



REFLECTIONS

Fortuneteller

BY JOYCE BARRETT

The best news from the future is that my granddaughter will grow up to be “a hero to the world.” Based on her Sept. 1, 2004, birth date, she’s a hen, but she’ll grow into a swan.

Nipon, a Chinese astrologer, came walking up my street in Bangkok with a black canvas bag slung over his shoulder. I had been led to believe that the person I had hired to feng shui my apartment was a monk, so I was expecting someone in orange robes. Prepared for an emissary from Lord Buddha, I wore an ankle-length denim skirt and a long-sleeved white blouse to receive him. Yet I found myself nodding to a man with a crew cut in a light-blue shirt and navy pants, shiny with wear.

We walked into my high-rise and rode the elevator in silence. He didn’t even stop to check out the vibrations in the tiled hallway outside of our three elevators, much less take note that we live on the 13th floor. He just slipped off his shoes and walked in.

I had arranged for a young man, Supak, who works at the reception desk in our building, to be our translator. I stood in my dining room, clutching my notebook to my chest and smiling and nodding politely so he’d pick up on all my positive wavelengths.

“What is your birthday?” Supak asked. Nipon took out a dog-eared calendar. They conferred. Supak turned to

Joyce Barrett lives in Bangkok with her husband, William A. Marjenhoff, an FSO in the embassy’s Financial Services Center.

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me, “You’re a snake. A big snake.”

That was a disappointment.

“No, that’s a good thing,” Supak nodded emphatically. “A snake is good.”

Rereading the attributes of the snake later mollified me. Snakes have highly developed qualities of sensitivity, perception and suppleness, with an uncanny ability to enjoy life. Others should take care never to make an enemy of the snake. There was no question of my snakesness.

Nipon prowled my house. He instructed me to repaint my bedroom’s blue ceiling white; he ordered that some pictures be taken down and others moved. He rearranged potted plants. Entry lights should be left on, he said, to protect from evil outside.

“You have one son,” Supak said. That was the linchpin of my fortuneteller’s credibility: I had yet to put out any pictures of Barrett. We have lived in Bangkok for just a few months, and are still unpacking boxes.

“And one granddaughter,” I said. I showed Nipon a picture of Sloane, taken on her first birthday. She had the winsome smile of a little girl just

discovering the world.

Nipon stared hard at her picture. His hands circled her head and forehead. I held my breath. Finally, he spoke to Supak, who then spoke to me: “She has a good brain,” he said. “She’s intelligent. She’ll study hard and be a hero to the world.”

“What about her relationship with me?” I asked. Here I am in Thailand, and this child whom I desperately want to know lives in West Virginia.

“She will love you so, so much,” Supak said after conferring with Nipon. “You were born on the same day of the week. Hen and snake are good together.” Nipon held up two side-by-side fingers to indicate how close Sloane and I would be.

I wept. Nipon pointed to the 50-pound chicken lamp next to my front door. “That’s a hen, like your granddaughter,” Supak translated. “Good.”

“Anything else?” Nipon gestured.

“Yes, just one more thing,” I said, as I pulled out a picture book and plat of the house in Charleston, S.C., that we are renovating. It’s an ambitious project, considering we moved halfway around the world days after buying it.

Fortunately, our front door faces north, which means power; and our street number, 49, is lucky. You’ll have “no problems there and will share everything,” Supak said. “It will be powerful. Very good. Happy.”

Nipon was ready to go. Whether anything he said is true, I can’t say. But I am counting on Sloane loving me so, so much when she’s a young woman and I’m living in my lucky house in Charleston. ■

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