

LIN NAN'S DIARY

(1928)

*July 30*

Little Rong began coughing again today. Mother said she must have caught cold last night, but the implication was that I am too careless. Little Rong is really such a nuisance these days; she never stops crying. Father and Mother have been thinking about Lin recently and it just grieves them more to hear Rong cry. When I asked Mother for some medicine, her expression was so pained that I could feel my hand shaking as I reached to take the small yellow bottle from her. After Rong took the medicine, Granny Zhang held her until she fell asleep while I went to serve Mother and Father dinner.

Lin drifts about like duckweed on the surface of a pond, and something always seems to come between him and the family. We all yearn to see him and our anticipation of his return has mounted ever since the Nationalist Party banners began waving from the walls of the old city. Yet the days keep passing without any word from him. Could Lin have for-

gotten his home? Or is there something else holding him back? Only Heaven knows.

At mealtime each day, the whole family sits in sullen silence. I take up a bit of food, but my throat is too tight to swallow anything. Sometimes Mother drones on and on with her complaints while Father doesn't say a word, and I just put down my chopsticks and listen to her. She interrupts the usual void of deathly silence the way an unexpected wind whips up the sea, refusing to let it remain calm.

After dinner, I was washing little Lian's ears in the bedroom when I heard Mother call me. I went upstairs to find Father holding a letter in his hand. Mother laughed and said, "Lin will be coming home soon!"

In the letter, written on the fifteenth, Lin says that he has been delayed in Shanghai for a few days, but hopes he will arrive home within a day or two. This news comes as a wonderful surprise—as welcome as the sudden appearance of a crystal-clear blue sky after the clouds and fog of a dark overcast day have dispersed. All seems brilliant and perfect before me now. A fiery-red dawn has replaced the lacquer-black night, and Lin is nothing less than a glittering star.

At that moment, the mist and gloom vanished instantly. Everybody's spirits have been lifted, and even the servants seem to be working more diligently. In no time at all they hurried to sweep the room and prepare Lin's bedding. Granny Zhang said, "Miss Rong is seeing her daddy for the first time. Let's dress her up in some pretty clothes!" I laughed and kissed Rong's rosy cheeks, and she laughed too as she clapped her little hands together.

After languishing away in pain for three long years, my heart is pounding and feels more troubled today than ever! I am a little scared to see Lin. I pulled out my light emerald-colored silk blouse from the bureau and gazed at myself in the mirror, thinking how thin and pale I have become. I wonder if I will look the same to Lin? I couldn't keep from crying! Afterward, I thought: Be patient. These tears should fall on Lin's shoulder, where he can warmly kiss them away along with all my sorrow!

As I look up, the flower vase smiles and even the lamplight appears unusually bright. It seems to be teasing me deliberately, following me wherever I go. Away with you, lamplight! When Lin comes back, you can cast both of our shadows together.

At eleven o'clock, Mother still hadn't gone to bed, so I urged her to go to sleep. He probably won't get back tonight, I told her.

As little Lan wasn't asleep either, I teased her, "Daddy won't come home until you start dreaming!" She actually went right to sleep, though

after a while she raised her tiny head again and asked me, "Is Daddy home yet?"

Beneath the grape trellis in the garden, I prepared some ice cream, drinks, and fruit. The fire in the kitchen was not yet out, so the whole garden was filled with light as if it were daytime. I waited impatiently, walking quietly through the front gate. The night was still and the alley chilly; there was not a single sound anywhere. A pair of stars at the edge of the Milky Way and a crescent moon faintly illuminated this dreamlike, quiet bit of earth. Then a car horn blared in the distance, and I listened with bated breath. Could that be him? But gradually it faded away, leaving only the cold curtain of night to envelop me as I stood in my light clothes in the heavy, frosty dew.

Two o'clock. Realizing he probably wouldn't return, I let the servants go to bed. From behind the window, Mother called out, "He definitely won't be home tonight, go to sleep!" I know that Mother is still as awake as I am. Even asleep our hearts remain vigilant.

