COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Liu/Chaos and All That

is published by University of Hawai‘i Press and copyrighted, ©1994, by University of Hawai‘i Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.

NB: Illustrations may have been deleted to decrease file size.
Why wasn’t I just born an ant?

“Oh my God. Will you look at the little mite – her head’s only the size of my fist.” Auntie’s great-great grandfather was the great-great grandson of an umpteenth-generation descendant of the Great Sage Confucius, so she was surnamed Kong, like him. She put my very first bonnet on her knuckle, and it fit just fine.

The doctors weren’t impressed with me either, so they put me in an incubator, like bread going into the oven, to bake for a few days.

When I was ready to go home, the doctor handed Auntie a recipe, and from that point on she was forever fussing about the kitchen, chopping and pulverizing everything she could lay her hands on, concocting soups and purees to pour down my throat. After a month of this she looked me over and pronounced, “This baby is disgustingly fat! Her calves are so chubby you can’t even see where her feet begin!” She tweaked my toes through the blubber, chortled “kootchie-koo” and made funny faces, all with no response from me.

“Oh God, it’s hopeless. She’s gorged herself stupid!” So I was rushed back to hospital for a regimen of physical therapy.

After a month of that I had slimmed down enough that my feet poked out.

After another month I started to grow.

After a year I could cry could laugh could sit could stand could walk could talk could play with my ants.
And after a few more years, when the ants decided to move out, I doused them all with boiling water.

And then there was my family:

Eggs and rice, eggs and rice,
Eat them once and eat them twice;
Open wide, here they come,
Right into your tum-tum-tum.
Poo your pants, poo your pants;
Wash ’em in the river when you get the chance.
Up your pants froggies come,
Bite you on your bum-bum-bum.

Auntie would chant as she walked around the courtyard rocking me in her arms; Mommy and Daddy’s snoring wafted out from the North Wing, and the sun lit the swarms of bugs on the crab apple tree.

“What’s for dinner, Auntie?”

“Wisteria blossoms.”

Wisteria grew in such abundance on the pergola that it blocked out the sun; only the scent of its blossoms was gone. Auntie would knock the furry purple blossoms down with a long pole and scoop them into a wicker basket. Then she would steam them in a pot with salt and garlic. The fragrance was enticing, although I couldn’t tell whether it was the garlic or the blossoms that smelled so good. There was a hairy caterpillar on the peach tree; the branches of the date palm that bore the most fruit seemed to grow over the neighbors’ fence; and the alley cat with one eye blue and one eye yellow slept under the grape arbor, too lazy to catch mice.

Hey diddle diddle, my pride and joy,
Kong Rong was a good little boy;
Took the littlest pears and plums
And left the big ones for his chums.
Hey diddle diddle, my pride and joy,
Now wasn’t he a good little boy?