

Nai Nai

by

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INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD - DAY

A minimalist living room.

The afternoon sun shines onto its pristine bamboo floor.

The space is well lived -- hints of a household filled with love and joy can be found throughout:

- A stuffed polar bear toy, its white fur worn grey from countless hours of play, sits on the couch.

- A couple pots of healthy vines hang from the ceiling.

- A candid picture of a Chinese family goofing around sits on a side table.

POV ON PICTURE

A slim FATHER with glasses is caught in mid laugh as he carries his pigtailed BABY DAUGHTER on his shoulders. She squeals in delight as the two of them escape the spray of a garden hose from MOM, a cheeky smile across her face.

NAI NAI is smiling and sitting next to her in sunglasses -- her silver hair tucked away in a fabulous hat. YE YE is at the home's entrance giving a funny face and the peace sign.

The diffuse sunlight is interrupted by the pitter patter of small socked feet. It's CELESTE, (10, clever and rambunctious) the preteen version of the baby girl in the photograph.

Celeste hops onto the couch and sits cross-legged in front of a large TV.

Underneath the TV is a large wooden chest. Its vintage style a stark contrast against the modern decor. However, the chest radiates a humble warmth that helps it fit right in.

CELESTE

Home, call Nai Nai!

The TV turns on -- the screen displays a profile picture of the same elderly Chinese woman from the family photo. This time, she's sitting in a rose garden.

Within a couple of rings, the call is answered. NAI NAI (70s, quick to smile) is outside in her garden, surrounded by the leaning branches of a Wisteria tree.

She greets Celeste with joy and laughter.

NAI NAI

Hello baby!! How is my favorite girl doing?

CELESTE

Hi Nai Nai! I'm doing great. How's your garden?

NAI NAI

Ohh well Nai Nai is busy as always! My dear plants need lots of love to grow up big and tall -- just like you! I haven't heard from you in a few days, how is summer break?

CELESTE

I've been having so much fun! Oh, I must've forgot to call! Did I tell you we're going on vacation tomorrow? Daddy is taking us camping! I'm so excited! But I want you to come too...

NAI NAI

(smiling)

Well, Nai Nai's home is very far away. I'm sorry I can't be there baby, I would love to if I could.

CELESTE

But you used to come all the time!

NAI NAI

Aiya, honey. Nai Nai had to move far away. But you know that I am always with you. Whenever you need me, just think about me and I'll be right there in your heart!

CELESTE

I know...

The precocious girl isn't satisfied.

CELEST

But is that kinda why you don't seem to grow older Nai Nai? Because you moved?

NAI NAI

You're such a smart girl! Yes, exactly! Thanks to your daddy we can talk whenever you want!

CELESTE

I don't really get it though...

NAI NAI

Well baby, if you have some time, I can tell you the whole long story!

CELESTE

Sure!

NAI NAI

It all began with the chest right underneath me.

Nai Nai looks down, as if she can see the chest under the TV. She points her finger at it.

NAI NAI (CONT'D)

That chest has meant a lot to our family over the years...

[NOTE: SUBTITLED MANDARIN DIALOGUE WILL BE ITALICIZED]

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. TAIPEI STREET MARKET - DAY

SUPER: Taipei 1975

NAI NAI V.O

It all started when my father was getting ready for my wedding day...

Taipei in the 70s. The streets are full of young people eager to show off their long hair and colorful clothes.

The market is crowded with vendors hawking slaughtered meat and fresh produce. Weaving through the crowds with practiced ease is WEI (40s, balding, scholarly demeanor).

Between a toothy woman selling scallion pancakes and a portly chicken farmer is his destination: a small furniture store with wares stacked up to the ceiling.

INT. FURNITURE STORE - CONTINUOUS

The shop is packed with odds and ends. A lopsided fan futilely bats around the humid air.

Wei smiles as he sees LIN (60s, hunched back, white tank top) who greets him with open arms.

