

Selected Plays from the Yuan Dynasty

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Preface

Social progress lies in exchanges, as does the development of cultures as well as personal friendships. It has been proven through world historical practice that the achievement of cultural prosperity and social progress in the 21st century depends on mutual understanding and exchange.

Thanks to the rapid development of transport and communications, mutual exchanges are becoming increasingly frequent day by day, but at the same time new problems have emerged under new circumstances.

Human culture can be divided into two levels. The surface level, or “living culture,” which involves all aspects of survival such as eating, drinking and clothing, has been universally propagated. Through fusion, integration and imitation of each other, living culture has played the role of deepening friendship and enhancing mutual understanding among different peoples.

The deeper second level of human culture we also need to pay attention to is known as “conceptual culture,” exchanges which have also been carried out, but still far from sufficiently. Although also formed over a long period of time through rich historical accumulated development, conceptual culture evolves from the original national traditions, so its nature is more concealed and more profound. Yet, it also allows for concise abstract ways of thinking, more accurate ways of expression and more systematic written records, and can be constantly accumulated, readjusted and improved. Conceptual culture manifests itself through the literature,

history, philosophy and arts of a people or a region—aspects nowadays belonging to the field of “humanities”—and becomes the spiritual wealth enjoyed by all human beings. To gain a better understanding of a people or a country, in particular one with long-standing and rich cultural traditions, one needs to better understand and respect its conceptual culture.

It takes time to advance from understanding a culture to respecting it, as with the process of moving from respect to appreciation. Chinese culture has experienced three peaks in its history of exchange: The first occurred during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), when the Silk Road connected China with Western Europe, bringing with it the first great leap in Chinese culture, and thus this period in history came to be known as the “prosperous age of the Han Dynasty.” The second apex came during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), when the “Maritime Silk Route” was opened up as a supplementary trade route, which in turn expanded the scope and content of interaction, upgrading the level of exchange from living culture to conceptual culture, and promoting the prosperity of the Tang Dynasty through cultural exchanges with South Asia and neighboring countries in the east. The third exchange peak began from the beginning of the 19th century to the present, becoming the greatest in scale and the longest in duration.

Cultural exchanges during the 19th century began as unidirectional, with China in a passive position, or we could say that China had been “forced into” exchanges. Nevertheless, during these foreign contacts, China also began to open its eyes to a much larger world, encountering the characteristics and values of many other cultures. Since the beginning of the 20th century, China has begun undertaking equal and bidirectional exchanges with the outside world. We came to realize that Chinese culture has its own strong points and weaknesses, as do foreign cultures, and only by learning from others’ strengths to offset our own weaknesses is it possible to make even more contributions to China, the entire world, and humankind in general.

The purpose of publishing this series is to introduce Chinese culture to the outside world, and to help readers abroad to gain a truer under-

standing of China. The Chinese people are always ready to unreservedly offer the riches of Chinese culture to the world, so that greater spiritual wealth can be shared with all peoples across the world. Since we have also enriched ourselves by drawing nourishment from the world, we should reciprocate by sharing our own spiritual wealth.

The aspects of culture that can represent a people or a country in the truest sense are conceptual culture, especially the representative works in the fields of literature, history and philosophy. Most works included in this series belong to these categories. In the past over 100 years, translations of world-famous works can be found in many different versions in various languages. However, as for the traditional culture of a country, the older the nation is, the more difficult it becomes for us to properly compile and annotate it. Therefore, despite being a single translation version, this series, having been translated mostly by native Chinese, would generally minimize the limitations in Chinese cultural understanding that translators from other cultural backgrounds might have. We sincerely hope that this series will prove helpful to international scholars in their exchange studies.

Ren Jiyu

March 2008

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An Introduction to the Yuan Plays

Anyone interested in Chinese literature knows that the Tang Dynasty (618-907) is acclaimed for its poetry, the Song Dynasty (960-1279) for its *ci*, poems of irregular line length, and the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) for its drama known as *zaju*. Although the roots of drama in China can be traced to much earlier sources, the Yuan Dynasty is the period when it matured and flourished, and became the most representative literary genre of an era.

A *zaju* is usually composed of four acts, with or without a short scene called “the wedge,” which is most often placed at the very beginning of the play to introduce the background, or between acts as a transition.

Different from the Shakespearean theater, in which the actors mainly speak their parts, in traditional Chinese plays it is the songs that are highlighted, and a salient feature of *zaju* is that the singing is done by the leading character alone. The other characters only play speaking parts, though that does not rule out an occasional song, e.g., the judge’s song at the end of Act III in *The Bubbles Bear Witness*. Consequently, the lead may need to fill more than one role in a play, as *zheng mo* (male lead) assumes both the role of Wang Wenying and that of the celestial lieutenant in *The*

Bubbles Bear Witness, both Shanshoma and Jinzhuma in *The Tiger Badge*, and both Liu Tianrui and his adult son Anzhu in *The Missing Deed*.

The songs are composed according to musical tunes, which have a set pattern of lines, line length, tone and rhyming, and the tunes are further organized into mode suites. Each suite uses one rhyme only, and each act uses a different mode suite. In other words, a play is composed of four suites of songs. The playwright may choose any number of tunes from the suite's repertoire, and have them arranged in a conventionalized sequence.

Most tunes originated from *ci* or from popular songs. As time went on, the tune titles, which are placed in square brackets, became mere indications of the tune pattern and were gradually divorced from its content. However, they may still indicate the emotional sensation they once carried. The suite used in Act II of *The Tiger Badge* is a telling example of how name and content can match.

Although we say the tunes have a set pattern of line length, which means the number of words in each line is fixed (Chinese words are monosyllabic), it is a phenomenon of *zaju* to break the rule and incorporate into its lines a large number of non-metric words. Sometimes the number of these additional words may even double that prescribed by the pattern. This latitude is especially apparent if compared to plays of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

The unique rhyme throughout the act, which may comprise over a hundred lines of verse, together with the free insertion of non-metric words, increases the difficulties in translation. Blank verse is therefore opted for over an attempt to re-present the verse in its original rhyme scheme, and non-metric words are not meticulously marked out. Where possible, the iambic pentameter is generally adopted for lines that have six words or more, metric or non-metric.

What is most admirable about the speech parts in *zaju* is that

the language used is the vernacular of the day and appropriate to the social register of the speaker. This point is particularly apparent when compared with the more polished and refined language of Ming Dynasty plays. Of course, style varies from playwright to playwright and theme to theme. The language of *Love at River Bend*, for instance, is more elegant than the others in this selection.

One reason for the vernacular style is that the playwrights of the Yuan Dynasty had a much lower social status than those of the Ming Dynasty, and lived closer to the ordinary people they put on the stage. The Mongol rulers did not trust the Han people or their learning. Social advancement by way of the imperial examination ladder was a thing of the past, as was the “aura of sanctity” surrounding Confucian scholars. Writing plays had become a way to make a living, as is reflected in the mushrooming of “writing societies.” That is probably why we find so many plays by anonymous writers, and even with those that are credited to an author, very little is known about the person. In the Ming Dynasty, however, plays were written by the more or less leisured literati, often officials themselves, as a kind of amateur literary fulfillment.

As the songs of the play took center stage and speech parts became secondary, the dialogues and monologues in the earliest extant scenarios from the Yuan Dynasty are often missing, or sketchy at best. The preservation of the majority of *zaju* as we can read them today should be credited to a great Ming Dynasty drama critic and editor named Zang Maoxun (1550-1620), alias Zang Jinshu, for his *Yuanqu Xuan* (*Selected Yuan Plays*), which consists of one hundred plays. Although later scholars criticize him for over-editing, it is thanks to his collecting and editing, which could have meant polishing and supplying the missing spoken parts to the text, that the plays have passed down to us from generation to generation, and it is the best collection ever for anyone who wants to study Yuan Dynasty drama.

Another speculation on the near absence of spoken parts is that actors and actresses at that time might not have been acting from a fully written script. In addition to what they learned orally from their masters, they might have taken it for granted to improvise on the spot, and there were plenty of stock expressions for them to pick up and use. Such examples are rife in the eight selected plays.

Two types of play were not considered for this translation. One category is the history plays, plays that center on historical figures or events and are thus laden with historical references; the other includes those about supernatural beings and their miracles.

This selection focuses on what can be classified as social plays. It is hoped that the plays will not only offer readers a glimpse of what China's theatrical world was like more than seven centuries ago, but will also shed light on some of China's fundamental values in order to gain a deeper understanding of China's present.

To avoid redundant efforts while so many plays remain untranslated, or are less known to the English-speaking world, works that already have popular translations in English are not taken into consideration this time, for example, plays by Guan Hanqing, which the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing have published and reprinted many times in a collection entitled *Selected Plays of Guan Hanqing* (1958), translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang.

The eight plays in this selection are all translated from Zhonghua Book Company's 1989 edition of Zang's *Selected Yuan Plays*, with reference to *Selected Yuan Plays – Collated and Annotated*, published by Hebei Education Press in 1994 under the general editorship of Wang Xueqi.

When reading these plays, readers may need to use their imagination to recreate in their minds' eye the spatial and temporal dimensions on the ancient stage. One must bear in mind that the Chinese stage was almost

bare. An actor “goes in” could mean that he mimes the act of crossing a threshold or pushing open the door of a house that exists only in the mutual understanding of the actors and audience.

Another weakness of reading the script rather than watching the performance is that what appears to be continuous speech in the printed text might actually contain an unmarked pause or acting in between. Take for instance the dialogue at the beginning of Act I in *The Eastside Neighbor*.

LIU: You keep an eye out for him, and tell us as soon as you see him coming. For the moment we don't want any tea.

ATTENDANT: All right. Master Zhao's coming.

The script seems to suggest that the attendant is rather erratic, but what may actually happen onstage is that the attendant would wait a moment, perhaps pretending to be cleaning tables, before he looks up and makes the announcement: “Master Zhao's coming.” As this occasion is likely to create confusion, an ellipsis mark is inserted into the translation. Less ambiguous pauses are not individually specified.

Careful readers may notice an unusually high frequency of semicolons in the verse, for parallelism is typical of Chinese poems. Each line is often an image in itself, and there is seldom an explicit conjunction to link them. The semicolon therefore could indicate a parallel structure (mostly couplets), a cause-and-effect relationship, or other kinds of logical relationships.

In this translation, the layout intends to convey the difference between the songs, the spoken parts and the intoned poems in the original text. The songs are indented 0.75 cm from the left in separate lines, while the spoken parts are indented 0.25 cm and in continuous lines. The intoned poems, which usually accompany a character on and off stage, are put in italics and indented 0.5 cm.

An introduction is written for every play, consisting mainly of a synopsis of the story and explanations on the cultural background. It would be most rewarding if readers find them helpful and the plays enjoyable.

Z.G.Q.

The Bubbles Bear Witness

Anonymous

INTRODUCTION

As a prelude to the play, a fortuneteller predicts that a life-threatening disaster will befall Wang Wenyong, a small businessman, and that the only way to avert it is to stay far away from home for no less than a hundred days. Wenyong therefore decides to go south on a business trip.

Act I tells us that he has done some successful trading at Nanchang, the capital city of present-day Jiangxi Province. It can be inferred that he has invested his profit in cinnabar ores, as Chenzhou in neighboring Hunan Province had the best cinnabar mines in China. Cinnabar was an essential ingredient in alchemy and in producing longevity pills.

His unease about the precious goods he is carrying causes a nightmare, in which he sees himself murdered. The next day, as it turns out, his heavy load catches the eye of Bai Zheng, a hooligan nicknamed Iron Flagpole. Wenyong, however, makes a clever escape by getting the tough man drunk.

In Act II, Wenyong is caught up again by Iron Flagpole at an inn called the Black Stone. He slips away while Bai Zheng is sound asleep, but their paths unfortunately cross once again at a Taoist temple to a celestial lieutenant, where he is killed by Bai Zheng in the presence of the divine being. As it happens to be raining and rainwater dripping from the eaves is striking up bubbles in the small puddles below, Wenyong calls on the bubbles to bear witness to the murder.

After killing Wenyong and seizing his wares, Bai Zheng thinks further of taking possession of Wenyong's family property and even his wife. He pretends to be Wenyong's business partner and comes to his home, pushes Wenyong's father into the well and becomes master of the house. The second half of Act III follows the soul of Wenyong's father to the netherworld. There he is faced with a muddle-headed judge. By chance, it happens to be time for the celestial lieutenant to come to review cases.

In Act IV, with the help of the celestial lieutenant Wenyong gets his revenge, and brings the play to the conclusion that good is rewarded with good, evil with evil.

Setting aside the superstitious belief in predestined fortune, the play reveals to us the difficult life of a small businessman about seven centuries ago. Besides the physical strain of carrying his wares over mountains and

INTRODUCTION

rivers, disasters due to social insecurity may befall him at any moment. The strong bully the weak, and officials, represented by the netherworld judge, are corrupt and incapable. For ordinary people, they can only lay their hope on the gods for justice.

The shoulder pole, which is repeatedly mentioned in the play, is a long, narrow pole about the length of a person's height. It is made out of bamboo in south China or resilient wood in the north. Baskets or the objects to be carried hang from each end of the pole, which is balanced on the shoulder. In this way the center of gravity is low and the springiness of the pole offsets part of the weight so that the carrier can walk more steadily and faster than when carrying the object on the back.

