The Goddess Departs

ACCORDING TO Chinese folklore a special goddess, named Songzi Niangniang, "the princess who sends children," is responsible for delivering babies into the world and for safeguarding them during the first perilous weeks after birth. Having remained beside them on earth for one month, this kind guardian returns to heaven, and that morning the baby smiles to bid farewell. Always we watch eagerly for that special smile, relieved that the goddess has departed and left the child safely behind.

Until recently, newborns were greatly at risk in China, and modern medicine has not totally quelled the apprehensions reinforced by centuries of parental loss and grief. Even today a baby's one-month birthday is considered an auspicious event, announced by sending out the red-dyed eggs that for generations have symbolized happiness and prosperity. It is an occasion for celebration and feasting when friends and relatives, confident that the child's continued presence in the family is now assured, drop by to offer gifts and congratulations and to enjoy the traditional snack of eggs poached in homemade sweet rice wine.

During this first month the mother must stay at home, her activities strictly curtailed to protect her health as she recovers from the birth. She must not venture outside, eat cold foods, wash her hair, or read books for fear that such actions might expose her to a chill or strain her eyes. Some people believe that she must not even

brush her hair, close a door, or pour tea because of the danger of damaging her already weakened joints. And because she is still considered unclean, she may not touch anyone except members of her immediate family. Thus the one-month celebration commemorates the mother's freedom from confinement as well as the infant's safe entry into the world.

Our son was the first male grandchild in the family of Lao Tang's* parents, then in their sixties. It was only natural that they doted on this grandson, even though I had given them a granddaughter four years earlier. Each morning as they passed our bedroom door, they would pause to admire the new baby. Concerned about my health, Lao Tang's mother would look in from the corridor many times during the day, stopping to draw the pink satin quilt more tightly about my shoulders or to close the pale yellow curtains, certain that exposure to bright sunlight would injure my eyes. A beautiful woman with white hair and refined features, she always dressed in jackets and pants of blue or brown silk, her tiny bound feet clad in specially made black satin shoes. Admiring her kind and gentle disposition and realizing that she desired only to hasten my recovery, I never minded the many restrictions she imposed.

Shortly after my marriage in 1952 I had moved with my husband's family to this large, comfortable house on the campus of Beijing University, known as Beida, where my father-in-law, Tang Yongtong, was then a vice-president. In the area known as Yanjing South Courtyard were the former residences of faculty and administrators at the American-funded Yanjing (Yenching) University, whose site had been turned over to Beida after Liberation in 1949. Ours was a semidetached house, the other half of which was home to the family of Feng Youlan, one of Beida's most eminent philosophy professors. Built of gray brick with window frames painted a deep red, its dark tiled roof sloping down to meet gracefully upturned eaves, our house combined Chinese decor with Western

*"Lao," meaning "old," is a form of address commonly used in China instead of a given name to signal respect or familiarity. Yue Daiyun referred to her husband, her friends, and many of her colleagues in this way, with Lao as a prefix to the surname. Thus she called her husband, not Tang Yijie, but Lao Tang.

convenience. The bedroom I shared with Lao Tang had an adjoining bathroom, for example, and there was a large brick fireplace in the living room, a telephone in the hallway, and an oven in the spacious kitchen. Roses bloomed beside the bamboos in our front garden, and a strawberry bed had been planted in back. In these surroundings, unimaginably luxurious by Chinese standards, I had spent five happy years, far from my native Guizhou province.

On the day of our son's one-month celebration, I awakened very early to watch for the smile of the baby. Propped against the bed pillows, their white cases embroidered with blue chrysanthemum blossoms, I waited impatiently for Lao Tang to return. As I gazed at the tiny face smiling sweetly in my arms, I called to his father to come and see. Hearing no reply, I assumed Lao Tang must have gone out to help prepare for the day's festivities. Then through the door I heard him speaking in a muffled voice to Daolan, the kind and capable young woman who for ten years had helped Lao Tang's mother with the housework and meals.

"You must be careful; don't let her see it."

"I won't, you needn't worry."

"And my father is not to know either."

Cradling the baby contentedly and wishing that Lao Tang would hurry back, I wondered idly what they were talking about. I had no thought about politics or about my work, nor had I any idea my husband had hidden something from me. Because of lingering high blood pressure, I had been allotted two extra weeks of maternity leave, and the political issues of the day were far from my mind. I was surprised only that no one was talking about the one-month birthday or the banquet that was to be given for Lao Tang's relatives that evening.