### *August 2*

Lin returned home last night. As I lift my pen to write these words, my heart is in knots.

My brother-in-law Jing and his girlfriend Xiu Qin came back with him. Xiu Qin comes from the same village as my sister-in-law Dai, and they also went to school together, so they are very close. Even before they got here, I had already heard all about Xiu and Jing from Dai. In our house, these lovebirds are like a pair of young swallows who just flew in. Everyone welcomes them with curiosity and pleasure. They certainly are children of fortune sheltered beneath the wings of the god of love.

Xiu is an energetic and aggressive girl who radiates with a spirit of rebellion. She spent over a year in Russia, and she still possesses a bit of the zeal of "New Russia." To a family like ours, she seems like a reformer with a tocsin in one hand and a torch in the other. I, my body in chains and my heart marked with scars, am nothing like her. Although I am just six years older than she is, the times have left me behind. Mother silently shakes her head at Xiu in disapproval, but me, I yearn to discover what it is that lights up her world in order that it might penetrate the darkness of my own.

Lin! I still call him by this familiar name but I know that his soul is no longer joined to mine.

Fate warns me that a deep, dark chasm lies before me and that I ought to hold back my tears so that I can edge around it one step at a time. The future is so uncertain; I don't know where it will lead me. Surrounded by a shadowy forest, all I hear is Lin's voice gradually fading into the distance and the mournful call of a barn owl in a far-off, secluded valley. I awake from this dream to find myself crying alone, left by the wayside.

Lin has not spoken more than ten words to me since last night. Wherever I go, he avoids me. And I hesitate to approach him, with his frosty demeanor and those eyes filled with anger and resentment. Last night after he got back, he rushed the servants to make up a bed for him in the outer room and when I brought out the lilac silk comforter, he threw it on the floor. Even Granny Zhang was taken aback by his rage.

I couldn't sleep the whole night. I stood silently at the head of his bed and listened to his thunderous snoring. When I went back into the inner room, I thought I heard him turn over and then sigh faintly. I'm sure he is troubled by some deep secret tormenting his heart, but what could it be? As hard as I try, I can't understand why he is annoyed with me or why he avoids me. The third time I went over to his bed, I called softly, "Lin." But he seemed as distant from me as the most remote corner of the earth. My trembling voice echoed in the silence, yet no one answered. I collapsed on the side of his bed in disappointment. This is how I passed Lin's first night home.

### *August 3*

As the first rays of the morning sun filtered through the gauze drapery, my heart filled with gloom. After I washed and dressed, I walked to the head of Lin's bed. His eyes were closed, but he was already awake. I had thought to go over quietly to wake him and speak to him for a while, but I dreaded his steely cold expression. I could hear my own excited breathing, and I couldn't keep my eyes from filling with tears. I was afraid of making him mad, so I quickly walked away.

I gently pushed open Mother's door, and she called from behind the bed curtain, "Who is it?" My throat was too tight to answer. Mother went on, "Why get up so early? Let him sleep a bit longer. If you're up, you're sure to wake him." I didn't know what to say, so I stood dumbly in front of the bed curtain. Mother thought this was odd and after she got dressed and lifted the curtain, she glanced at me and said, "Lin Nan, what has got-

ten into you?" As I folded up her flannel blanket, Granny Zhang came in with water for her to wash with.

There were many visitors today. Elder Sister and Dai, my sister-in-law, came as well, but Lin was even cold to them. Elder Sister sat politely for a while and then left. Dai was bewildered; she just kept staring blankly at me, and then back at Lin.

Lin went straight to bed after dinner. Even Father and Mother have hardly had a chance to talk with him, and Mother seems a little upset, complaining that we shouldn't have even welcomed him back. It's becoming increasingly awkward for Jing and Xiu; they have to deal with me, while at the same time maintaining their relationship with Lin. It's a very tense situation for everyone.

