

## Midnight Observances

At the discount corner, she inspects one then another, feels how firm they are, trying to intuit their sweetness from touch, from scent, before settling on twelve.

At home, she arranges them into a pyramid on a rattan basket, its exterior stuck with a red 福 sticker. Is this old-fashioned or traditional? She thinks for a while then decides she really doesn't care.

This basket with yellow-orange peeping over its rim is placed on the television console.

There is an abundance of peach blossoms, peonies, chrysanthemums – all synthetic – in the adjacent vase. Their living room is ready.

She heads towards the kitchen, saying, "Supermarket so crowded, people spending like they don't want money, anyhow buy." She sighs. There are steamboat ingredients to prepare.

Hours later, various vegetables and meats are dipped into boiling soup for brief minutes, then scooped out. On the table, there is, of course, her famous dish, prosperity drunk chicken.

Him and her, using chopsticks to pick food for one another – here, meatball, here, slice of fish – watching the riotous song-and-dance on TV. The emcees' faces contort with over-rehearsed humour.

They keep eating.

At ten, he dozes off on the sofa. There is no news segment tonight. She washes the dishes, keeps excess food in plastic containers.

When the emcees start to count down, she heads to the ancestral altar, lights an incense stick.

He suddenly opens his eyes, answers, "Yes, year of Chicken."