The baby had been two weeks overdue, amazing everyone with his eight and a half pounds and with the abundance of his thick, black hair. Lao Tang's mother, intensely proud of this first grandson, had talked ever since the birth about giving a big party to celebrate his arrival. Several times we had discussed what the baby should wear, wanting to show him to advantage when the guests arrived. My mother had already sent us the customary gift of the

maternal grandmother, a complete layette for the infant's first year, including ten pairs of embroidered satin shoes in graduated sizes. I had initially planned to wrap Tang Shuang in the quilt she had made of red and blue flowered satin, but had deferred to my mother-in-law, who thought her own gift of a crimson quilt more appropriate on such a happy occasion. After all this anticipation, it seemed strange that no one spoke of the celebration now that the day had arrived, that Lao Tang's mother had not come to see her grandson, and that Daolan had not gone out to buy food for the guests.

As the door opened, I saw immediately from Lao Tang's face that something was wrong. Standing beside the bed, he looked only at me, ignoring his son's endearing smile. Eager that nothing disrupt the peace and contentment of the moment, I continued humming the Brahms lullaby that had always been our favorite when our daughter was small. Still Lao Tang's expression did not soften. Something must have happened, I realized with a sinking feeling, something involving me. Clinging to the warm feelings of motherhood, I tried to perpetuate the illusion of well-being as long as possible. Lao Tang hesitated also, unable to begin, neither of us willing to break the awkward silence.

Outside the window the snow fell silently, coating the branches of the crabapple trees with white powder. In the pale light of early morning, I stared fixedly at the photograph that hung on the wall across from our bed. Taken a few days after our marriage, it captured the revolutionary spirit and the tender affection of those youthful days. When Lao Tang cleared his throat to speak, I saw tears in his eyes.

"Listen, we must talk about something very serious."

Despite his distress, I spoke lightly, struggling to preserve the special joy of that morning, determined not to be apprehensive. "What is it? Don't I have two more weeks of maternity leave? We will talk of work and politics later."

Lao Tang spoke urgently, "We cannot wait."

"Why?" I asked. "Can it be so pressing? Today is the one-month birthday of our son. Can't these other matters be put off?"

"No, we must talk about it now." He paused, then continued softly: "At ten o'clock you must attend a meeting to be criticized."

"But I'm on maternity leave," I protested.

"You still must go," he told me sadly. "They wanted you to appear ten days ago, and I pleaded with them to wait until this first month had passed. I told them you could not leave the house and finally they relented, but now you cannot delay, Xiao Dai.* You don't know how difficult it was to get them to postpone the meeting this long."

"Why should I be criticized?" I asked.

"They claim you are a rightist," he replied, his words low and tense with emotion.

"But," I objected, aghast, "I have never said anything against our Party or against Chairman Mao. I have never done anything to harm our country. In my heart I am completely loyal, you know that."

"I know, and I have been to your department and to mine, I have appealed and protested, but they just instruct me to draw a line separating myself from my wife."

Only later did I learn that Lao Tang had known for perhaps a month that I would be criticized, that he was disciplined for his defense of me, that he had received a serious warning from the Party. In a moment he remarked, his voice breaking, "As a husband I cannot even protect my wife." Then his tears of anger and frustration, so long suppressed, spilled out. Holding me tightly, he said with bitterness, "Sometimes people act just like wolves towards each other," echoing a line from *Jean Christophe*. He wept sadly, but at that time I had no tears.

My composure stemmed partly from disbelief. Surely such a serious accusation could not apply to me, I reasoned; surely the error would be quickly corrected. And partly it resulted from my greater familiarity with adversity. Lao Tang's life had always progressed smoothly. His father, a famous scholar of Buddhism and professor of philosophy, had received a master's degree from Harvard in 1921. Lao Tang's family had always been comfortable and affluent, his childhood sheltered from hardship and pain. During the war against Japan, when my own father's career as a middle-school

*"Xiao," meaning "small," is a diminuitive commonly used to convey familiarity and often affection. Thus Yue Daiyun's husband referred to her as Xiao Dai.

teacher had been interrupted and my family had fled frequently from enemy bombs, I had grown accustomed to danger, disruption, and scarcity, becoming resilient and adept at surviving. Now instead of thinking about my own situation I automatically began to comfort Lao Tang, trying to ease his distress.

"We must trust the Party," I assured him. "Even if in the short run something about my actions is seen to be wrong, the problem will be resolved quickly." I couldn't imagine that the situation was so serious, but neither could I block out a flood of painful memories.

It was January 24, 1958, just one month after the Christmas Eve birthday of our son. My two-month maternity leave had begun at the end of November, when Lao Tang's parents had persuaded me to stop work, knowing that I was exhausted and needed a rest. It had been a relief to leave the world of politics behind and to pass the days reading stories to my daughter, with whom I had spent little time in the preceding months, and rereading two French novels, Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* and Romain Rolland's *Jean Christophe*, both of which had long been translated into Chinese and were very popular.