By chance, Mother opened Jing's leather trunk and came across a bunch of photo albums containing pictures of them all together. Besides Jing and Xiu, there were also pictures of Lin and Miss Qian together, mostly taken at West Lake. I smiled when I saw Lin's photo! Mother simply stated, "Oh, so it's her." Jing and Xiu exchanged startled glances.

Miss Qian is from our village. She was enrolled at Beijing University, but last year, during the warlord crackdown on students in Beijing, she herself came under suspicion and fled to Nanjing. At the time, Lin happened to be the head of an army supply station there, so he helped her out. As his living quarters were roomy, Xiu, Jing, and Miss Qian all lived there together. The circumstances brought Jing and Xiu together, so naturally they did the same for Lin and Qian. Love develops easily in such a romantic setting. In a letter Lin wrote me last year while he was recovering in Hangzhou, he mentioned how kind Miss Qian had been to nurse him through his illness. I thought the warm concern Miss Qian showed for him when he was sick and away from home was exceptional and I was deeply grateful. But I always believed that Miss Qian knew all about me and of course I never imagined that Lin would transfer his love for me to someone else. At the time, it didn't even cross my mind that they were more than friends.

But now I know the truth!

Oh God! I haven't the strength to quell the anguish burning in my heart. It's up to Lin what becomes of the rest of us; he can leave me, abandon me, and ruin my life. I am clearly the most pained and pathetic of women; can they really go on loving each other without any misgivings? I have come to see myself as no more than a pitiful victim taunted by human fate!

August 5

Last night I asked Lin, "If something's bothering you, go ahead and tell me about it, and I will think of a way out for you. There must be a reason why you are depressed like this all the time! You are such a determined man, why don't you pluck up a little courage?"

I asked him several times, but he only answered coldly, "Nothing is wrong, stop worrying." When I asked him again, he had already turned toward the wall pretending to be asleep; he seemed annoyed at even having to listen to me.

This time I was really angry. How I wished I could hit or bite him, only then would I feel satisfied. In the middle of the night, he got up and poured some water into a flask for himself. I slipped on my shoes and fetched sodas from the icebox for him, and he drank both of the bottles I opened. This seemed to cool his anger, so I leaned on the table and asked him, "Lin, what have I done to offend you? Whatever it is, I'm sorry. Please just tell me frankly. Surely you know that my living here at home is all for your benefit—serving your parents, raising the children, I have never once complained. Why are you so angry with me? As hard as I try, I cannot understand why your feelings for me have changed. What problem could possibly be so hard to resolve? Tell me and I will help you find a way to work this out. I'll do anything to help you succeed just as long as it makes you happy. How can moaning and groaning all day long help matters?"

"Father and Mother were looking forward to your return so much that they could barely eat or sleep, but you've been so cold and disagreeable to the family. See how upset Mother has looked these past few days? Today she was crying in Father's room. You've been gone for three years and it was such an event for you to return home. I never imagined you would treat me like this."

Lin stood up and yawned, replying, "Of course I'm sorry, but Mother and Father owe me an apology too! Let's not talk about this anymore. Go to bed!" He walked straight back to his bed, turned over, covered his head with the flannel blanket, and fell asleep.

I stood next to the table transfixed, gazing at the dreary light under the green lampshade and crying. It was clear that he could hear me, but he paid no attention. Lin, my love flows like water, but your heart is as hard as iron. Lin, you used to be so tender and loving; now you're so close to me, yet so terribly far away.

August 7

This morning I had just fallen asleep when Lin started banging about as he rummaged through the chests and drawers.

Dai arrived carrying a big parcel. She sat down and spread its contents out over the bed: a little foreign stuffed dog, a diary, a camera, leather shoes, handkerchiefs, silk stockings, material, and other things. She asked me childishly, "Sister-in-Law! What did my brother bring for you? He just gave me all of this, including some things that I really like. He certainly knows how to give a woman gifts—so unique and appropriate."

I forced a smile, and she continued on, "Sister-in-Law, I get along with you so I'm going to tell you something on the sly, but you must not bring it up with Third Brother, otherwise he'll hate me."

