



TWO THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED FORTY-FOUR YEARS BEFORE this one, upon the death of the Buddha, his followers went solemnly to the temples. There, to show their sympathy and share in his suffering, they had their heads shaved by the village elders.

Today, in the West End of Providence, Sary Kim sits next to her mother in the back of a friend's car. A piece of lace — white, for mourning — covers her head, which is shaved, just like her mother's. In her lap, she carries a silver pedestal bowl, filled with popcorn and coins.

A week ago, upon the death of her father, Kim and her mother went to their temple, the heart of the Cambodian Buddhist community in Rhode Island. Her father, Phon Kim, had served there for 13 years as the spiritual leader, and it is there that his daughter and

wife had their heads shaved to begin their seven days of mourning.

Now, as the sun breaks through fog, they follow the hearse carrying the holy man from the temple, where his final services have been held, to the crematorium at Swan Point Cemetery.

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PHOTO AND TEXT BY
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Repeatedly, Kim whispers prayers to the Buddha and reaches into the silver bowl. She takes a handful of popcorn and coins and gently drops them out the car window.

In Cambodia, the family would have used just-plucked rice, but here they scatter the popcorn through the industrial streets to show their father's spirit a path to the heavens. The popcorn drops to the ground, where his body will stay while his soul soars. And the coins — the family's gift to the universe — touch the pavement and ring out like tiny bells.