LIN

*Xiao Wei! Congratulations! Excited
or dreading your favorite
daughter's big day?*

WEI

*Favorite daughter? Is it that
obvious?*

LIN

(smirks)

*Ai, when you get to my advanced
age, you'll understand. The first
time I saw how you look at her was
all I needed!*

Wei doesn't try to protest.

WEI

Well then, you know why I'm here.

LIN

*Of course, of course. Right when I
heard the big news I reserved our
rarest dowry chest just for you.
It's made with the finest rosewood
and covered with a beautiful
lacquer finish...*

As Lin talks, he slowly guides his customer to the back of the store.

Lin's description does not inspire enthusiasm. As Wei follows the store owner his wandering eyes spot another item more appealing to him.

WEI

*Big brother, hold on one sec.
(points)
Can you show me that piece in the
back?*

Lin looks in the direction Wei is pointing. Once he sees the piece in question he turns back to his friend with a quizzical expression.

LIN

*Oh that one? It's just an everyday
chest. Surely your little treasure
deserves a piece more fitting her
position in your hear-- hey!*

Wei is already on the move. Lin weaves around dusty chairs and old wardrobes as he tries to keep up with his friend.

Wei stops in front of the chest. Once in full view of the piece, it was clear that Lin was right.

There were no ornate inlaid decorations. No luxurious metal latches to complement a burnt umber exterior. Not even any artistic carvings to catch the eye.

LIN (CONT'D)

Well... here it is. It's made of camphor wood, which does help repel insects. It's pragmatic -- sturdy. I can guarantee it will last a long time. Maybe a good wedding present for a nephew, but if you look at the chest I was telling you--

WEI

I'll take it.

EXT. TAIPEI HOTEL - DAY

A pair of good-looking newlyweds hurry out of a hotel entrance and are met by a cacophony of cheering and confetti from the friends and family who line the steps.

TIEH-CHUNG (mid 20s, tan skin, grey pinstripe suit with red tie, dashing smile) gently leads JIA-PYNG (mid 20s, pale, elegant, traditional red wedding gown) by the hand as they smile and wave to the well-wishers.

At the bottom of the stairs is Wei, dressed in a blue *changpao*, urging the hotel staff to quickly load the newly bought camphor wood chest into the back of an old black Mercedes.

Before one of the young bellboys closes the chest, we see its contents: a number of delicate blankets and dresses with a few pieces of gold jewelry on top.

The newlyweds reach the bottom right as the chest is placed in the trunk of the car. Jia-Pyng runs up to give her father an emotional hug. After the loving embrace, Tieh-Chung clasps his father-in-law's hands with genuine gratitude. Wei gives a nod of affirmation.

Wei urges the newlyweds into the waiting car.

INT. WEDDING CAR - CONTINUOUS

The couple wave goodbye to their friends through the car window. The car begins to take off as Wei and his wife step into the street to see them off.

Jia-Pyng, eyes full of emotion, keeps her gaze on her father until her parents disappear into the busy Taipei streets.

INT. TIEH-CHUNG AND JIA-PYNG'S HOME - DAY

SUPER: Los Angeles, 1982

An empty, unfurnished living room. The door opens. Tieh-Chung, now in an oversized suit and aviator glasses, carries a big box labeled BOOKS into the room.

Hands still full, he turns back to see his wife's reaction to their first home.

TIEH-CHUNG

Well? What do you think?

Jia-Pyng walks past her husband. Wearing a long flowing dress with hair tied up in a pony-tail, she carefully examines every corner as she crosses the floor.

Soon she's at the glass sliding door in the back. She opens the curtains, revealing a beautiful backyard: fruit trees, palm bushes, roses. Her discerning expression quickly turns to excitement.

She turns back to Tieh-Chung.

JIA-PYNG

I love it.

INT. TIEH-CHUNG AND JIA-PYNG'S HOME - LATER

The two new homeowners are in the midst of moving their belongings into the new home. The living room is almost done - - but its missing a centerpiece. Tieh-Chung has an idea -- he goes into another room and comes back with the camphor wood chest, placing it right in the middle of the room.