"Whatever could deserve such secrecy?"

"Xiu came over to my place yesterday, and when I mentioned that you were not feeling well, she heaved a sigh! I asked her 'Why is my brother quarreling with Sister-in-Law?' She laughed and said how should she know. Only after pressing her did I find out what my brother's been up to. He and Miss Qian have been close friends for over a year now, and he's very serious about her. Why on earth he loves her is a mystery; no one understands it. It grew out of a particular set of circumstances—when ever he was sick, it was always Miss Qian who came to take care of him and to prepare his medicine for him. Do you think that a lonely man in the company of an affectionate and sympathetic woman could resist falling in love?! Especially in such a romantic southern setting. After she left Nanjing, my brother stopped working and applied for a vacation in order to go to see her in Hangzhou, where he rented a little house on West Lake. He claimed he was recuperating in Hangzhou, but what exactly was his illness? Her! He rarely even brings up the matter with Jing or the others, and if he wanted to settle it once and for all, he wouldn't know where to start.

"As for formally marrying Miss Qian, I'm afraid she herself would be unwilling! Perhaps she does have some ulterior motive—as they say, 'a drunkard's thoughts are never on the cup!' My brother is an honest man. If he weren't so honest, he would never have been this stupid, returning home and treating you, his own wife, as he has. Don't feel bad, he and Miss Qian won't last long together. I've heard that she wants to go back to Guangxi, and once they have separated, their love will fade. Then he'll be yours once again, Lin Nan. This time you shouldn't stay here at home,

but go with him. Foreign couples never separate since there's no way of guaranteeing what might happen when they're apart. It is only in China that men go away on business and fool around for over ten years without coming home, leaving their wives behind to suffer in tears. No wonder Chinese literature is filled with so many boudoir laments that go on and on about grieving in spring and griping in autumn, and all those never-ending sad partings and joyful reunions."

I laughed at what she said—Dai certainly has a glib tongue; no wonder yesterday Lin told Mother and Father that his sister was a little like Wang Xifeng!<sup>1</sup>

I took some lily powder to bolster my strength. Tomorrow is Father's birthday and I'll have to attend to everything, otherwise Mother will complain. Lin can go ahead and ignore and spurn me, but I won't leave his family—one day he'll have to take responsibility. Xiu laughs at how strong my old-fashioned moral outlook is, but such is my fate. In this situation, I have little recourse since I have already become a victim of the times. If someday Xiu and Jing marry properly, her position in the family will be different from mine. Everyone will assume that it's natural for her to just sit by and watch, eat, talk, and laugh as if she were a guest; in my position, however, such behavior would be impermissible. I am a daughter-in-law married into the family, not a lover invited in.

#### August 9

With misunderstanding comes pain. No one is willing to speak about their true feelings openly. When you want to cry, you must swallow your tears and put on a smile, and although you can't stand a certain person, outwardly you must still act affectionately. Such empty hypocrisy arises from the basic morality of the Chinese people; it permeates the society, every family, and every individual. I detest it, and yet I am unable to behave otherwise. How can anyone ever express their true self in all its nakedness within such an environment?

In my family, old and young alike have their problems and worries, as do even our guests. The only exceptions are my three innocent little children.

Yesterday, Father celebrated his birthday, and on the surface it was quite festive after all the guests arrived. Dai was particularly happy, dashing back and forth, filling the place with her voice and physical presence. Lin says she's an actress and even offstage she shines in her role. Like everyone, I really adore her; she's so competent and pretty, and her manner is so gentle and kind. No matter what she does, she does it just right and never complains in the least. The money she earns as a schoolteacher is more than adequate for a single person, so she is unfettered and free of worries. No one ever bullies her and she never has to think about pleasing anyone. How fortunate she is! If I were more like her, I would never have let Lin take over my entire existence. I have practically become his plaything: when he loves me, I am content; when he hates me, I suffer; and when he casts me aside, all I can do is sit by and cry. I would never dare take my anger and walk out the door like Ibsen's Nora.

