommy?" The mother started to step back into the house, ignoring what her daughter said, with the eyes still searching around.

Now the laughter in the dining room disappeared, and was replaced by some hushed female voices, which became a complete blur through the seam of the door.

The little girl followed her mother closely and tried hard to share something with her mother.

"Mama, Mama, what's this?" Now in the girl's hand was a dose of white powder. "Is it what you give me to eat every day, Mama, Mama," asked the girl, pulling her mother's clothes.

Tommy was still gone. . .

“Mama, Mama! Papa said Aunt put this in his food, too. He doesn’t like it. He told me to ask you why. What why? Mama. What why? Mama?”

Nowhere. Nowhere could the mother find Tommy.

“DID YOU SEE TOMMY,” this time the mother cried loud.

Horrified, the girl thought her mother got mad at her, so she nervously loosed her hand from her mother’s clothes. But as if she also wanted to know where Tommy was, she just gazed at her mother innocently.

Just then the mother rushed toward the children’s room. It was a girl’s room now, no sign for a boy. Only a picture near the bedside board could show where Tommy was.

It was two years ago. Before the car accident, Tommy liked to go fishing with his grandpa by bicycle. In the picture he stood at the lake with his grandpa aside putting his right hand on him. Under the great sunshine, the boy in the picture now smiled mutely at his mother.

“Where is Tommy. . . ? Where is Tommy. . . ?” Looking at the picture, the mother murmured, really lost at this time.

The laughter in the kitchen again started to leak out of the seam of the door lightly and finally covered the sobbing of the mother.