Alleged to be important sources of support for reactionary students, these novels had come under sharp attack in the early summer. We were continually exhorted in those days to emulate the strength and selflessness of a simple screw, fitting in contentedly wherever the Party needed us, yet these two novels were said to encourage dissatisfaction with such self-effacing ideals and to stress instead the idea that creative individual effort makes life worthwhile. The novels were further accused of portraying individual rather than class struggle and of influencing the younger generation to chase after fame and fortune, thereby undermining the collective goal of serving the people. Having heard all of these allegations, I read the novels carefully, but never could I see any harm in enjoying such literary works, nor imagine that readers in China would actually take these foreign protagonists as models.

During those weeks of late pregnancy, I had made many trips downtown to the hospital so that my elevated blood pressure could be monitored. Worried about my health and that of our unborn child, Lao Tang had purposely kept me uninformed about the ac-

celerating pace of the current political campaign. He had wanted the weeks before our baby's birth to be peaceful, restful ones for me, knowing how exhausted I had become by the beginning of November. The previous summer had been entirely occupied with political meetings, ever since June 8 when the official Party newspaper, *People's Daily*, had warned that counter-revolutionaries were trying to seize state power. This had marked the start of the Anti-rightist Campaign, and I, as head of the Party branch for teachers in the Chinese literature department, had been assigned many duties.

How quickly the atmosphere had changed. That spring had been a time of "blooming and contending" in response to Chairman Mao's call in May 1956 to "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend." Intellectuals, still cautious after the attacks they had suffered in the campaign against counter-revolutionaries in 1955, had initially been slow to respond to the invitation to criticize the weaknesses of the Communist Party. But after Chairman Mao delivered his famous speech "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People" in February 1957, many people were persuaded that their criticisms of the Party were genuinely welcomed, that the country would now move forward to a new era of openness, harmony, and progress. We held frequent meetings during which the teachers and students in our department were urged to speak out, to voice their opinions about the Party's shortcomings, and I wrote down everyone's comments, certain that many of these candid observations would help the Party improve.

When a rectification campaign was launched in April 1957 to strengthen the Party's work by eliminating the "triple evils" of subjectivism, sectarianism, and bureaucratism, I had shared excitedly in the spirit of confidence and optimism. Big character posters written on bright sheets of pink, yellow, and green paper had appeared on the notice boards outside the central dining hall, later on the walls of the building itself. Many of these were lengthy essays presenting thoughtful and searching analyses of such stirring questions as the role of democracy in a socialist system or the acceptability of official privilege in a society predicated on equality.

Some of the posters, written by people dissatisfied with the Party's accomplishments, contained bitter complaints that I thought departed too sharply from the official policies. At that time I could not condone the call for a complete reversal of Hu Feng's* verdict, for example, because I trusted the Party's allegations that he was a traitor and an agent of the Guomindang. I could not agree with the many posters that criticized the 1955 movement to eliminate counter-revolutionaries, even though this campaign had become excessive, because I thought it was necessary in a class struggle to kill those who were guilty. Above all I could not accept the posters attacking Chairman Mao personally, some of them comparing him to the Pope, and his writings to the Bible, for I believed without reservation in his greatness as the person who alone had been able to unify China and get rid of the foreign powers.

While disapproving of the most strident attacks, I nevertheless thought this opportunity to discuss such previously forbidden topics and express opinions freely about the Party's practices was the best way for the promise of Liberation to be fulfilled. I especially admired the probing essays written by the students of physics, who seemed the most sensitive, capable, and broad-minded of that generation. The students in my department had written many evocative poems appealing for a better future. One, entitled "Now Is the Time," became especially famous for it captured the prevailing sentiments of that exhilarating moment. The time was right, the student wrote, to examine the deficiencies of the society and the Party in order to make necessary improvements, to stand up and speak out in order to influence the leaders, to express individual opinions rather than obeying blindly in order to usher the country into a new epoch. All of these were goals that I fervently shared.

Yet despite my sympathy with those who were speaking out, some sense of inner caution prevented me from joining this chorus of critical voices. I felt it prudent to wait and see what would happen before commenting openly myself, and decided to participate in another way. Inspired by the open and permissive atmosphere

*Hu Feng, a prominent Marxist literary critic and follower of Lu Xun, was denounced for his bourgeois viewpoints in 1954 and made the target of a nationwide vilification campaign.

and believing that creativity could now be promoted to a new level, I joined together with seven other young teachers and graduate students in the Chinese literature department to discuss the formation of a new literary magazine. Even though unofficial journals were forbidden in China, we felt that the climate was right to undertake something new.

