

I grew up in a small village, where old feudal ideas still prevail among its people. When I was born, my mother lived with my paternal grandparents, who I call Yeye and Nainai, while my father lived a thousand miles away in Shanghai. He lived far from us because of work, and he'd come home for visits once a month. It is common in China for fathers to live away from their families. It's because so many people are poor and must take any kind of job they can for money. The reason why Mom and I originally lived with my father's parents is that in China, we follow the patriarchal order, so as soon as a couple is married, they belong to the husband's family, and their records are registered in their village. Thus, when couples marry, they move in with the husband's family.

Yeye, or my paternal grandfather, and Nainai, my paternal grandmother, have three sons. At the time of my birth, my eldest uncle already had a three-year-old daughter. She is my oldest cousin and the first baby in my generation. Because she was a girl, when I, the second granddaughter, was born three years later, it irritated my grandparents to no end, because they wanted a boy baby badly.

During this period when Mom and I were living with Yeye and Nainai, they were remodeling their house and were adding two more stories to it to accommodate for their children and their growing families to make their home a three-story building. Because this construction was going on upstairs, all the families had to live on the first floor. When it was time for me to be born, Dad came home from Shanghai to be with us, and as soon as Mom took me home from the hospital, she immediately took me to bed with her to rest on the first floor. So among all of the commotion of hammering and screaming power tools, Mom leaned back in bed to relax, as she nursed me from her breast, sang to me softly and stroked my soft, fluffy, black hair. As she held me in her arms and comforted me whenever I whimpered, she was very tired, for she had given birth only recently. Previous to going to the hospital, she had not been told what sex I was, but once she came home with me and my grandparents learned that I was a girl, they became absolutely livid, but she ignored their reaction and reasoned that they would soon get over their disappointment.

At that time, as Mom rested with me among all the construction noises, she was still very young and naïve. Before she and Dad had ever met, they had never dated anyone else, nor had they socially interacted with others of the opposite sex who were their age. Their parents had paid a matchmaker to find them a mate, and after they were introduced to each other and got to know each other, they decided that they liked each other well enough to marry. This practice is common in China, although there is an increasing tendency for couples to choose their own mates today. Today, the number of couples who are still being matched up is fifty percent, so my parents' situation is still not unusual. Further, it was commonly expected of them to obediently move in with my father's parents, while my father went back to work in a faraway city. So a few years after they married when I was born,

they had only been following what was traditionally expected of them.

However, while my mother was lying in bed with me, my father's parents surprised her when they suddenly came running up to her, with much anger in their faces. It was largely because under the one-child policy, I was the only child that my parents would ever have, and what made things worse to them, is that now that I was born, they now had two granddaughters, and no grandson.

"You must give up that baby!" Yeye demanded. When he said this, Mom immediately gasped and clung to me protectively.

"You are still young and your body can give birth to many more children," Yeye continued. "You don't need this female baby."

As Mom held me, she didn't care if I were a female child. What was most important was that I belonged to her.

Before Mom knew it, Gonggong had snatched me out of her arms and began running away with me.

"Stop! What are you going to do with my baby?"

"I will drown her in the toilet outside!"

Because we lived in a primitive area, everybody had outdoor toilets that were just holes in the ground that were kept covered up when they were not being used, and Yeye was determined to throw me into one of them.

As Yeye ran away with me, he yelled over his shoulder, "You can easily give birth to another child!"

However, Mom was not going to stand for this. She immediately jumped out of bed and ran after my grandfather. To his surprise, she yanked me out of his arms and ran away with me.

Above all the hammering and sawing, she yelled, "No! You can't have my baby! I won't let you! She's mine!"

As both Yeye and Nainai tried to catch up with Mom to get me back, she deftly dodged them and refused to let them have me. After they were unsuccessful for some time, they finally gave up and stomped away. All this time, my father was just standing there, watching everything and daring not to raise a single word against his parents. He said nothing and did nothing to settle this squabble, nor did he do anything to defend my mother or me. It was because he was raised to always be obedient to his parents. However, this awkward situation would always remain in the memory of both of my parents and would leave a scar between them that would forever confuse them and cause them to make many mistakes in the future.