Readers may note that this play seems to preserve some earlier forms of theater, in that acting is often accompanied by verbal description, either spoken or sung. Here are some examples from Act II:

“I close the door behind me and go into the backyard.”

“Let me tear off a slip from the window's paper-pane, twist it into a spill, dip it into the lamp oil and light it. Now I may peep out.”

“Quietly I button up my cotton shirt
and lace up my straw sandals carefully.”

These “speech acts” may partially prove that mime had not yet become stylized performances, and words were considered a necessary supplement to facilitate understanding. One also has to bear in mind the fact that the traditional stage was virtually bare, except for perhaps a table and two chairs, even small props were few and simple.

However, despite the crudeness of the set, the plot of the play is well structured in building up tension and suspense. Though Wenying manages to escape time and again, ultimately he is unable to escape his fate.

The Bubbles Bear Witness

CHARACTERS¹

WENYONG (*zheng mo*), Wang Wenyong, a peddler

FATHER (*chong mo*), Wang Wenyong's father

WIFE (*dan*), Wang Wenyong's wife

INNKEEPER (*chou*), an innkeeper

BAI (*jing*), Bai Zheng the Iron Flagpole, a tough

WAITER (*jing*), a wineshop waiter at the crossroads

INNKEEPER (*chou*), innkeeper of the Black Stone

LIEUTENANT (*zheng mo*), a celestial being

JUDGE (*jing*), a judge of the nether court

FOOTMEN

THE WEDGE

(Enter Wang Wenyong, his father and wife)

FATHER:

Time flows like the rapids between steep banks;

A young man's hair turns gray before he knows.

Having been full the moon soon wanes and dims;

A person's high hopes fade in middle age.

My old self is a native of Henan Prefecture. My family name is Wang and my given name is Congdao. Mine is a family of three. This is my son Wang Wenyong, and this is his wife. We three make a modest living by carrying on an honest business. Son, you went down to the main street this morning. What did you do there?

WENYONG: Father, I went to see a fortuneteller. He predicted that a life-threatening misfortune would befall me within one hundred days. And he said the only way to evade that disaster is to get hundreds of miles away. So I'm thinking of going south of the Yangtze River to Nanchang and do some trading there. In that way I can both avoid the misfortune and, with a bit of capital to take along, probably turn a profit. Father, what do you say to that?

FATHER: Don't you remember the old saying: "Better at home stay than be a mile away?" And "Fortune telling, fortune telling, just sick babbling." How can you believe such an oily tongue? Wouldn't it be wiser to lie low at home and wait out the misfortune?

WENYONG: Father, one can't be too careful with the workings of *yin* and *yang*. I've made up my mind and packed up already. Please give me your permission to go. To hide at home in constant fear would only make me sick or drive me mad, even if no real misfortune happened.

FATHER: Since your mind is set, I won't hold you back. Be careful on the road.

WENYONG: Today just happens to be an auspicious day for traveling. I'll say goodbye to you now and set out immediately.

WIFE: Take care of yourself while you're away from home. Father is aging. Come back as soon as you can. Remember to send us a message whenever you meet someone coming this way.

WENYONG: Wife, I'm leaving family matters with you. Look after father. It's no more than a business trip and I'll be back pretty soon.

FATHER: Son, don't worry about me. Good luck with your business and come back soon.

[Xianlu Proper]

WENYONG:

To shun bad luck

I'm leaving home.

Having made my farewell I'll hit the road.

WIFE: Wenyong, it breaks my heart to say goodbye.

WENYONG:

Now I see why parting is least desired.

It leads to where earth ends and sky begins.

(Exit Wenyong)

FATHER: He's gone. Child, let's shut the gate and wait patiently till he returns.

WIFE: Don't worry, father. I'll take care of things.

(Exeunt)

ACT I

(Enter an innkeeper)

INNKEEPER: I'm an innkeeper and here's my inn. Coming north or going south, merchants and peddlers put up for the night at my place. It's getting late. I don't think anyone's coming. I'll close the gate.

(Enter Wang Wenyong)

WENYONG: I'm Wang Wenyong. After I left home, I did some very successful trading at Nanchang and increased my money a hundredfold. I'm eager to go home, but it hasn't been one hundred days yet. I heard that business is booming in Si Prefecture,² so I've decided to make a trip there. Ah! Life is really hard for a small business!

[Painting Cherry Lips]

Under the moon and stars,
ignoring frost and chill,
away from home,
through villages and verdant fields,
I won't allow my feet a moment's rest.

[A Roiling Dragon]

Look and see how the humans lead their life:
in daily dust they're sweating to survive.
Whether they travel by boat or by horse,
what they aim at is either name or gain.
The rudder cuts and splits the rolling waves;
the horseshoes crest and crush the rugged hills.
Paddles compete and horsewhips crack aloud
just to gain two more ladles of thin gruel.
That's what life holds in store!

It's getting dark. I'll put up at this little inn. Brother, please open the gate.

INNKEEPER: Someone is at the gate. Let me open up and see. (He greets Wenyong) So it's you, old pal. It's two months since I saw you last. You do look well. How can I help you?

WENYONG: I'd like a room for the night. Can I have it for two hundred copper coins?³

INNKEEPER: That's fair enough. Please step in. Want any food or tea?

WENYONG: No, thanks. Just bring me an oil lamp.

INNKEEPER: Okay. Here's your lamp.

WENYONG: And here's the room rent. I'm leaving early in the morning.
I won't disturb you then.

INNKEEPER: So you'll leave at daybreak without waking me up. That'll be fine. I'll wish you good night. I'm going to bed too.

(Exit Innkeeper)

WENYONG: Let me close the door. I'm worn out by a whole day's walking. I can use a good sleep. (He sleeps and dreams) Wang Wenyong, why let sleep cloud your eyes? Open the door and have a look. I've been here twice, but never taken a good look around. Why! Here's another gate in the corner of the courtyard wall. Let me open it. Ah, it leads to a garden. What beautiful flowers!

[Drunk Midday]

The peonies here deserve a poet's songs.

How to one's senses they appeal!

Beyond are roses in red and in white,
and the blossoms of peach and apricot.

How lovely! I'll pluck one.

An alarm goes off in my heart;
my hands hesitate in mid-air.

No one is watching. Nothing to fear. (He winces)

Why! Why do the leaves and flowers wilt and fall?

(A tough man sneaks onstage, gesticulating in silence)

[Backyard Flowers]

WENYONG:

I hear the muffled scratching of shoe soles,
and the crunching of hefty strides.

My teeth are set a-chatter at the noise.

(The man sneaks up behind him)

A fit of cold sweat bursts out on my back.

(The man clutches him)

A shady monster there appears,

who seems at pains to pick a fight.
 Presently, all is quiet and dark,
 except for Luna's palish light.
 Does he intend to take my life?
 His glaring eyes are rolling wild.
 I'm scared as rigid as a corpse.

[A Verdant Song]

Oh, heavens!
 I dare not ask, ask him of his name.
 A shudder flashes from my head to foot.
 (The man beats and kills him, and goes offstage)
 (He wakes up)
 Murder! Help! Bah!
 That nasty dream has flung me wide awake.
 What a nightmare! Let me open the door to have a look.
 I cross the threshold
 and toward the garden stroll.
 The breeze licks at the drying lamp;
 the midnight moon is shining bright.
 I saw a monster with my eyes,
 who terrified and harried me
 – one blow of his fist almost knocked me dead.
 Oh, heavens!
 Such apprehension can unnerve a man!

Ah! What an ominous dream I had! There goes the first cock crow.
 Brother, time to get up and light the stove. I'm leaving.

(Exit Wenying)

(Enter a wineshop waiter)

WAITER:

*To gain a living there're a thousand ways.
 Without good calculation all is vain.
 Why do some youthful heads turn early gray?
 Because a dozen times a night they wake.*

I'm a wine seller. Here at the crossroads on this hill I've opened up a small

wineshop, just to earn a few coins to make a living. I got up early this morning to get the fire started, and the pot is already hot. Let me hang up the wine banner and see if there's anyone coming.

(Enter Wang Wenyong carrying two baskets on a shoulder pole)

WENYONG: Wang Wenyong, you must push on.

[Drunkard Returning]

A creek meanders through the gaudy flowers;

village dogs bark beside the wicker gates.

The well's rumbling windlass accompanies

the pounding of the pestle husking rice.

Behind the rows of willows thatched roofs hide.

Here's a small wineshop. (He greets Waiter) Brother, got some good wine?

WAITER: You bet.

WENYONG: Here are two hundred good coins. Get me some wine, please.

WAITER: Here you are. Drink your fill, as long as you don't get into a drunken fit.

WENYONG:

Be your wine cloudy as indigo dye,

I'll take a cup to relieve my fatigue.

It tastes okay. I'll take a leisurely drink.

(Enter the tough man Bai Zheng)

BAI:

One is born with a name,

Which he will never change.

I'm Bai Zheng, nicknamed Iron Flagpole. Yesterday I had too many bowls of wine and zonked out in the shade of the willows until the morning rays woke me up. As soon as I opened my eyes, I saw a young guy passing by. He was a shorty and his face was pale and yellow. He was carrying two heavy baskets on a shoulder pole. He shot a glance at me and hurried off. I jumped to my feet and followed at his heels. I'm a good walker but, the odd thing is, I couldn't catch him up. Perhaps those bowls of wine have filled my legs with lead. Well, well, well. I see a wineshop ahead. I'll drink a few more bowls to wash away the hangover. This is the wineshop.



Waiter, got some wine?

WAITER: Sure have. Do come in please.

BAI: Serve it in your biggest bowls and fetch me some crude salt lumps to go with it. A fresh drink will wash away the old one.

WAITER (lays the table): Sorry, we don't have salt lumps. Here are two cloves of garlic.

BAI: They'll do.

WENYONG: Wang Wenyong, see how you're forgetting your manners. You didn't offer a libation before you drank. Let me do it now.

[Golden Cups]

A pious libation to the gods
who supervise finance and trade.

One's fortune is probably predestined.

BAI: Someone is talking in the far corner. Let me see if I can catch a word.

WENYONG (sprinkles wine onto the floor): The first cup to the ground, may all enjoy a happy life; the second cup to the ground, may there be a bumper harvest; the third cup to the ground, may good men gather and bad guys scatter.

BAI (bangs the table): Damn that stupid son of a bitch! Which bad guy are you referring to?!

WAITER: Big uncle, please don't smash my table.

WENYONG:

At this outburst I turn my head
to meet a pair of flaring eyes.

BAI: You've insulted me!

WENYONG:

His eyebrows jump and stand erect;
his big eyes open wide and round.

My hands panic and drop my cup;
my soul is scattered from its house.

(He drops to his knees)

BAI (pulls Wenyong to his feet): Young man, you ain't very good at words. Why didn't you say: Good men gather and bad guys prosper? When the bad guy hears you put it that way he won't be offended.

WAITER: Big uncle, this young fellow is indeed no good at words.

BAI (beats Waiter): None of your business!

WENYONG: Big brother, I'll remember that.

BAI: Let me ask you, what kind of business do you do?

WENYONG: I peddle household trifles.

BAI: Then you're a peddler, and I'm a hawker. We can be partners and do business together. (He gives the baskets a kick)

WENYONG: Brother, nothing there but some rouge and powder for the womenfolk.

BAI: Where are you from?

WENYONG: I'm from Henan Prefecture.

BAI: So we're from the same place. Me from Henan too.

WAITER: I'm from Shaanxi.

BAI: What part of Henan d'you live?

WENYONG: In the capital, inside the east gate, west of the Red Bridge by the large vegetable garden.

BAI: I live inside the west gate.

WAITER: I live inside the south gate.

BAI (beats Waiter): Who asked you? [To Wenyong]⁴ What's your name?

WENYONG: My family name is Wang. My given name is Wenyong.

BAI: So we're from the same family. My family name is Bai.

WENYONG: Brother, you're a Bai and I'm a Wang. How can we be one family?

BAI: What you don't know is that my mother's side are Wangs.

WAITER: My family name is Zheng. The same Zheng as in Zheng County.

BAI: How many people in your family?

WENYONG: There are three of us.

WAITER: Four counting me.

BAI: Which three?

WENYONG: My father, my wife and me. That makes three.

BAI: How old are you?

WENYONG: Twenty-five.

BAI: Don't say I'm pulling rank because of age, but I happen to be thirty.

WAITER: The same age as my son.

BAI: I'll give you a good thrashing, you son of a bitch. [To Wenyong] So I'm as good as your big brother. I'll buy you a drink.

WENYONG: If that's your pleasure, I'll gladly be your young brother.

BAI: Waiter, fill our bowls.

WENYONG: Big brother, let it be my treat. Waiter, bring us another two-

hundred-coins' worth of wine. I'm going to offer a toast to my big brother.

WAITER (ladling wine): Here's your wine.

WENYONG (offering a cup to Bai): Big brother, please.

BAI (drinks): I'll lend you a strong helping hand when we go peddling together. You'll see what an asset I am.

WENYONG: Big brother, traveling is not a pleasure trip. You may not be able to keep up with me.

BAI: Bah! How come I can't keep up with you?