At lunch, Xiu and Dai got drunk. Lin was a bit tipsy as well. Xiu seemed upset about something, and drinking a few cups of wine only seemed to aggravate her. She lay on Jing's bed, tossing about, crying! She really is such a liberated girl, never giving a thought to anything. Behind her back, Mother cursed her for being such an ill-mannered girl with no sense of propriety or shame about other people's scorn for her. Crying on Father's birthday like she did is considered taboo. But actually, why would any of them care about that? They're used to being on their own, so they are free to drink themselves into a stupor and laugh up a storm or wreak havoc crying whenever they feel like it. Who would dare to interfere? I think that Jing and Xiu will do best to have their own small family, as they could never survive in an extended household like this! The new and the old clash in violent opposition in too many places. Mother always says, "You all are so fortunate. Back when we were daughters-in-law, we had to do everything ourselves. We were on our feet the whole day filling the pipes of our parents-in-law and pouring their tea, and at night we still had to make socks for our sisters and brothers-in-law. We could never act like you, having fun all day long and thinking nothing of flitting off to the park or the cinema." She never mentions how many years' difference in age there are between us, but just keeps on about how she suffered in her youth. She envies our generation, and yet we are still dissatisfied with life as it is now.

Last night I didn't get to sleep until three o'clock. I hadn't much energy to start off with, and then I still had to work hard all day. After washing up, I fainted into a chair, immobilized from exhaustion. Lin saw me but didn't even come over to ask how I was.

1. Wang Xifeng is a feisty, outspoken female character in the famous classical Chinese novel, *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

Leaning on the wall, I made my way into the inner room where I collapsed on the bed and wept silently! I can't help thinking about my lot in life. Who else do I have in this world other than Lin? My own mother and father died long ago, and I haven't a single brother or sister. I came to the Wei family all alone and have suffered through so much abuse here, yet I always felt that as long as somewhere in this world Lin loved me, it didn't matter what I had to endure in his family. I have spent fifteen years like this and have never once complained about my fate. Now, however, my last links to happiness have been severed and I am falling into a deep, dark abyss.

Exhausted from crying, I turned to look at little Rong sleeping so adorably. My tears had trickled onto her face, leaving it stained with the tokens of a mother's broken heart. Besides her, only Heaven knows my grief. In the middle of the night, I got up and went to look at Lin, who was asleep facing the wall. When I unconsciously stroked his head, my hand came away damp. Oh! I realized then that Lin too had been crying secretly! Feeling even worse, I leaned over him and asked, "Lin, why?" He did not answer. After I asked him three more times, he threw off the quilt, turned over and said furiously, "Tomorrow I'm moving into a hotel. Every night you disturb me so I can't sleep. Why, you ask? You tell me why."

I am not scared of him, but I left it at that to avoid making a scene.

### *August 11th*

Dai came over today. She had just come from Jing's room, and when she saw how distraught I looked she couldn't help heaving a sigh, saying, "In this family, the joys are too joyous and the worries too worrisome. I really don't know how to deal with it. I come into the eastern wing and you're putting on a tragedy; I go into the western wing and they're acting out a comedy. You had better clear this up with Lin. What an attitude he has! This is not such a big deal anyway. Times have changed, and besides, you are a graduate of a teachers' school with a decent education, and you don't deserve to endure such painful days in this kind of family. Sister-in-Law, I totally sympathize with you and pity you. Besides, I can help you. But if you keep on crying like this, you are going to get sick, and that won't help solve the problem!"

"What can I say to him?" I replied. "He just ignores me, and I realize now that the two of us are through. There is nothing holding us together any longer. Love can't be forced. Naturally he's also suffering terribly since

he can't be with the one he loves, while the one he doesn't love is constantly around him and won't be shooed away. Even when he does drive me away, I keep coming back to bother him. If he officially divorces me now, that's fine, but I'm afraid Mother and Father will not agree to it.