What we envisioned was an alternative to the established *Beida Journal*, a publication staffed by senior scholars that accepted only highly academic articles about literature, philosophy, and history. We wanted to provide a forum where younger intellectuals could explore contemporary problems, and called the proposed magazine *Contemporary Heroes*, borrowing the title of Lermontov's novel, to signify the role that we saw for ourselves as pathbreakers in this new era. Our purpose was to follow Chairman Mao's call and encourage everyone to develop his own talents for the building of the new China. Even though at twenty-six I was the eldest of this founding group, I was too busy with political responsibilities to accept the leadership of the new magazine, and suggested that Lao Lu, another young teacher and a close friend, take charge.

At our first meeting on May 16, believing the future to be bright and promising, we talked enthusiastically about providing some new perspectives on Chinese literary theory and practice. After a second meeting on May 20, however, we decided to suspend our discussions. Not only had we been unsuccessful at raising enough money to cover publication costs, but also we sensed a change in the political atmosphere. Perhaps the rectification movement was not as straightforward as we had imagined, in which case continued meetings would be ill-advised. Knowing that some of the small student groups had become increasingly radical, their attacks upon the Party more daring and drastic, we decided to wait and perhaps try to publish our journal later.

Suddenly, on June 8 the official editorial in *People's Daily* changed everything. The Party's line had reversed; a movement to rid the country of counter-revolutionary elements had begun in earnest. At a secret meeting for Party members, we listened to a Central Committee document that ominously declared the situation to be very serious. Some people, we were told, wanted to attack the

Party in order to gain control of the government. We must increase our vigilance, we must protect the class struggle, we must defend against class enemies. Everyone could interpret this as a warning to adopt from then on a completely different viewpoint toward the earlier posters and to criticize anyone who had expressed anti-socialist, or rightist, views.

Posters continued to appear, but after June 8 their content was utterly transformed as another group of spokesmen emerged to trumpet the new political line. In subsequent weeks I would read that critics who had attacked official privilege were really opposed to the Party, that people who had encouraged the expression of private opinions really thought some organization within the Party was oppressing the people, that those who had claimed democracy should be a goal for our country really desired to overthrow socialism, that any who had attacked the feudal remnants in the Party were really attacking Chairman Mao as a patriarch and thus were themselves counter-revolutionaries. Such an abrupt and total reversal left me confused and depressed.

The students who had spoken out in the spring I knew to be the most sensitive and intelligent members of their classes, the most thoughtful and far-sighted. But obviously another group, some of them simply obedient followers of the changing policy, others eager to become distinctive through displays of loyalty, had waited to see which way the wind would blow. Alert to the Party's signal that the criticisms had gotten out of hand, this second group had jumped to the attack, isolating those who had expressed opinions in the spirit of rectification. I had agreed with many in that first group, finding their contributions valuable and instructive, but suddenly those same people were being accused of opposing the Communist Party.

At a flurry of meetings, we Party leaders were told to separate the first group of dissident students out from the majority, to criticize them and expose the real faces that lurked behind their masks, to make clear the fact that inwardly those critics were opposed to Chairman Mao, to the Communist Party, to socialism itself. Each department had to select some people to be condemned as "bourgeois rightists," and the task of the four-person teachers' branch

committee that I headed was to provide evidence and make suggestions, even though the final decisions about who would be labeled rightists would be made at a higher level by the Beida Party Committee.

I spent many hours that summer poring over the records of the rectification meetings held the previous spring, trying to decide who among the department's teachers should now be construed as enemies of the Party. We had been provided with examples, with the profiles of "standard persons," and we assiduously compared the cases of likely suspects with those prototypes. By November when I went on maternity leave, our Party branch had identified five people as possible rightists.

The first, a teacher in his early fifties, was not difficult to select, because his complicated past had already triggered the Party's suspicions. Skilled at reading classical texts, this Lao Yang had previously been a secretary to the warlord Feng Yuxiang, then had worked at a publishing house, and only recently had achieved his lifelong goal of becoming a teacher at Beida. Shortly after being appointed to this post, he had married, and his subsequent mood of confidence and optimism had prompted him to speak out all his thoughts after Chairman Mao's call in February. Quoting Mencius, he had asserted: "If you have morality, then you can oppose a person in power." Later, we interpreted this to mean that intellectuals were justified by their integrity to oppose Party officials. Lao Yang had also suggested that the Party had moved too fast in its campaigns, that movements like the collectivization of agriculture had sometimes made the peasants' situation worse. This indication that he preferred the old capitalist system to socialism led us to pronounce another of his crimes to be the belief that "today is not as good as yesterday." I had taken careful notes of Lao Yang's remarks, all of which had been offered in an effort to help the Party correct its mistakes. Later our branch committee read the transcript from a different perspective, singling out incriminating sentences and arranging them in a new way. This is how guilt was established at that time.

The second person to be accused was the vice-secretary of our branch committee, a young man from a middle peasant family who