[All-season Flowers]

WENYONG: Big brother,

are you used to long treks away from home?

BAI: Three hundred and sixty days a year I'm out doing business.

WENYONG: Big brother,

we may fall prey to bandits on the road.

BAI: Do you dare to take them on?

WENYONG:

If they have got the guts to bar my way

BAI: What then?

WENYONG:

a fearless wrath would rise up from my heart.

BAI: How d'you fight?

WENYONG:

I once cracked a stone stele with bare fists;

I also smashed skulls with my shoulder pole.

BAI (pulls out a knife): What d'you think of my blood-sucker?

WENYONG: Big brother,

haven't you heard: You take a life, you pay with yours?

BAI: What d'you deal in?

WENYONG: Big brother, you know I lack resources.

A humble peddler carries only petty goods.

BAI: How many miles can you cover in a day?

WENYONG:

An average of sixty miles and more.

BAI: I can cover one hundred miles a day and don't even need to get up early.

WENYONG:

I sprained my ankle recently,

so I'm a little slower than usual.

BAI: Me too, I've got a blister on my sole. Waiter, bring me a needle. I'd like my brother help me prick it.

WENYONG: Big brother,
you're pestering me and driving me nuts!

(Aside) I have to find a way to get rid of him. I've got an idea. (To Bai) Big brother, have another bowl.

BAI: Fill it. Brother, a bowl for yourself too.

WENYONG: I'm not a big drinker. I'll drink a small cup to keep you company.

BAI: Be seated, brother. (He rises and goes out) I'll make him drink one bowl after another, one cold, one warmed.⁵ Once he passes out, I'll take his baskets and walk away. (He returns to the room) Brother, since we're fellow hawkers, you sing me a song and I'll drain a bowl of wine.

WENYONG: I'm no good at singing.

WAITER: I can sing for you. (He sings) For my lover I prayed and prayed.

BAI (hits Waiter): Who asked you to sing?! Brother, if you don't sing, I'll sing a tune. But don't laugh at me. (He sings) O... a maiden young... All I have is a big throat. Hard on the audience.

WAITER: Like the mooing of a cow.

BAI (hits Waiter): I'll teach you a lesson, you son of a bitch. Brother, do sing us a song.

WENYONG: I'm no good at singing.

BAI: Bah! It won't hurt you just to sing a song.

WENYONG: I'm really no good at singing.

BAI (angrily): Sing, why don't you?!

WENYONG (frightened): Big brother, I'll try a tune if you drink.

BAI: You sing.

WENYONG (offering wine): Big brother, please drain this bowl. Since this is our first meeting, I'll sing you a tune called "The pleasant autumn wind."

BAI: You sing and I'll drink up.

[The Pleasant Autumn Wind]

WENYONG:

Sleep comes not,

only unhappy thoughts.

A cold rain splashes on the palm-tree leaves;

the wind disturbs the iron bells on the eaves;
above the watchtower honk the southbound geese.

(Bai shams sleep) Great! It's time to go.

BAI: Freeze! Where are you off to?

WENYONG:

Too bad their honking interrupts his sleep.

BAI (aside): Bai Zheng, you're losing it! You planned to get him pickled with alternate bowls of cold and warm wine, and then walk off with his baskets.

But now, it's you yourself who's pickled! I can't keep my eyes open. If I fall asleep, he'll run away, unless... (He catches hold of Wenyong)

WENYONG: Big brother, have two more bowls.

BAI: Brother, I'm drunk. I need to take a nap.

WENYONG: Waiter, please bring us a pillow.

BAI: I'll use your leg as a pillow. When I wake up, we'll go peddling together.

WENYONG: You may use my leg as a pillow if that's what you want.

(Bai lies down, but jerks up to grab the knife and stab it into the floor)

WAITER: Oh, my! Better let the sleeping dog lie.

WENYONG: This ruffian is sleeping on my leg. What can I do? Got it. Waiter, how much do I owe you?

WAITER: Sir, I know you're a good man. Just give me what you see fit. You've made two orders.

WENYONG: You're in business and I'm in business. We know the rules. Don't bear me a grudge if you feel cheated.

WAITER: Sir, next time you come, I'll offer you some better wine.

WENYONG: I don't mind a few coins, but your wine is rather thin.

WAITER: You may call it thin, but it has one good effect. As soon as it goes down, your bowels start rumbling.

WENYONG: That must be why I heard them rumble when I drank your wine.

WAITER: That proves it's good wine.

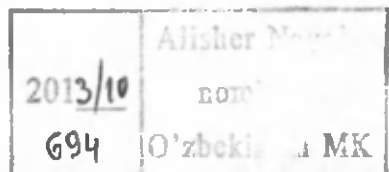
WENYONG: Can you do me a favor?

WAITER: Are you thinking of getting away?

WENYONG: No. I'm afraid my bowels are opening. Can you replace me for a while? If not, I may mess up your place.

WAITER: Please don't, sir. I'll replace you. (He inserts his leg under Bai's head while Wenyong withdraws his)

WENYONG: Here's your money. (He picks up the shoulder pole and places it



on his shoulder) I'm leaving you now. Thank heaven I'm out of here!

[Coda]

That rogue thought he was fire and I was ice,
or I was a piece of cake on his plate.
If I hadn't managed to make him drunk,
I couldn't have smothered the fire in him.
Now that I have escaped the tiger's maw,
I must push forward at a faster pace
– can't watch the flying geese and dream of soup.
By the time he wakes from his fuddled sleep,
I'll have regained my poise and strength.
Should he attempt to catch me up,
I'll have a lead of many miles.

(Exit Wenyong)

BAI (wakes up): Brother, let's go do business together. What! He's slipped away like a cicada that sheds its skin. [To Waiter] I'll beat you, you son of a bitch. Why did you let him go?

WAITER: He had loose bowels and had to take a dump.

BAI: Where did he actually go?

WAITER: You were lying here, I was lying here. How do I know whether he's gone south or north? He's not my business partner.

BAI (hits Waiter): Bah! Sonny, he was a sure catch in my hand and you let him slip through my fingers. I can't let him go that easy. I'll find him. If I catch him, you're safe; if I can't catch him, I'll come back to burn down your little hut and kill everyone in your family. Wang Wenyong, you can't get far. Wherever you're, I'll find you.

(Exit Bai)

WAITER: What a rotten day! A disaster out of the blue! I'd better close down this wineshop and go sell vinegar in the back lanes.

(Exit)

ACT II

(Enter an innkeeper)

INNKEEPER:

*Other inns add water to cook their rice;
I sprinkle rice into a water pot.
If you come to my place and drink my wine,
You can drink till you burst but not get drunk.*

I'm an innkeeper. My inn is called the Black Stone, one of the Three Family Inns here. The two inns on either side are favored by the less wealthy peddlers. The more affluent merchants like to stay at my place. It's getting dark. I'll close the gate.

(Enter Wang Wenyong in haste, carrying two baskets on a shoulder pole)

WENYONG: Quick, quick, quick!

[A Spray of Flowers]

His eyes immediately fell on my petty wares,
but I was able to divert him to new brew
– in one gulp he downed half a dozen bowls.
With spirits high he swallowed several jars
before he was finally soused.
He seemed to have a natural head for wine
and wouldn't fall until his skull was brimming full.
There he lies snoring loudly in his clothes.
Blissfully unaware I've run away.

[Seventh Tune from Liangzhou]

If I hadn't knelt down and offered wine,
heavens above, this humble life of mine
would doubtless have been over thousand times.
Since daybreak till now when the sun sinks west,
I've walked past many verdant hills
with ancient temples and clan shrines,
and trekked along the winding streams
with shallow shoals and rocky banks.
Mountains and valleys rise and fall;

the creeks gurgle and rapids roar.
I've climbed up to the top of peaks
only to find that yet more ranges stretch ahead;
then they flatten into the distance white.
When finally I reach the willowed fort,
fog and clouds have already spread a shroud.
I'll find and put up at a far-flung inn.
Once the giant turtle escapes from the hook,
never again will it return.

Here I am at the Black Stone. There are three inns in a row. I won't stay in the side ones, but in the middle one. If that tough finds his way here, he won't be able to find me. Even if he should find me, when I cry for help, those in the other two inns on the sides will certainly hear me and come to my aid. (He greets Innkeeper) Brother, have you got a clean room? I'd like to stay for the night.

INNKEEPER: The one in the corner is clean. You can take that one.

WENYONG: Please bring me a lamp.

INNKEEPER: Here you are.

WENYONG: Would you please show me the backyard? I close the door behind me and go into the backyard. What's this? A section of wall has collapsed.

INNKEEPER: It crumbled in the heavy rain. I didn't have time to fix it.

WENYONG: Brother, where does that road lead to?

INNKEEPER: That's the road to Henan Prefecture.

WENYONG: What about that one?

INNKEEPER: That one goes to Si Prefecture.

WENYONG: And this one?

INNKEEPER: This is the main road. You can go anywhere.

WENYONG: I need to take a leak. To be honest with you, there's a big guy chasing me. If you find him knocking at the gate, please do me a favor and say the local authority has rules that you're not permitted to put up single travelers. I'll pay you the price for two tomorrow morning.

INNKEEPER: I see. If he comes, I tell him we don't take single travelers and turn him away. Trust me and have a good night.

WENYONG: Now I'll shut the door tight. A whole day's walking is exhausting. I'm going to bed right away.

(Enter Bai)

BAI: That guy walks real fast. My heels kick up to the back of my head and I simply can't catch up with him. And he's carrying two heavy baskets! Well, it's getting dark and I'll call it a day. Where shall I put up tonight? Ahead, I see three inns in a row. This place is called Three Family Inns. The one in the middle is called the Black Stone. If that guy doesn't have much money he'd stay at the side ones; if he's rich he'd stay at the Black Stone. I wonder which one he's staying in. Let me ask the innkeeper. He must know. (He calls at the gate) Boy, come and open the gate.

INNKEEPER: Who's there?

BAI: A traveler. It's dark. I'm looking for a place for the night.

INNKEEPER: Local authority regulations say that we can't take single guests.

BAI (turns around, pretending): Brothers, what did I say? I said we should put up at the side inns, and you insisted on the Black Stone. You said it's the best choice. See now? Drive the donkeys back to the side inn.

INNKEEPER: Wait. I'm coming. I'm opening the gate. (Bai steps in) Come in please. We do have vacant rooms.

BAI (grabs and beats Innkeeper): You said you can't take singles.

INNKEEPER: No. I said we can take single guests.

BAI: You sly son of a bitch. Answer me: Did you see a short young fellow with a pale yellow face at sundown, carrying two baskets? Is he staying at your place?

INNKEEPER: From dawn to dusk, I haven't seen a single soul.

BAI: Oh, brother, you've lost.

INNKEEPER: What do you mean lost?

BAI: It's like this. My brother and I made a bet at our last resting place. He insisted he's the faster walker, and I said I am. So we decided that the one who first arrives at the Black Stone would be the winner. The slower one will lose a sheep's head, a pile of pancakes, and a jar of wine. Now I'm the first to arrive. That makes him the loser, right?

INNKEEPER: Well, I'm afraid it's you who's the loser. He's been here for several hours already. I'll go tell him you've arrived.

BAI: Hold on. Just tell me in which room he's resting.

INNKEEPER: He's sleeping in that room.

BAI: Brother, do me a favor. Be my witness tomorrow morning. When we ask you who arrived first, you say the big guy came first. I'll give you the sheep's head, pancakes and wine.

INNKEEPER: Big uncl, I love to eat sheep's tongue.

BAI: Let's go and take a look at the backyard. Why has this stretch of wall collapsed?

INNKEEPER: It crumbled in the rain.

BAI: Why didn't you have it fixed?

INNKEEPER: Don't have the money.

BAI: Where does that road lead to?

INNKEEPER: To Henan Prefecture.

BAI: And that one?

INNKEEPER: To Si Prefecture.

BAI: And the other one?

INNKEEPER: This is the main road.

BAI: Fetch me a straw mat, and bring me your lock and key.

INNKEEPER: Here they are, mat, lock and key.

BAI: You go to bed. I'll close the gate and lock it up. If you dare make a noise, I'll kill you.

INNKEEPER: Big uncle, don't get angry with me. I'll go to bed right away.

(Exit Innkeeper)

BAI: I must be cautious. Let me first hear what that guy is saying.

WENYONG: That tough has kept me on the run, and I didn't have a chance to check my goods. I'll trim the wick of this oil lamp and have a good look.

(Bai listens attentively. Wenyong picks up the cinnabar lumps one by one) One, two, three, four, five. None is missing from this basket. Let me check the other basket. (He counts five) Thank heaven. All ten lumps are safe and sound. Now I can undress and have a good sleep. (He sleeps)

BAI: If this isn't the best place and time where is? I can knock down this door with one kick. But wait. Bai Zheng, use your head. The guests in the two side inns must still be awake. If this guy cries for help, I'll be the loser. I should take my time. Better snatch some sleep myself and get up at midnight. (He sleeps)

WENYONG: Who's snoring like thunder? It just woke me up.

[Congratulating the Bridegroom]

Who's it that snores so loud with easy mind?

Is he the one who occurred in my dream,
the monster in the dark?