INT. TIEH-CHUNG AND JIA-PYNG'S HOME - NIGHT

Jia-Pyng now has short hair and has traded her dress for a power suit. She's sitting on the coffee table while Tieh-Chung paces nervously.

TIEH-CHUNG

What did the doctor say again?

JIA-PYNG

At my age, we only have a couple more chances.

Tieh-Chung subconsciously rubs his head with anxiety as they contemplate the serious news.

Jia-Pyng breaks the silence.

JIA-PYNG (CONT'D)
 (determined)
 I want to try.

Tieh-Chung stops in his tracks. He stares at his wife for a moment before rushing over to embrace her.

INT. TIEH-CHUNG AND JIA-PYNG'S HOME - DAY

Tieh-Chung steadily paces around the room holding his newborn in his arms. His face is beaming with happiness.

INT. TIEH-CHUNG AND JIA-PYNG'S HOME - DAY

A ball crashes through the sliding door.

JIA-PYNG (O.S.)
 PATRICK NIU!

INT. TIEH-CHUNG AND JIA-PYNG'S GARAGE - DAY

The chest now sits in storage. It gathers dust next to a creaky ping pong table and boxes of old files.

The garage door slowly creaks open. Jia-Pyng is accompanied by PATRICK (mid 20s, wild hair, bright eyes) -- the same man who we saw in Celeste's family picture.

JIA-PYNG
*Take as much as you can, or else
 its just going to go to waste.*

Patrick looks around with skepticism at his parent's old belongings. He's about to leave empty-handed until he spies the camphor wood chest in the corner.

PATRICK
 ...This chest is pretty
 interesting. Can I take it?

Patrick's choice brings a smile to his mother's face.

INT. PATRICK'S APARTMENT - DAY

Patrick is at his desk -- surrounded by monitors of code. Behind him sits the chest -- the centerpiece to his hip, midcentury modern apartment.

INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD - DAY

The chest has moved with Patrick to his current minimalist home. He and his wife sit and converse with Jia-Pyng and Tieh-Chung while a baby Celeste plays on the couch.

Celeste wanders to the edge. She teeters... before Jia-Pyng reaches over and catches her. As she rests in her grandmother's arms, she says her first words:

CELESTE

Nai nai!

INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD - LATER

The younger couple sees Patrick's parents off at the doorway. As Jia-Pyng puts on her shoes, she doubles over coughing.

Patrick rushes over to take care of his mother.

INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD - MORNING

Patrick and his mom sit on the couch, having a serious conversation. He's trying to convince her of something. In the end, she agrees and they have an emotional hug.

INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD - LATER

Jia-Pyng talks into a mic while Patrick sits at his computer working on some code.

INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD - LATER

Jia-Pyng is wearing a motion capture suit. She makes a few awkward motions while Patrick encourages her to keep going.

INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD - LATER

The lights are off, only Patrick's monitor is illuminated as he works tirelessly into the night.

INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD - DAY

Patrick installs a large amount of computer hardware in the open camphor wood chest. His eyes are dark and hollow -- the result of pushing himself through countless days of intense work.

He doesn't notice his wife walk in behind him. She's on the phone -- her face pale and serious.

She hangs up and kneels down next to Patrick -- breaking the news to him. His shock soon turns to sadness, and he begins to sob. She reaches over and gives him a comforting hug.

INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD - DAWN

Patrick is at his computer -- still pushing off sleep. He makes some final adjustments and runs the program... causing the TV to turn on.

Patrick turns around, watching the screen in anticipation.

After a few moments, Jia-Pyng appears on the screen. Her back is to her son as she trims a Wisteria tree.

Soon she turns around and faces Patrick.

PATRICK

M-mom?...

JIA-PYNG

(smiling)

Hi dear.

END FLASHBACK

INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD - DAY

We return to Celeste, now deep in thought, digesting the entire story.

CELESTE

But do you like living like this
Nai Nai?