"The truth is, I may be his wife, but I am also their daughter-in-law. They are becoming more and more dependent on me, and if I were to leave, who would be willing to spend so many years staying at home taking care of them? Mother has never been satisfied with me and thinks that I don't work as hard as she did when she was a daughter-in-law, but in comparison to someone like Xiu, I am every bit the traditional woman. She's a rebel intent on reforming precisely this kind of family. She may be Jing's lover, but she could never be a daughter-in-law.

"If I left the Wei family, I wouldn't become a beggar; even if I only worked as a servant I could support my basic needs. But I can't bear to part with my three children, Lian, Lan, and Rong. How could I be so hard-hearted as to make them suffer the pain of losing their mother? Little Lian is already a perceptive child; she's not deaf, and when she sees me cry, she cries too! Sometimes at night when she hears me sobbing, she jumps out of bed and comes over and hugs me, saying, 'Mommy, don't cry, Mommy, don't cry!' Yesterday, little Lan told Mother, 'Granny, Daddy is being mean to Mommy and making her cry! Why don't you scold Daddy?' In their little hearts they already know how pitiful their mother is. It's too awful to even think about what their fates would be like if I were really to leave. I am willing to endure this miserable life for them."

As I was talking with Dai, Lin sent the maid to call her over. After a while, I heard a car horn honk as Dai and Lin left to go to the movies.

Even though it was awkward for her to broach this subject, Dai handled it in a flawless manner that revealed her utmost consideration for all those involved.

I suspect that the reason Dai pressed me to resolve this problem is that Lin had deliberately asked her to come sound me out and to get me to bring up the matter of a divorce from him. If this really is the case, he is simply being too vicious. Even though he is the one leaving me, he won't admit to anything and would rather humiliate me in front of the others. Mother's already somewhat unhappy with me; she says that before he came back I was longing for his return, but now that he's back I keep losing my temper and irritating him. She won't blame him, so she blames me.

I can't even cry anymore because if I do they'll curse me for "driving him away." Lin himself keeps saying that he can't stand these family woes for a second longer. But has anyone ever put themselves in my shoes?

Last night Xiu said to me, "This family is so stifling, you'd be better off if you went ahead and got this thing out in the open, but no one's willing to take off their mask and stop being so completely superficial. I am thinking of going home to visit my mother in a few days. It's oppressive at my sister-in-law's place as well since they joke about the issue of my marriage all day long, but staying here is too awkward. Sister-in-Law, you stay so calm, but if I were you, I would have run away long ago. Jing used to brag about how good and kind his family is, and how good-tempered his parents are. But now that I have come here and had a look for myself, I can see that this isn't the case at all. To be honest, Sister-in-Law, I am really sorry about all this. Brother Lin and you were such a loving couple, but now on account of that Miss Qian he's made such a mess of things. How do I know my Jing won't turn out to be like this eventually as well?! Hmmmm. Men are all so untrustworthy."

I don't know why she was grumbling to me like this, but I didn't utter a word and simply smiled.

*August 15*

I've been in a terrible mood lately. I don't even feel like writing in my diary anymore.

I think about leaving. I think about dying. I think about having to keep on living like this.

## LUSHA—A LETTER TO LU YIN

(1924)

Dear Lusha,

Last night, for some reason, I paced up and down the corridors. A curtain of clouds blocked off the moonlight, and even the twinkling of the tiny stars couldn't be seen. I simply sat in silence, staring off blankly into the distant darkness, allowing my thoughts to wander wildly.

The rhythmic beating of a fortune-teller's drum broke the silence of this remote alleyway. I leaned on the balcony railing and thought of the past, back to that poetic evening and the two of us so mournful and impassioned.

I remember an ancient twisted pine drooping its long branches in the evening wind as pairs of crows flew overhead and quickly disappeared into the deep forest. You walked slowly along the silent pathway. Suddenly you stopped, grasped my hand, and said, "Bowe! Only here, on this piece of earth, among these fallen leaves, at this hour, does all the world belong to us."