His resounding snores are like thunder booms
that bring my trembling heart into my mouth.

It's said "A high pillow drives away worldly cares,"
but I cannot erase my constant fear.

That throaty sound seems rather familiar.

Let me tear off a slip from the window's paper-pane, twist it into a spill,
dip it into the lamp oil and light it. Now I can peep out.

I open the door and peer left and right.

So, it's the innkeeper sleeping here.

Here he lies in the open like a corpse,
his ass head pillowed on a piece of brick.

The snoring comes from someone else. Let me see who that one is.
(Terrified) Heavens! It's that tough! He's scaring me to death. I must blow
out the paper spill. I can't let him see me here.

[Shepherd Pass]

Promptly I blow out the light
and retrace my steps;
a sheet of cold sweat breaks out on my back.
Is he the king of hell who in person comes,
or the headsmen's notorious chief?
My chin drops and my mouth is left agape;
my head is buried in my neck.
Try as I may to lift my eyes,
my hands have both gone clammy limp.

He's sound asleep. I'll pack up and slip out by the backdoor. Hope I won't
arouse him. Damn! In my hurry-scurry I've blown out the lamp. How am I
to find my clothes and shoulder pole?

[Quasi-coda]

Quietly I button up my cotton shirt
and lace up my straw sandals carefully.
I dare not even make the slightest cough;
all the while I keep my eyes fixed on him.
Oh, heavens!
Hope he'll stay in that stupor long enough.

Now I've found my clothes and baggage. Thank heaven he's still asleep. I mustn't stay a moment longer.

[Shepherd Pass]

Suddenly he turns over on the mat,
but continues to sleep and snore,
not even opening his gummy eyes.
The phlegm in his throat wheezes up and down;
my heart contracts and gallops on a knife.
Like chilly rain in autumn nights,
every drop adds a dose of woe.
But just as I'm about to lift my feet
my leg is seized by a portentous cramp.

I'll get out through the crumbled opening in the wall. With one jump I'm out. No more Si Prefecture. I'll go straight home.

(Exit Wen Yong)

BAI (wakes up and looks about him): Ah, that guy has sneaked away again. Maybe this good catch wasn't destined for me. Well, well, well. There's no way to find him in this darkness. Better go home.

(Exit Bai)

(Enter a celestial lieutenant, followed by a ghost footman)

LIEUTENANT:

*Before you burn up paper coins⁶ to pray,
I know already what you want to say.
Justice is believed to be heaven's Way,
But where is justice midst the mortal clay?*

I'm a lieutenant to the god of Mount Tai.⁷ In my previous life, I was an honest and upright man. Nevertheless, I was murdered by an evil person. Heaven is fair and therefore appointed me lieutenant to the god of Mount Tai. I've just attended a court session with the Jade Emperor,⁸ and now I'm making a stopover at my temple on my way back.

(Enter Wen Yong)

WENYONG: What a downpour! I can't press ahead in such heavy rain. But if I wait out the rain that tough may catch up with me and take my life. What shall I do? Ah, here's a temple. Let me step in to take shelter. (He

puts down the baskets and shoulder pole) The inscription reads: Shrine of the celestial lieutenant. Great spirit, pity me! Help me get rid of that tough, and I'll renovate your temple and build more shrines for you.

(Enter Bai)

BAI: What a downpour! Where can I seek shelter? Ah, there's an ancient temple. I can take cover there. Why! That guy is here too! Isn't he just looking for death? (He grabs Wenyong) Brother, you're some turntail!

WENYONG: And you're some tail!

BAI: Why couldn't you wait for me? You didn't have to run away in such a hurry. (Aside) Let me test his muscles. [To Wenyong] Brother, my shirt is soaked. Help me wring it out, and then we can go peddling together.

WENYONG: Brother, I don't know how to.

BAI: You don't know how to wring out wet clothes? You hold one end and twist that way and I twist this way. Just don't turn in the same direction.

WENYONG: Brother, I see.

BAI: Okay, you don't have to move. Just hold it tightly and I'll do the wringing. (He wrings and Wenyong lurches and falls) Didn't you eat? Or are you exhausted? Come on, no more beating about the bush. Let's cut to the chase. Give me the red stuff!

WENYONG: You want the rouge? Take it.

BAI: I don't have such a fair face for powder and rouge.

WENYONG: Okay, okay, how about some orpiment?

BAI: I don't have smelly feet.

WENYONG: Brother, I don't have any other red stuff.

BAI: I mean the cinnabar.

WENYONG: Brother, I'm only a petty peddler. How can I have cinnabar?

BAI: You forget you were counting them one by one in the Black Stone?

WENYONG: Okay, okay, you can have one lump.

BAI: Don't say I'm greedy. Since we're friends, I ain't going to rob you. But I've followed you over such a distance. One lump doesn't amount to much of a reward. One more, please.

WENYONG: Brother, they are mine.

BAI: No?! I'll have to kill you then.

WENYONG: Okay, I'll give you one more.

BAI (puts the shoulder pole on his shoulder): Brother, I want them all.

WENYONG: Brother, how can you take all of them?

BAI: If you dare say no, I'll kill you. (He pulls out the knife)

WENYONG: Brother, take them all. They're yours.

(While Bai bends down to pick up the baskets, Wenyong raises the shoulder pole to hit him.)

BAI (looks up): What are you doing?

WENYONG: I thought you might need this shoulder pole.

BAI: A cunning son of a bitch! I'll hide outside and listen to what he says.

WENYONG: He's taken my cinnabar! But if I can get ahead of him and notify the local authority, they'll be able to catch and punish him. That'll serve him right.

BAI: Listen to that! I guess he may actually do it. Better get in first. Brother, here's your cinnabar. I'm giving it back to you.

WENYONG: That's most kind of you.

BAI: I want something else.

WENYONG: Brother, what do you want?

BAI: I want your head!

WENYONG: Brother, isn't there someone coming this way?

(As Bai turns around to look, Wenyong tries to hide. Bai catches him by the hair and puts the knife to his throat)

WENYONG: Bai Zheng the Iron Flagpole, you may take my goods and take my life, but I'll have you indicted in the nether court. There's no lack of witnesses.

BAI: What witnesses?

WENYONG: The celestial lieutenant is one.

BAI: I'll take you outside and kill you under the eaves. Then he won't be able to see a thing.

WENYONG: In that case, the bubbles from the dripping eaves will be my witness.

BAI: How can bubbles be witness? Take your case to whichever court you like, I ain't afraid of you.

[Coda]

WENYONG: Oh, my!

Like the waning moon toward the end of night,
no effort can reverse its dying course.

For all my pains
and desperate miles,
who is coming



做備巨武筆

to save my life?

Those few cinnabar lumps
are costing me my head.

I'll lay my case before the king of hell;
you Iron Flagpole shall wait and see.

Large as a door-plank though your hand may be,
you won't be able to choke my protesting mouth!

BAI (kills Wenying): Fancy that! Such a pale lad could've made me sweat! Let me drag his body to the foot of the wall. (He drags Wenying to the backdrop) I'll cut a groove in the base of the wall with my knife, and push down this wall to cover the corpse. Let this be his burial. Now these two baskets of cinnabar are mine. Since I've got his wares, why shouldn't I take the rest? He said he had a blooming wife at home. I'll go straight to his home and get rid of his old man. His wife couldn't but be mine. You gods up there, Iron Flagpole ain't afraid of you. Find whatever witnesses you like!

(Exit Bai)

LIEUTENANT: That insolent Iron Flagpole! Of all places, he robbed and killed Wang Wenying in my very own temple! He made me a witness. It's said: Good is rewarded with good, bad with bad. If heaven doesn't produce sharp frost, noble pine trees would have the stature of weeds; if gods don't mete out fair retribution, it could be more rewarding to do evil than good. To bring that Iron Flagpole to justice I must make a journey to the mortal world with my ghost footmen. A poem has it:

Don't think your cunning can deceive the gods;

What you've done like a shadow follows you.

Retribution will never fail to come;

Sooner or later you'll receive your due.

(Exeunt)

ACT III

(Enter Wenying's father and wife)

FATHER: My old self is Wang Wenying's father. It's been a long time since my son left home to do business. Oh, heavens! There are so many

Henanese doing business around the country. Why couldn't he find someone to bring us a message?

WIFE: Father, don't fret. He may come back pretty soon.

(Enter Bai)

BAI: I'm Bai Zheng the Iron Flagpole. After I killed Wang Wenyong, I walked day and night, and here I am at the Red Bridge inside the east gate of the capital of Henan. I asked around and people told me this is Wang Wenyong's house. I'll call out at the gate. Is there anyone home?

FATHER: Child, there's someone calling at the gate. Go and have a look.

WIFE: Okay. (Greets Bai) Sir, who are you looking for?

BAI: Sister-in-law, is Wang Wenyong living here?

WIFE: Why are you looking for him?

BAI: I'm his partner. He asked me to give you a letter.

WIFE: Oh, my! I must tell father. (To Father) Father, it's Wenyong's partner. He's carrying a letter from Wenyong.

FATHER: Can that be true? Let me talk to him. Brother, come in please.

BAI: Sir, are you Wang Wenyong's father?

FATHER: I am. May I ask who you are?

BAI (bows): I'm his sworn brother. We're doing business together. He's made a hundredfold profit, but he's got bleeding blisters on his feet and is lagging behind. So he asked me to come first with a message. I guess you're his wife. That means you're my sister-in-law. Uncle, I'm dying of hunger and thirst. Would you please fetch me some cool water from the well?

FATHER: I'll go and haul up a fresh bucket.

BAI: I'll go with you.

FATHER (hauling up water from the well): Up it comes.

BAI (pushes Father down the well): Down you go.

(Exit Father)

WIFE (crying): Father! My heart breaks.

BAI: You woman, stop that howling. I killed your husband and pushed your father-in-law into the well. He's drowned by now. You know why I came all the way here? It's for you. Be my wife.

WIFE: I'd rather die than be your wife!

BAI: If you say no, I'll finish you with one slash of this knife. Think about it.

WIFE: Hmm! If he kills me, who will avenge my husband and my father-in-law?

All right, I'll be your wife if you promise me one thing.

BAI: Name it and let me judge.

WIFE: It'll bring you ill luck to marry a new widow. Why not wait till the one-hundred-day mourning period is over? Then we can be man and wife forever.

BAI: Agreed. I certainly don't want to tempt fate. After the one hundred days, you'll be my wife. Look, now I've money, wife, house and land. They're all mine! For such a kind-hearted person as myself, heaven will always provide.

(Exeunt)

(Enter a netherworld judge, followed by a ghost footman)

JUDGE: I'm a judge in the netherworld. It's time to hold court, but the celestial lieutenant hasn't arrived yet. You ghost, go and wait at the gate. Send me word as soon as His Excellency arrives.

FOOTMAN: Yes, sir.

(Enter Wenyong's father)

FATHER: My old self is Wang Wenyong's father. That damned Bai Zheng! He killed my son, pushed me into the well, and made my daughter-in-law his wife. As I died an unnatural death, I'll bring my case before the judge of the netherworld. (He kneels before Judge) Your Honor, please hear my case.

JUDGE (kneels): Old man, please rise.

FATHER: Your Honor is the judge and I'm a wronged soul. Your Honor, please rise and hear my case.

JUDGE: So you're a plaintiff. I thought you were my uncle. Who are you accusing?

FATHER: I'm a native of Henan Prefecture. My name is Wang Congdao. There are three in my family. I have a son. His name is Wang Wenyong. And he has a wife. My son went south to do business and made a hundredfold profit. There's a man named Bai Zheng the Iron Flagpole. He not only robbed my son but also murdered him. He pushed me into the well to drown, and he took possession of my daughter-in-law. Your Honor, I beg you for justice.

JUDGE: Who did you say pushed you into the well?

FATHER: It's a man called Bai Zheng the Iron Flagpole.

JUDGE: Since you were drowned in a well, why aren't your clothes wet?

FATHER: They were wet, but they dried out through my body heat.

JUDGE: Are you living or are you dead?

FATHER: I'm dead.

JUDGE: If you're really dead, what's the use of charging him?

FATHER: Your Honor, show us your power. Fetch him here to stand trial.

JUDGE: I don't have the power. You just wait here for the celestial lieutenant.

And then you may present your case to him. I'm not going to fetch that man. He may kill me as well!

FATHER: I've never heard of a netherworld judge being afraid of a mortal.

(Exit Father)

(Enter Lieutenant, followed by a ghost footman)

LIEUTENANT: I'm lieutenant to the god of Mount Tai, responsible for the register of life and death and the records of good and evil. I'm on my way to the nether court to review the files.

[Base Tune Perfect]

Here I tighten my leather belt

and straighten my official hat.

My long sleeves swirl and puff up as I dance.

Before my eyes, frost has flushed the autumn leaves;
breaths of chill pervade the empyreal vault.

[Rolling the Embroidered Ball]

Why do you think this region chills the bones?

Because it's shrouded in eternal fog,

which blocks out all sight of the mortal world.

I just had a glimpse of the withered grass,

and suddenly I'm at the netherworld

— a cove of murk.

Soon as I step across the bridge to hell,

blade trees and sword mountains loom ahead.

With one hand on the shoulder of the ghost,

I watch out for the miserable souls.

Who wouldn't stagger at this place?