NAI NAI

Well, I certainly wasn't expecting
it when I was younger, but I'm
happy I get to spend more time with
you and your parents!

CELESTE
What about Ye Ye?

NAI NAI
Ye Ye wasn't able to be
convinced...

CELESTE
I see. Well I'm happy I get to talk
to you too, but when I'm older I'm
going to figure out a way for you
to come with us on vacation!

NAI NAI
I would love that child. Thank you!

PATRICK (O.S.)
Celeste! Time to go!

CELESTE
Ok! Dad's calling me.

She turns, excited to head out, but catches herself.

CELESTE (CONT'D)
I'm going to miss you Nai Nai! See
you when I'm back! Love you!

NAI NAI
Bye! Have fun! I love you!

Celeste hops off the couch and runs out the door.

INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD - EVENING

A constant stampede of heavy rain interspersed with the roar
of thunder rumbles through the living room.

From the edge of the room, a puddle of water begins to form.

The puddle grows quickly. Very quickly. It soon reaches the
center of the room... and begins to rise.

INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD - AFTERNOON

Celeste and her parents open the door and... find the house
completely destroyed by water damage.

CELESTE
(desperate)
Nai Nai?... Nai Nai!

The child repeatedly tries to call for her grandmother, but nothing happens. She runs to the chest and hugs it while tears stream down her face.

Patrick, equally devastated, walks over and tries to comfort her.

INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD GARAGE - NIGHT

Patrick's foot hits a pink toy car. He stumbles, almost dropping the damaged chest. Eventually he reaches an open space in a dusty far-flung corner of the garage.

He gently places the chest down and turns to leave.

He pauses at the entrance -- staring remorsefully at the chest for a beat...before turning off the light and exiting.

INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

Midnight. Patrick, sporting a new beard, creeps toward his computer and turns it on.

He hesitates -- the artificial light highlights the uncertainty on his face -- before sitting down and bringing up a wall of code. He starts working away with renewed energy.

INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD - DAY

As we see the years pass we watch Patrick and Celeste continue to bond:

- Patrick helps Celeste with her homework.
- Patrick waits impatiently for Celeste to come home before scolding her for missing her curfew.
- Patrick and Celeste goof off by playing a rhythm based VR game together.

Interspersed between each moment we see Patrick continue to tinker away at his computer.

INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD GARAGE - DAY

An older Patrick, now with spots of gray hair, opens the garage door from the inside. On the other side is Celeste, in her early 20s.

Her hair is tied up in a bun and she's sporting a backpack-- ready to head out for her next adventure.

The father/daughter duo start moving a few prepared boxes into her car parked on the driveway.

As they finish, Patrick motions for her to hold on. He jogs back into the house.

INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD - DAY

Patrick rummages around in his desk drawer. Finally, he finds what he's searching for. A small hard drive labeled "Nai Nai". As he grabs the hard drive, memories start flooding back.

- Jia-Pyng helping a young Patrick with homework
- Jia-Pyng and Tieh-Chung at Patrick's wedding
- Jia-Pyng dancing with a baby Celeste

Patrick's hand wavers. He looks back and forth between the garage door and the hard drive...struggling to arrive at the right decision. Finally, he closes his eyes...and lets out a sigh of understanding.

He takes his hand off the hard drive and closes the drawer.

INT. THE NIU HOUSEHOLD GARAGE - DAY

An impatient Celeste leans on her car, waiting in the driveway. She raises an eyebrow in confusion when she sees her dad come back empty handed.

Patrick motions for her to follow him. The two head deeper into the garage until they reach a piece of furniture covered in a canvas tarp.

Patrick lifts it up, revealing the camphor wood chest. It's weathered the years well.

Celeste's face changes from surprise to excitement. She grabs the chest without hesitation and begins lugging it back to her car.

Patrick helps her gently place the chest inside before closing the trunk. Father and daughter enjoy a long hug before Celeste gets in her car and drives away.

Patrick stands in the driveway until her car vanishes into the horizon.