



What a lowing my wife put up  
when she gave birth to the first twin.  
“Very pretty, just as I’d wished, but those fiends  
choked them and wrapped them in black plastic.

“Two pretty girls . . .  
*Buddho!*<sup>1</sup> I couldn’t do a thing to save them!”  
murmured my mother.  
“Here, *Ta!*”<sup>2</sup> the midwives handed the bundles to me.

Cringing as if I’d entered Hell,  
I took the babies in my arms  
and carried them to the banks of the Mekong River.  
Staring at the moon, I howled:

“O, babies, you never had the chance to ripen into life—  
only your souls look down at me now.  
Dad hasn’t seen you alive at all, girls . . .  
forgive me, daughters, I have to leave you here.

“Even though I’ll bury your bodies here,  
may your souls lead me, your mom, brother, grandma  
to a safer place, to a good safe world.”

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<sup>1</sup>*Buddho!*: God.

<sup>2</sup>*Ta*: colloquial for “Old Man”—used pejoratively.