[The Stupefied Scholar]

So frequently polished my jade belt shines;

now I straighten and dust my satin robe

and follow the verandah up the stairs.

I have sat through a hundred thousand miles,

and dropped in at a thousand holy grounds

– all in a flash of thought.

[The Inert Baton]

Let me lick a hole in the paper windowpane.

FOOTMAN: Your Honor, the god of Mount Tai's lieutenant has arrived.

JUDGE: I must go out to receive him.

LIEUTENANT:

I reach out to catch and topple that ghost
and make him cartwheel round the waist,
two fingers stretched to dig his eyes,
one fist raised high to crush his skull.

This little exercise has made me sweat.

JUDGE: Your Excellency, please show mercy.

LIEUTENANT: Get your hands off me!

I'm going to pluck his hair off his head.

Why are you attempting to seize my arms?

JUDGE: You ghost, serve wine. Quick.

FOOTMAN: Here's wine.

JUDGE (offering wine to Lieutenant): Your Excellency, bottoms up.

[The Stupefied Scholar]

LIEUTENANT:

Seeing him offer wine with both his hands,
I raise my tusk tablet¹⁰ in due response.

JUDGE: Your Excellency, we haven't had the honor for a long while.

LIEUTENANT:

You and I haven't met for several years,
without any tidings,
without courtesy calls.

It's nice to see you once again.

JUDGE: Please take a seat. (He hands Lieutenant the files)

LIEUTENANT: What is this case about?

JUDGE: It's a tailor who tricked people by using yardsticks of different lengths. When he bought in quality satin he used the longer one, and when he sold the satin he used the shorter one. I've fetched him here and

ordered three thousand blows with a copper hammer in his left ribs and five thousand blows with an iron club in his right ribs. Now he's passed on for reincarnation.

FOOTMAN: What will you change him into?

JUDGE: He's to be reborn in the form of a leech.

FOOTMAN: Why a leech?

JUDGE: A leech can stretch or shrink as it pleases.

LIEUTENANT: What is this case about?

JUDGE: It's a laundry owner. He took delight in bleaching his customers' colorful clothes and scorching their expensive Korean-silk dresses with a red-hot iron. I've fetched him here and ordered three hundred blows with a copper hammer in his left ribs and five hundred blows with an iron club in his right ribs. Now he's passed on for reincarnation.

FOOTMAN: What will he become?

JUDGE: He's to be a blacksmith.

FOOTMAN: Why a blacksmith?

JUDGE: He can temper iron as he pleases.

LIEUTENANT: What is this case about?

JUDGE: It's a gardener. When he was alive, he planted trees and flowers around the year. His pruning and clipping hurt the plants. That's why he was fetched here to have thirty blows with a copper hammer in his left ribs and fifty blows with an iron club in his right ribs. Now he's passed on for reincarnation.

FOOTMAN: What will he become?

JUDGE: He's to be reborn in the somersault department of a theater house.

FOOTMAN: Why in the somersault department?

JUDGE: He may plant himself this way or that as he pleases.

LIEUTENANT: What is this case about?

JUDGE: It's robbery and murder by a man called Bai Zheng the Iron Flagpole. He killed Wang Wenyong, pushed his father into a well, and took possession of his wife and property.

LIEUTENANT: I must look into this case.

[A Reading Companion]

I pick out murder cases to review.

Who is he that dare violate heaven's rules?

Authorized by the great Jade Emperor,

I carefully measure the rights and wrongs.

Never will retribution fail to come;
heaven's cycles are always carried through.

JUDGE: Your Excellency, this case is most horrifying.

[The Smiling Monk]

LIEUTENANT:

You, you, you lay out the file page by page;
I, I, I steady my palms on the desk.
There, there, there lines of fine print crowd the page;
here, here, here I must read them line by line.
Not, not, not a single word should be missed.
Now, now, now I'll sentence them one by one.

JUDGE: Your Excellency, there's no evil Iron Flagpole wouldn't do in the mortal world. His days are numbered, for heaven does not permit that!

[Drink for Peace]

LIEUTENANT:

Does he think he was born with vulture wings
and boast a heart more brutal than a wolf's?
See the evils he's done in recent years
without the slightest sense of fear.
Wang Wenyong died at the point of his blazing knife;
Wang Congdao was drowned in the dark depth of the well,
and he intends to abuse Wenyong's lovely wife.
The sins he committed are numerous!

Since he has such a horrible record, why didn't you dispatch your footmen to summon him?

JUDGE: Honestly, I did send my footmen several times to snatch him, but he's so violent they were afraid to approach him.

LIEUTENANT: I'll go in person to apprehend him.

[Coda]

I'll clutch his topknot in my steely claws,
and tie a sturdy hemp rope round his neck.

I'll empty his skull and disjoint his wrists,
and let him suffer a protracted death.
Be he iron flagpole or stubborn dog,
with my strong arms that can shake mountain peaks,
I'll drag him here before your very eyes.

(Exeunt Lieutenant and Footman)

JUDGE: His Excellency is gone. Why don't we join him and help him subdue that villain?

[Ditto]

I'll cripple his arms with a heavy rod,
and lace his collarbones with clanking chains.
I'll split his skull and scoop his brains,
explode his eyes and snap his waist.
(He makes faces)

FOOTMAN: Why make such faces?

JUDGE:

So he'll be seized with remorse when he comes to hell.

(Exeunt)

ACT IV

(Enter Bai with Wenying's wife)

BAI: I'm Bai Zheng. After I killed Wang Wenying I came to his home, pushed his father into the well, and took possession of his wife. These days, however, I can't shake off this jumpy feeling and my mind seems unsettled. Not sure what's wrong. Woman, cook me some porridge for dinner.

WIFE: Take a rest. I'll go cook porridge for you.

(Exit Wife)

(Enter Wang Wenying's spirit)

WENYONG: I'm none other than Wang Wenying. I was robbed and murdered by Bai Zheng the Iron Flagpole. Yet my mortal life wasn't destined to end that early. Tonight I'm going to seek him out and make

him pay the debt.

[Minitune from River Xin]

Dusk is descending on the cottage yards.
Oh heavens!
I feel like walking on a thread of breath.
The rugged mountain path is rainy cold;
a foggy gloom is borne by evening blasts.
Lifting my weary feet,
step by step I retrace my final stage.

(He walks) Here I am at the crossroads wineshop. This is where I first ran into that tough. My heavy load attracted his attention and aroused his greed. He ruined my life!

[Dead Drunk in the East Wind]

If I wasn't running out of luck,
how could misfortune have befallen me?
Our paths had never crossed before,
and it was the first time we ever met.
"Bad guys scatter" was all I said,
and he sprang to his feet to pick a fight.
Obviously he had his eyes on my wares.

(He walks on) Now this is the Black Stone. Damn him! I tried to shun his company. Why did he inflict himself on me?

[The False Card]

Since I humbled myself and slipped away,
why did he have to chase me to earth's end?
There was no feud or debt between us two.
Why was he determined to take my life?

On reflection, since I was on the run, why didn't I go straight to bed and hide under the cover, but instead turned up the lamp to count the cinnabar lumps? An ancient motto says: Never count your money in public. And that exposure was fatal.

[Sweet Water Minitune]

I should have tightly shut my door,
promptly blown out the feeble light,
and slept serenely through the night.
What on earth made me count them one by one
and thus offered him such a chance?
He overheard my voice
and discovered my whereabouts.
Wasn't myself the one to blame?

(He walks on) This is the temple to the celestial lieutenant of Mount Tai. That tough! He's a savage! I gave him all the cinnabar to save my life, and yet he had no qualms about killing me. I remember before I died I pointed at the bubbles stirred up by the rainwater dripping from the eaves and said they would be my witness. My poor soul cannot lie at peace until I get my retribution. Great celestial lord, you're in charge of life and death. You should bring me justice! (He kowtows)

[Laurel Crown Minitune]

I piously lie prostrate below your feet,
and pray to you who keep the book of life
to punish the bad and reward the good.
(He kowtows) Great celestial lord,
why don't you have pity on my murdered soul?
How can you leave the cruel assassin loose,
and allow him to seize my widowed wife?
I asked the bubbles to be my witness.
Didn't you sitting up there see me killed?
(He kowtows)
I hope that you will soon review my case
and show us your almighty power.
Condemn that tough to hell's most dreadful pit
just to be worthy of your lasting fame.

(He walks on) Here's my home. I'll go in to see my father. Ah! He's still drowned and stuck at the bottom of the well. Father! It pains me to see you there! (Tormented)

[The Plum-ripening Wind]

I thought your soul had risen to heaven.
Who knew you still are trapped here in the well!
Even a stone statue would break its heart.
Sooner or later he must pay for it,
unless he and I are kept worlds apart!

Let me see where my wife is. So she's living with that tough. And she's cooking porridge for him!

[Shopping for Sweet Wine]

She didn't burn paper coins for my soul,
but is simmering porridge for that man.
So she's water that swiftly shifts its course.
I toiled year in year out for family's sake,
and see how she became the bad man's spouse.

[Peaceful Minitune]

I'd expected her to be a loyal wife,
but see what has become of her!
That Flagpole now lives a contented life,
while my head lies forgotten in the dirt.
How can that
usurper
take it all!
Those are my belongings and property!

(He tugs at Bai) You Iron Flagpole, give me back my life!

BAI: Who are you? I don't owe you your life!

WENYONG: I'm Wang Wenyong. You robbed and killed me at the temple to the celestial lieutenant. You drowned my father. You took my wife. You owe me several lives!

BAI: Who said I took away your life? Is there any witness?

WENYONG: There is! The water bubbles are.

BAI: I'm a strict vegetarian. I never killed even an animal, and won't snap at your finger even if you put it in my face. How can I be a murderer? If you say the bubbles at the temple are your witness, just call forth that celestial

lieutenant to bear you out.

(Enter Lieutenant with Footman)

LIEUTENANT:

A whisper of a human

Cracks like thunder in heaven.

A sin committed in the dark

Flares like lightning before the gods.

Bai Zheng the Iron Flagpole, don't you recognize me? You robbed and killed Wang Wenyong under the very eaves of my temple. You drowned his father and took possession of his wife. You've sinned too much already. You can't deny that, can you?

BAI (kneels): I was wrong. I did kill Wang Wenyong. I beg Your Honor's mercy. I'll invite the most venerable Buddhist monks to hold memorial rituals to transcend his soul to heaven. Please spare my life.

WENYONG: Bai Zheng, your time has come! No one can be exempt from retribution. You cannot be spared!

[Coda]

Even your death cannot appease my mind,
for hatred persists like the dripping eaves.
A brutish creature overfilled with greed,
you should be a headless ghoul in the deepest hell.

LIEUTENANT: Bai Zheng the Iron Flagpole has made a clear confession. Footman, drag him to hell and let him go through the various tortures. To avenge Wang Wenyong, he shall forever starve. Listen to my verdict:

Iron Flagpole is a wild and brutal man.

He chased Wenyong into the temple house,

Where he committed two atrocious crimes,

And sowed a hatred deeper than the sea.

Wenyong asked the bubbles to bear witness,

And now it's time that all wrongs be redressed.

My footman is to take the villain's soul

Down and down to inferno's deepest cell.

Father and son whose lives were wrongly deprived

Shall enjoy prosperity in their next.

Let that be evidence of retribution

To show that heaven's Way is just and fair.

BANNER TITLE:

***The Iron Flagpole takes the cinnabar lumps;
The bubbles bear witness to homicide.***

- ¹ This list of personae is supplied by the translator. It follows the order of appearance on stage. The role type of the actor or actress follows the name in parentheses. In Yuan Dynasty plays there are four major types, namely, *mo* (male character), *dan* (female character), *jing* (negative character) and *chou* (clown), which, as their adjectives indicate, can be more finely categorized, but, generally speaking, only the male lead (*zheng mo*), or female lead (*zheng dan*), does the singing. The leading character of the play is in bold type.
- ² Si Prefecture: in the northeastern part of present-day Anhui Province.
- ³ Copper coins: the most widely used currency for daily exchange in ancient China. They are about the size of a nickel with a square hole in the center so that they can be strung together. A thousand coins, called *guan* (a string), roughly equal the value of one ounce of silver.
- ⁴ Stage directions in square brackets are added by the translator.
- ⁵ Wine in ancient China refers mainly to low-proof rice wine, which is usually warmed up before drinking. It is easy to get drunk on a mixture.
- ⁶ Paper coins: yellow straw-paper cut into the shape of copper coins and burned up for the spirits and ghosts.
- ⁷ Mount Tai: one of the five sacred mountains in China, also known as the Mountain of the East. In Taoist belief, the god of Mount Tai is in charge of the netherworld, whose administration consists of 72 departments, each headed by a lieutenant.
- ⁸ Jade Emperor: the Lord of Heaven, who is the supreme deity of Taoism.
- ⁹ A dead person should be cold – a deliberate confusion between the actor and the role he is playing.
- ¹⁰ Tusk tablet: also known as court-tablet, which is a strip of polished wood or elephant tusk held before the chest by a civil official when received in audience by the emperor, on which a simple outline of his intended report can be jotted down.

The Eastside Neighbor

by
Qin Jianfu

INTRODUCTION

Historical records have left little about the author of the play, Qin Jianfu, except that he was a celebrated figure in the capital in the late Yuan Dynasty. Altogether five plays are attributed to him; *The Eastside Neighbor* is one of the three that survive.

How to teach the younger generation has been a knotty problem throughout China's history. From the emperor to country gentry, great efforts have been devoted to the struggle against the corrupting power of wealth and the degeneration of vitality. The sage Mencius claimed that the fortune of a respectable family could last no longer than five generations. This predicament is vividly portrayed in *The Eastside Neighbor*, which shows us how easily the young are led astray and how difficult it is for the older generation to set them on the right track.

The problem is set out in the Wedge. A rich merchant has failed to bring up his son, Yangzhouer, as an industrious and honorable man. Seeing that his huge estate is to be ruined at the hands of his decadent son, who is strongly influenced by two loafers, the rich man upon his deathbed entrusts the young spendthrift to his best friend and neighbor, Li Shi, and secretly deposits a large sum of money in his care.

Ten years have elapsed between the Wedge and Act I, and now Yangzhouer has squandered away most of his fortune. At the instigation of his two wastrel friends, he decides to sell his house for cash, the last piece of real estate he has.

In Act II, Yangzhouer continues to lavish his money on feasts and prostitutes. Li tries to correct him, but his scolding and warning simply fall on deaf ears.

Act III opens with Yangzhouer begging. Penniless, he begins to understand the hardship of life and the fickle and snobbish ways of the world. True repentance only comes when you hit rock bottom, as a Chinese saying puts it: "No one weeps and repents until they look their coffin in the face." Finally, Yangzhouer makes up his mind to turn over a new leaf, and with a small loan from Mrs Li, he starts over as a street peddler.

THE EASTSIDE NEIGHBOR

The content of his father's will is revealed in Act IV. Li Shi, a model of faithfulness and moral integrity, with his effective management, restores Yangzhou to his former property. This big and sweet surprise brings the play to a happy ending.

The Eastside Neighbor

CHARACTERS

ZHAO (*chong mo*), Zhao Guoqi, a wealthy man

YANGZHOUER (*jing*), son of Zhao Guoqi

JADEITE (*dan*), wife of Yangzhouer

LI (*zheng mo*), Li Shi, neighbor of Zhao Guoqi, also known as Li Maoqing or Uncle East Chamber

ATTENDANT (*chou*), an attendant at a teahouse

LIU (*jing*), Liu Longqing, a scoundrel

HU (*jing*), Hu Zizhuan, a scoundrel

MRS LI, wife of Li Shi

SON (*xiao mo ni*), son of Li Shi

BOYS, men servants

NEIGHBORS

THE WEDGE

(Enter Zhao Guoqi, weak and sick, with Yangzhouer and Jadeite)

ZHAO: My family name is Zhao and my given name is Guoqi. I'm a native of Dongping Prefecture,¹ but business has brought me to the City of Yangzhou² and here I live on Pailou Alley inside the east city gate. There used to be the four of us, me and my wife, my son and his wife. My wife was from the Li family. Unhappily, she died young. We have an only son, whom we called Yangzhouer because he was born in this city. His wife is also a Li, called Jadeite, the daughter of General Li. Since marrying into my family she's proven herself to be a very prudent woman and she never spends her time in idle gossip.

I went into trade at an early age. During those years I rose early in the morning and worked late into the night, and gradually built up a family fortune. I'd hoped my son would carry on and build the prosperity of our family business, but since he came of age and married, he only keeps company with a pack of scumbags. He drinks and carouses all day long, caring only about his food and clothes without the least thought to

family and business. Not only have I heard tales of his unruly behavior but I've also seen it with my own eyes so many times that I've lost sleep and have fallen ill through worry and grief. I'm afraid heaven is forsaking me while mother earth is beckoning. Death can't be far off. After I close my eyes there's no doubt my son will ruin the family. How shameful it'll be to become the laughingstock of others!

My next-door neighbor to the east is a lay Buddhist disciple, named Li Shi. His school name is Li Maoqing. He's a dignified person, a real gentleman. People respectfully call him Uncle East Chamber. He and I are like brothers, he the younger brother and I the elder since I'm two years his senior. Our friendship has lasted three decades, and there has never been a quarrel between us. Another reason that brings our two families close is that his wife is from the Zhao family, the same as mine; and my wife is from the Li family, the same as his. That makes our relations even closer than kin. Today I'm going to invite him over and ask him to take care of my son after my death. I wonder if he'll accept that responsibility. Yangzhou.

YANGZHOUER (responds): What are you calling me for? Old man, even if you are ill, do you have to call me by my pet name? I've grown up! That'll take some years off you.

ZHAO: Go next door to invite Uncle Li over. I'd like to talk to him.

YANGZHOUER: Okay. Boys,³ go next door to invite Uncle East Chamber.

ZHAO: I asked you to go, not the servants.

YANGZHOUER: Me? It's a wall apart. Why do I have to go myself?

ZHAO: Why are you always sending others instead?

YANGZHOUER: All right, I'm going. I don't want to argue with you. Boys, saddle my horse!

ZHAO: It's only next door. Do you have to ride?

YANGZHOUER: What sort of father are you? You don't know your son! I ride wherever I go, even if it's to the outhouse.

ZHAO: Just look at this man!

YANGZHOUER: All right, I'm going, or you'll say I'm driving you nuts again. Out of the gate, no one is around. That's my father. Every time he tries to speak to me, I make him choke on his words. That Uncle East Chamber, though he's our next-door neighbor, he and I live a world apart. He's the last person I want to see. Every time I hear him call "Yangzhouer," oh, boy, that scares me out of my wits. I don't know why

I'm so afraid of him. Whilst speaking, I've already reached his gate. (He clears his throat) Is uncle home?

(Enter Li Shi)

LI: Who is it?

YANGZHOUER: It's me, Yangzhouer.

LI: What brings you here?

YANGZHOUER: My father asks me to invite you over. I don't know what he's up to.

LI: You go home first. I'll be right there.

YANGZHOUER: Suits me. I have no wish to stay with you.

(Exit Yangzhouer)

LI: My family name is Li, my given name is Shi, and my school name is Maoqing. This year I've turned fifty-eight. I'm a native of Dongping Prefecture, but business has brought me to Yangzhou. So here I live on Pailou Alley inside the east city gate.

When I was young, I studied a few volumes of the Buddhist scriptures, so I nicknamed myself the East Chamber Buddhist. Now I'm getting old, people have started calling me Uncle East Chamber. My next-door neighbor to the west is a man named Zhao Guoqi. He's two years my senior. Since we came from the same place and both of us settled in this city, our two families have been on intimate terms for the past thirty years. Recently Old Zhao was brought down by illness. I was just thinking of paying him a visit when he sent his son over to invite me. It must be something important. This is his gate. Yangzhouer, tell your father I've come.

YANGZHOUER: Uncle Li is at the gate now.

ZHAO: Please ask him to come in.

LI (greets Zhao): Sorry that I wasn't able to come earlier, though I heard you're ill. I was rather busy.

ZHAO: Please take a seat.

LI: How are you these days?

ZHAO: My health is going from bad to worse. I'm afraid death isn't far off.

LI: Haven't you seen a good doctor?

ZHAO (sighs): No, I haven't. You're my best friend. You should be able to guess the cause of my illness.

LI: If you ask me to guess, is it a cold?

ZHAO: No.

LI: Is it due to diet or perhaps fatigue?

ZHAO: Neither.

LI: Is it some kind of distress?

ZHAO: Ah! You're the one who knows me! To be frank, it's caused by profound worry.

LI: Brother, you're the very person who should be free of worries. You have a thousand acres of rich farmland just out of town. You have an oil-mill and a pawnshop downtown. You have a son well married. In fact, you're one of the richest men in the city. What else can you dream of? What have you got to worry about?

ZHAO (sighs): You may not know it, but I'm deeply worried about my unworthy son Yangzhouer. Since he grew into manhood and married, he's abandoned himself to drinking and carousing with a gang of scumbags. I'm certain he'll ruin my estate once I'm gone. The thought of it sits heavily on my mind and has wrecked my health. What doctor do you think can cure this kind of disease?

LI: You're worrying unduly. Haven't you heard of what the philosopher Shao Yaofu⁴ said to his son: "Although I would like to bring you up to be a cultivated person, perhaps that's not what heaven has ordained for you." About filial piety Confucius said, "You watch what the son says when his father is alive, and then you watch how he actually behaves after his father's death."⁵ Parents can put their conscience at rest after they have set children on their feet and had them properly married. Whether or not they turn out to be successful in the future is their own responsibility. As parents, we cannot see them right through their lives. You're worrying yourself for no good reason.

ZHAO: What you said may be true, but he's a piece of my own heart, and I toiled my whole life to build up such an estate of solid gold. How can I watch him ruin it! I'm afraid I won't be able to close my eyes when I'm lying in my grave. That's why I've invited you over today. I'd like to entrust my son to you, in the hope you'll keep an eye on him and see that he has a roof over his head. I'll remember and repay your kindness, whether I'm reborn as human or beast in my next life.

LI (stands up): You've put so much confidence in me I shouldn't decline your request, but, firstly, you still have many years to live. Secondly, since I'm neither a man of noble character nor any blood relation of your family, Yangzhouer may not care to listen to me. Thirdly, you're so well-off. As the saying goes, "Don't court trouble by tying your shoelace in



a melon field or lifting your hat in an orchard." I must avoid suspicion of taking advantage. You'd better ask someone else. I'll bid you farewell.

ZHAO: Yangzhou, make your uncle stay. Sir, you needn't be so cautious. Don't you remember Confucius also said, "A true gentleman can be entrusted with the life of the prince; a true gentleman can be entrusted with the fate of the country." You and I have known each other for more than thirty years. Our friendship can be compared to the legendary friendship of Chen Chong and Lei Yi,⁶ and is as fast as paint and glue. In my sickness, my life hangs literally on a thread. I believe a person of your integrity and repute won't let me down. That's why I make bold to entrust my son to you. Sir, you used to express strong indignation against any wrongdoing. What has happened to you? Don't let others say "You don't do what is right because you lack the courage."⁷ (He goes down on his knees)

LI (kneels too): Ah, please don't humble yourself so! I'm unworthy of this. Please rise. I agree.

ZHAO: Yangzhou, move the table over here.

YANGZHOUER: Boys, come and move the table.

ZHAO: I asked you to do that. Why do you have to order others around?

YANGZHOUER: Okay, I'll do it. You sons of a bitch, where are you when you're needed? If something should happen to my old man, you're to blame. (He carries the table) Oh, my! I've lived thirty years and this is the first time I've lifted a table. It's so big and heavy! (He sets the table down)

ZHAO: Go and fetch us pen and paper, ink and inkslab.

YANGZHOUER: Here they are.

ZHAO (writes): I've written and signed this document. Yangzhou, come over here and sign your name on the back of this sheet.

YANGZHOUER: Why should I sign it? It isn't my confession. Who knows what you've written there. See how you clutch it in your hands as if I'd snatch it away and eat it up. (He signs) I've signed it. Are you thinking of selling me?

LI: What if your father were selling you?

ZHAO: Sir, please keep this document. (He kneels again. Li accepts the paper) Yangzhou, please ask your uncle to sit down, and call out your wife.

YANGZHOUER: Uncle is seated. Wife, come here.

(Enter Jadeite)

ZHAO: Yangzhou, you and your wife make eight kowtows to your uncle.

YANGZHOUER: It's neither New Year's Day nor any holy day today. Why should I make so many kowtows?

LI: Yangzhouer, are you haggling with me?

YANGZHOUER: Certainly not. What are eight kowtows? It wouldn't be too much even if you asked me to kowtow from morning till night.

JADEITE: Let's do as father said and make kowtows.

YANGZHOUER: Shut up! It's none of your business. Stand aside and make room for me. I'll perform it. (He kowtows) One is as good as eight. (He rises and straightens his clothes) Uncle, how's my aunt doing at home?

LI (angrily): Bah!

YANGZHOUER: This old man is getting more and more difficult.

LI: Yangzhouer, what kind of illness is your father suffering from?

YANGZHOUER: I don't know.

LI: Shame on you! Your father has been ill for half a year already and you don't know what he's suffering from! Don't you know that a filial son must take care of his sick father?

YANGZHOUER: Uncle, don't get angry with me. As for his symptoms, if I say I don't know, how could I have not noticed? But if I say I do know, I can't figure out what is wrong. I find him dozing off while he's sitting, and find him sitting up when he's sleeping. Maybe he needs some exercise.

LI: Yangzhouer, what did your father write in the document he gave me just now?

YANGZHOUER: I have no idea at all.

LI: If you don't know the content, why did you sign it?

YANGZHOUER: Father asked me to do it, how dare I say no to him?

LI: If you don't know, both you and your wife come closer. Let me tell you. Your father's illness is caused by worry and grief. He brought you up, married you to a good wife, but you only seek the company of scum and spend your days drinking and carousing, without ever attending to family business. Your father has put it in this paper that "Whatever Yangzhouer does, he must have the consent of Uncle Li Maoqing, otherwise he cannot do it. Uncle Li has the right to beat him, even to death, if he does not obey." Your father has given me permission to beat you to death.

YANGZHOUER (moans): Father, how could you be so heartless? How could you allow others to beat me to death?

ZHAO: Son, you pushed me to that step.

LI: Old brother, don't worry. I believe Yangzhouer will mend his ways.

[Watching Flowers]

Worries about one's children gray one's hair;
 the wealth left behind keeps the dead awake,
 who rattle their dry bones to find a way.

Since you have entrusted me with your son,
 don't worry,

I truly promise you a happy end.

(Exit Li)

YANGZHOUER (supporting Zhao): Wife, father doesn't look well. Let's help him into the bedroom. Father, wake!

ZHAO: Yangzhouer, now you're a grown-up, you must shoulder the responsibility of the family and the household. Do cut down expenses. I'm dying.

*The gloomy prospects of a failure son
 Erode my health and sink me to my grave.
 Next time when you seek counsel from your dad,
 Such things could only take place in your dream.*

(Exeunt)

ACT I

(Enter a teahouse attendant)

ATTENDANT:

*My tea allures gods from their isles;
 Fragrance rises in wisps of steam.
 If I don't boast the best of tastes,
 Who will untie their pouch to pay?*

I'm a teahouse attendant. Now the kettle is singing. Let me see if there's someone coming.

(Enter Liu Longqing and Hu Zizhuan)

LIU:

*I neither weed the land nor plant a thing;
 My idle years are spent in wheed 'n' ling.⁸*

HU:

Why do those people work from dawn to dusk?

Simply because they think they owe me much.

LIU: I'm Liu Longqing, and this is my buddy Hu Zizhuan. We two have learned no trade and our tongues are our fortune. In town there's a young master of the Zhao family called Yangzhouer. Ever since we and him became sworn brothers we've been his masterminds. Without us, he would refuse to eat and drink. Without him, we two would have to starve to death.

HU: Buddy, even my wife's pants are his. Your headwear is his too.

LIU: Oh, that's why I've got such a lousy headache!

HU: Buddy, our food, our clothes, what isn't his? It's only a few days since I last saw him and my hands are stark empty. Buddy, let's go and look for him at the teahouse. If he's there, we'll have plenty of meat to eat and wine to drink. I may also take home the leftovers for my woman.

LIU: Let's go. (He greets Attendant) Waiter, is Master Zhao inside?

ATTENDANT: I haven't seen him today.

LIU: You keep an eye out for him, and tell us as soon as you see him coming. For the moment we don't want any tea.

ATTENDANT: All right. . . . Master Zhao's coming.

(Enter Yangzhouer)

YANGZHOUER:

My limbs and torso are gracefully shaped,

But my head is just such an empty shell.

Vulgarity is chiseled on my bones;

Gallantry is born with me from the womb.

I'm Yangzhouer. People prefer to call me Master Zhao. The moon and sun take rapid turns and ten years have slipped by since my father died. My large inheritance: the gold and pearls, the jades and bronzes, the farm estates and houses, cattle and sheep, the oil-mill and the pawnshop, the servants and maids, were either sold or pawned, and the money they raised simply dissipated. I'm open-handed, open-mouthed, and there isn't a day I don't spend several dozen ounces of silver. I've made two good pals. One is Liu Longqing, the other is Hu Zizhuan. They know me so well that I don't have to say a word but they know what I want. You only need to show the head and they already know the tail. Isn't that something? I didn't give a fig for what my father said, but what they say I take notice of as if it were god's own word, because it pleases my ear and suits my heart. I haven't seen them for a couple of days. We usually meet at the teahouse. Let me go there to

have a look. (He greets Attendant)

ATTENDANT: Master Zhao, glad to see you. Your friends are waiting for you inside. [Announces] Here comes Master Zhao.

HU: So he's come. One of us should put on a sweet face, the other a sour face to bamboozle him. Now you go out to meet him.

LIU: Buddy, you go.

HU: Buddy, you go.

LIU (greets Yangzhouer): Buddy, where have you been? I've been waiting all morning for you.

YANGZHOUER: Buddy, why haven't you come to see me lately?

LIU: Hu Zizhuan is here too.

YANGZHOUER: Let me go in and see him. (He greets Hu) Buddy, my respects. (Hu ignores him)

LIU: It's the young master.

HU: Which young master?

LIU: Master Zhao.

HU: Is his father an official that he gives himself the title "master"? He must be a swindler. Don't try to bluff me. I'll call in the cops to bind you hand and foot.

YANGZHOUER: You nut! Are you already drunk this early in the morning?

LIU: We've been waiting for you all morning, and we haven't had breakfast yet.

YANGZHOUER: Haven't had breakfast? How was I supposed to know? I'm not a tapeworm in your gut! Here's a piece of silver. Go and buy yourself something to eat. (He hands over a piece)

HU: Waiter, serve tea for Master Zhao. How come you're so thin-skinned you can't take a joke?

YANGZHOUER: Buddy, it's not me that's thin-skinned, but you that's too thick.

LIU: A piece of good news. We've found a new girl for you.

YANGZHOUER: Thanks for your kindness, but I ain't what I used to be. I guess my pocket is a sieve – the gold coins just fall straight through, and all I'm worth now is the clothes on my back – a face-saver. I'm a mere skeleton of my former self! You'd better introduce her to someone else.

HU: Okay, forget it. See what I said? There's no point in putting a dead dog on its feet.

YANGZHOUER: Buddy, it isn't that I don't want to stand on my feet; it's just

that I don't have the hard pieces to support me.

LIU: Shit! You don't have money? You have such a big house. Is it wearing protective armor that you can't turn it into money?

YANGZHOUER: Oh, dear! You're better than a brother, more like a father to me! Who else would tell me that in time of need? You're right. I'm crying out for money while I have this house! But, buddy, we have one problem. I remember my father once had the roof tiles replaced, and that alone cost a hundred silver ingots.⁹ Nowadays who could afford to buy such an expensive house?

HU: Simple. If you price a one-thousand-ingot house at five hundred, or a five-hundred-ingot house at two fifty, people would fight to buy it.

YANGZHOUER: You're right. If it's worth one thousand, I ask for five hundred; if it's worth five hundred, I ask for two fifty, and people would fight to buy it. Then it won't be a millstone around my neck. Another problem, buddy, is my neighbor Uncle Li. He's rather difficult to talk to. He won't agree. He just wouldn't agree to it.

HU: If he says no, why don't you let him have a cut?

YANGZHOUER: Right! If he says no, I'll let him have a cut. Now that we're going to sell the house, we must find an assessor and an accountant.

LIU: I'll be the assessor.

HU: And I'll be the accountant.

YANGZHOUER: I see. You be the assessor, and you be the accountant. When the house is sold, where shall I live?

LIU: I have a run-down donkey shed.

YANGZHOUER: So you have a run-down donkey shed. As long as it doesn't leak, it can be shelter. But what do I eat with?

HU: I have a broken clay pot, two cracked bowls, and two pairs of snapped chopsticks. I can give them all to you. That's as much as you'll need.

YANGZHOUER: Good buddies, I'll ask for five hundred ingots rather than one thousand, or two fifty rather than five hundred. People see it's cheap and they'll scramble to buy. If Uncle Li should say no, I let him have a cut. One of you will be the assessor, the other will be the accountant. One of you has a run-down donkey shed, the other has a broken clay pot, two cracked bowls and two pairs of snapped chopsticks. Those would be enough to sustain a happy life. If it hadn't been for you two sons of a bitch, I wouldn't have sunk so low so fast!

(Exeunt)

(Enter Li, his wife and son)

LI: I'm Li Maoqing, I wonder how my old pal could have been so far-sighted. He said his spendthrift son would ruin his estate after he passed away. And now what he predicted has come true. As his son has been wallowing in wine and vice, this large inheritance has been swept away in just a few years. It's true to say, "It's the father who best knows the son."

[Painting Cherry Lips]

Once it was grandpa's fabulous domain,
but his descendants turned out decadent,
and squandered all.
Laboring half his life to build it up,
his thousand-year project was planned in vain.

[A Roiling Dragon]

Do not be avaricious in your life,
for you may not have the luck to enjoy your wealth.
As life is mostly predestined,
your greed cannot make fortune change.
Retribution can defeat an industrious man,
or spoil the wanton children of a nouveau riche.
I think money doesn't come easily.
To do trade,
one must be shrewd.
To raise crops,
one tills the land.
To catch fish,
one dams the flow.
To get coal,
one digs a shaft.
When a person is thus engaged
nothing but profit occupies his thoughts.
He fails to see that in the end
all those turn out to be a sweetened dream,
like the songs of swallows beneath the eaves,
the nest of contented wrens in the reeds.

[Enter Jadeite]

JADEITE: I'm Jadeite. After the death of my father-in-law, Yangzhouer has squandered away all our money and assets, and now he's even thinking of selling our house. I must let Uncle East Chamber know. Here I am at his gate. I'll go in. (She greets Li)

LI: Jadeite, what brings you here?

JADEITE: After the death of my father-in-law, Yangzhouer has squandered away all our money and assets, and now he's even thinking of selling our house. I came straight here to let you know.

LI: I see. I know how to deal with him when he comes.

(Enter Yangzhouer together with Liu and Hu)

LIU: Master Zhao, you must have this matter settled right away. The longer it drags on, the more complicated it becomes.

YANGZHOUER: Twisting and turning along the streets, here I am at the gate of the Li's house. Buddies, there's one thing I must make clear. Now that I'm going in, I won't dare to mention the house directly, for that old man is rather stubborn. I need to take my time and beat about the bush. You two just wait outside. (He greets Li) Uncle and aunt, my respects. (He glances at Jadeite) Why are you here? Are you telling tales against me?

LI: Yangzhouer, what brings you to my home?

YANGZHOUER: I followed my wife here. I'm afraid her youth might set tongues wagging.

(Liu and Hu enter the house and salute Li)

LI (angrily): Who are these two?

LIU, HU: We two are scholars who have studied half a set of textbooks. We're not scoundrels.

LI (angrily): What are you doing in my home?

LIU: What a snob! We saluted him and he turns on us!

YANGZHOUER: They're my friends. This is Liu Longqing and this is Hu Zizhuan.

LI: I don't know any Liu Longqing or Hu Zizhuan. Why did you bring them under my roof? Yangzhouer:

[The Glib Cricket]

Why are you mixing with this pack of dogs?

Yangzhouer, how old are you?

YANGZHOUEER: I'm thirty already.

LI: Shame on you!

No longer is that an innocent age.

Why haven't you learned any useful trade?

Probably I shouldn't put the blame entirely on you.

At home you missed a father's stringent guide;

outside you lack a teacher or good friends.

Yangzhouer, one day you'll sink as low as a beggar.

YANGZHOUEER: Oh yeh? Read my left palm. I don't think so.

LI:

You've frittered away your dad's huge estate;

you've left your family starving in the cold.

I hope one day you'll stop dreaming and sober up.

Why must you associate yourself with these two?

YANGZHOUEER: They're my best friends.

LI: Yangzhouer!

[Universal Happiness]

Ah, son!

It's true that good company makes a wiser man.

Yangzhouer, if others don't know you well, I do.

After your mother brought you to this world,

she wrapped you warmly up and cuddled you,

fed you honey and raised you to this size.

Your father died from worry that you may fool away your heritage.

Despair and anger killed your mother first,

then too your father passed away.

Heavens above! Heavens above!

Who said a son is insurance against old age?!

YANGZHOUEER: Uncle, don't look down upon these two. They've read through half a set of textbooks.

LI: Yangzhouer, I can recount one by one the bad things you did through the years. Don't say you didn't do them.

YANGZHOUEER: Uncle, just tell us what kind of people I respect and what kind of people I despise.

[Nalakuvara Minitune]

LI:

As soon as a fresh girl appears in town,
you scoundrel, you would say, "Call her, call her."
And you'd invite her to your place.
As soon as a woman is at your gate,
you'd say, "Come in, come in."
You'd go out in person to welcome her.
When a learned man comes to visit you,
you'd say, "Push off, push off."
And you'd hastily hide away.
You snub the men who win the laurel crown;
you welcome those who have a pretty face.
You need to learn the way of choosing friends.

[Magpie on a Branch]

You love nothing more than willow waists,
who softly lean into your arms.
You are mesmerized by the singer's house,
cooing through moonlit nights and blooming morns,
your eyes fed with sensual dance, your ears with sexy songs.
You'll wake to find the candles out, the fragrance gone.

Yangzhouer, you'll sink as low as a beggar. It's only a matter of time.
YANGZHOUER: Oh yeh? Read my right palm. I don't think so.

[Parasitic Grass]

LI:

Why do I take such pains to counsel you?
Because you're planting the seed of ruin.
You forsake your good wife with homely looks
for pretty faces masking fickle hearts.
Son, you're undermining your huge estate!
You think life means snuggled days by the lute
immersed in the singer's endearing songs,
but soon you'll be shaking the rattle-drum¹⁰
and hollering the beggar's vulgar tune.

[Emerald Waist Overture]

The brothel lays a buried trap,
with hidden needles on the bed
and knives behind a smiling face.
No one can escape from their skillful hands.
It's all about a tempting bed,
a feast of wine and lamb,
a perfumed body melting in your arms.
That lovebird nest can swallow all the outlaws' loot
of many moonless raids around the Liangshan Lake.¹¹
The hookers lie in wait for fools like you,
who have five thousand boats of licensed salt
or ten thousand cartloads of costly tea.

[Ditto]

When across their threshold you set your foot,
you've clicked the cage door shut.
It's a place beyond government control,
no law, no justice and no officers.
Even if you had a mountain of gold,
it would disappear before you knew.
Try as you may to run away,
you'll find no escape.
They will pluck your feathers and peel your skin;
they'll cut you open from your head to toe,
greedily suck and chew you to the bone.
The madam has a pair of steely claws.
No matter how nimble your feet once were,
quick as a flash you'll be a skeleton.

Yangzhouer, what has brought you here?

YANGZHOUER: I wouldn't dare come and bother you if it wasn't something important. Uncle, it's ten years since my father passed away and I've been idling at home all the while. I only see money going out, not a coin coming in. A proverb says: "Sit and eat, you eat away a mountain; stand and eat, you collapse the earth beneath." There's another one to the same effect: "It's better to have a steady income of coins than a hoard of millions." Since

my father used to be in business, I think I should find a partner and start a business too, but I'm short of the initial capital. I'm afraid there aren't any assets left except for the house. I reckon it should bring in five or six hundred silver ingots. With that sum as capital I can go into business and money will soon be rolling in!

LI: I see. You've sold and pawned everything you had, your oil-mill, pawnshop, gold and pearls, farm estates and houses, and now all you have is the house you're living in. And you want to sell it! If you sell it, I'll buy.

YANGZHOUER: If uncle is going to buy it, you may like to check the house inside out, the main house and the wings, the hall and living quarters, the doors and windows, so you can fix on a price.

LI: That won't be necessary.

[The Halves]

I don't mind if the rafters are timeworn.

YANGZHOUER: The roof tiles on the main house are all new.

LI:

I don't care if the tiles are newly laid.

YANGZHOUER: If uncle is going to buy it, I'll make it five hundred ingots.

You wouldn't say I'm asking too much, would you?

LI:

I don't think you're asking a price too high.

YANGZHOUER: Then, when will uncle pay?

LI: I'm afraid I don't have that much in ready cash.

In ten days, or a fortnight at the most.

YANGZHOUER: Uncle, it's a good bargain. If you don't pay immediately, I'm afraid someone else may make an offer.

LI: I'll give you two hundred and fifty right now as a down payment. That's half of what you asked.

Of the five hundred ingots, half I pay and half I owe.

LI: Son, go and get the money.

SON (returns with the money): Father, here are two hundred and fifty silver ingots.

(Li hands the money to Jadeite. Yangzhouer snatches it away)

YANGZHOUER: Give it to me. Look at yourself. Do you think you're the kind of person to handle this kind of money? (He hands the money to Liu and

Hu) Buddies, you take care of the dough.

LI: Think on. When you've used up this sum, you won't have another house to sell.

YANGZHOUER: I know. I'm going to discuss business and money will soon be rolling in! (Aside) Buddies, these two hundred fifty ingots are quite a lot. Go and buy ten fattened sheep and have a banquet prepared. Five hot dishes and five fruit plates complete with sugar cakes for each table. Set one table for my mother-in-law alone; the others sit two at a table in pairs. Spread the tables out.

LIU: Right.

LI (listening): Yangzhouer, what did you say?

YANGZHOUER: Nothing. I was discussing business. With the money I'm going to buy a range of goods and lay them out on a long row of tables for passers-by to see and spread the word that it's a large business with solid funding. That'll win me a good name. Now that I've decided to go into business, money will soon be rolling in!

LI: Good. Put your heart into it.

YANGZHOUER: Phew! Almost got caught by the old guy. Buddies, the first course of soup will make us hot. Take off your coats and hats, and push open the flap windows.

LI: Yangzhouer, what did you say?

YANGZHOUER: Nothing. I was discussing business. I said transactions should be done in a well-lit warehouse, not in darkness. Otherwise we might get cheated. That's what the maxim means by "Do it in the open, not in the dark." I just told them to push open the flap windows. We were discussing business. Money will soon be rolling in!

LI: Good. You're learning.

YANGZHOUER: The old guy is gone. Buddies, when the banquet is over, one of you block the stairs, the other carry the wine flask, and I'll drink a toast with each guest. Then I'll ask my sweetie Yi Shijing to sing and dance.

LI: Yangzhouer, what did you say?

YANGZHOUER: Nothing.

LI: Look at this man!

[Coda]

Such a large house cannot contain your heart;
such fertile farmland you refuse to reap;

with a flourish you signed and sold them all!
Where will you abide in the days to come?
A leaky kiln will be your new abode.
Ah, son! Put your hand on your heart and ask:
How do you account for your nights and days?
Have you been sweating to promote your trade?
You threw away the precious gems and pearls;
you spent the silver ingots lavishly.
Ah, son!
How come you get just a gourd ladle in return?¹²

(Exit Li)

YANGZHOUER: Buddies, when the banquet is ready come and tell me.

(Exeunt all)

ACT II

(Enter Li, his wife and son)

LI: I'm Li Maoqing. I bought Yangzhou's house and paid him a large sum. He said he'd start a business, but the chances are he would once again be cheated out of his last penny by those two scoundrels. If I can't make this spendthrift son mend his ways, I'd be letting down my old friend. But what can I do?

SON: Father, these days my business isn't making money either. It's all down to fate.

LI: Son, don't lay the blame on fate. Some people in business are daring and adventurous. They brave rain and snow. They can endure cold and hunger. Some fear hardship. They shrink from rain and sun and are reluctant to leave the comfort of home. That's why among Confucius' three thousand disciples, only Zigong was successful in business and achieved riches. You can't say fate renders man's efforts futile.

[Base Tune Perfect]

An enterprising spirit creates "the haves."

The "have-nots" shouldn't blame it on their fate.

One's managerial talent also counts.
Though it's said one's fortune is predestined,
one can't sit by and idly wait.

MRS LI: Pop, why don't you tell our son how you made your fortune when you were young?

[Rolling the Embroidered Ball]

LI:

Back then when I was young and full of go,
for every penny I'd exert myself.
Alas! How I risked and ruined my health!
I'd even venture into the tiger's lair.
No thought was given to the time of day,
nor did I care whether it shined or rained.
Where there was profit to make there was I,
not a single day would I take a break.
It was not until a decade later
when I became well off and could relax.
What we now own was earned through blood and sweat.
The past is painful to recall.

(Enter Jadeite)

JADEITE: My humble self is Jadeite. After Yangzhouer sold the house, he handed over the money to his two wastrel pals, and went straight to the Bright Moon Tower to drink and sing with Yi Shijing. I must tell Uncle Li. So here I am at his gate. Young master, please tell your father I'm at the gate.

SON (to Li): Father, Jadeite is at the gate.

LI: Let her come in.

SON (to Jadeite): Jadeite, my father asks you to come in.

JADEITE (greets Li and wife): Boundless happiness to you, dear uncle and aunt.

LI: Child, what brings you here?

(Jadeite sobs)

[The Stupefied Scholar]

LI:

See how she chokes on broken sobs,

pent-up tears rolling down her cheeks like strings of beads.

JADEITE: He's such a letdown! (She cries)

LI:

What has he done that makes you so disturbed?

JADEITE: Uncle, Yangzhouer handed over the money he got for the house to his two wastrel pals and went with them to drink and sing with Yi Shijing at the Bright Moon Tower. Once he's spent that sum I'm afraid he'll sell me as well! Uncle, how much more do I have to suffer?

LI:

I listened with attentive ears
to what she painfully relayed.
He, he, he shows no signs of waking up!

JADEITE: Uncle, my father-in-law worked so hard to establish such a picturesque estate. He'd hoped his descendants would forever live in prosperity, but Yangzhouer has ruined everything.

[Rolling the Embroidered Ball]

LI:

"Boast not of lasting family wealth;
a spoilt wastrel will soon be born.
Sigh not for haunting poverty;
the money-maker is still young."
That ancient wit is proved by every clan.

The parents

hope that their offspring will forever thrive
– both family members and their wealth increase
as years stretch into centuries.

But what they can't predict is that

Heaven may coolly contradict their hope.
The elegant houses and richest lands
may scatter like willow catkins on the wind.
The pity of such grandiosity!

Son, let's take a team of houseboys to the Bright Moon Tower and teach that scoundrel a good lesson.

(Exeunt)

(Enter Yangzhouer, Liu Longqing and Hu Zizhuan)

YANGZHOUER: I'm Yangzhouer. How sweet life is! Today I can drink to my heart's content and won't have to go home until I'm good and drunk.

HU: The banquet is ready.

YANGZHOUER: Today, everybody should drink his fill. (He raises his cup)

(Li rushes onstage)

LI: Yangzhouer!

YANGZHOUER (intimidated): Oh, boy! He's ruining this table of delicacies. Uncle, I'm just throwing a banquet in honor of my new partners.

LI: Yangzhouer, is this the business you were talking about? Is this what you meant by "Money will soon be rolling in?" Answer me:

[The Stupefied Scholar]

It's not a holiday to celebrate,
neither is it a wedding or birthday.
Why on earth are you holding such a feast?

LIU: What a pain in the butt!

LI:

What in this scoundrel merits your respect?
What good character do you find in him?
Son, why do you prefer low company?

LIU: Old guy, don't call us low company. We're scholars who have studied half a set of textbooks.

LI: Shame! You read half a set of textbooks?

[Rolling the Embroidered Ball]

You must have read a masterpiece on how to fleece.

HU: What about me?

LI:

You're like a wet shirt sticking on one's back.
All you've learned is just one line: "Buddy, where to? Take me along."
You humbly begged you'd like to tag along,
but a thousand feasts can't fill your gaping mouth.
(He beats Yangzhouer with his walking stick)

YANGZHOUER: Actually, uncle, I'm following the example of two ancient

dignitaries. Lord Mengchang¹³ fed three thousand retainers and Gongsun Hong¹⁴ opened his door to talents of every kind.

LI: Bah! Shame on you.

Lord Mengchang was a man of royal blood;
Gongsun Hong was a perfect gentleman.
They were highly respected at the Court,
and all their retainers were gifted men,
not rogues low enough to abuse their wife.
(He beats Yangzhouer with his stick)

HU: Old guy, be careful. Don't sprain your ankle.

LI:

Nor scoundrels who disgraced their dad and mom.

LIU: Old guy, you're getting worked up for nothing.

LI:

A murderous wrath is burning in my chest.

Yangzhouer, you'll suffer your own foolishness. You'll be a beggar in no time.

YANGZHOUER: Oh yeh? Read my left palm. Not me.

[The Stupefied Scholar]

LI:

You think you have the magic arts of Zuo Ci?¹⁵
Or the mountain-lifting strength of Xiang Yu?¹⁶
Your "friends" have replaced your eyes with balls of clay.
Even if you knew how to cast a spell,
or knew how to convert a soul,
you couldn't outsmart these two fiendish crooks.

Yangzhouer, if you don't listen to me, you'll soon be on the streets begging.

YANGZHOUER: Oh yeh? Read my right palm. Not me.

[Pre-coda, three]

LI:

Even if you're so popular among the whores,
you'd only gain a wanton name, a dose of clap.

LIU: What about me?



LI:

You're just a hollow glazy porcelain vase.

HU: What about me?

LI:

You're but the wax crust of a herbal pill.

LIU: We two aren't bad looking.

LI:

Your sunny warm appearance cannot hide
the frigid innate coldness in your heart.

LIU: Old guy, stop blabbing. Just open your eyes big and wide, and take a good look at my outfit. What do you say?

LI:

Beneath the layers of expensive cloth
is nothing but a puffed-up chest.
You may swagger along the street
under an illusion of vernal blooms,
while you belong to the abandoned kiln.
Go, go, go,
you should be starving in the wind and snow.

LIU: Me starving in wind and snow? I shall be swanning down the street on a fine steed.

[Pre-coda, two]

LI:

You swanning down the street astride a steed?

My guess is as soon as you get home, you two will be reckoning up and dividing up the spoils,

small flies you catch and lose with open hands.

YANGZHOUE: Uncle, isn't this a good proof of my charity, my modesty, my fraternity, and my generosity?

LI:

Your charity would make Lu Su¹⁷ split his sides.

Your generosity would make Liu Yi¹⁸ look miserly.

Your modesty would even dwarf Bao Shu.¹⁹

Your fraternity would put Chen Deng²⁰ in the shade.

YANGZHOUE: I often give out money to support others. That's certainly

something commendable.

LI:

If only you had supported
a businessman who had suffered a loss,
an official caught in financial straits,
or a student without sufficient means,
you would have made a good name for yourself,
which would last for years and might reach the throne.

[Pre-coda, one]

Isn't that wiser than wasting silver on the whores,
or drinking bottle after bottle with those scum?
But all you care for is just fleeting joys,
lighthearted laughs,
carousing friends,
with whom you toast and drink.

Yangzhouer, let me ask you: Whose money are you spending?

YANGZHOUER: It's my old man's.

LI: Who has the right to use it?

YANGZHOUER: Me.

LI:

That is the property your father earned,
and now it's handed down to you,
to which no other family has a claim.
But why instead of sharing with your wife,
you favor Hu Zizhuan and Liu Longqing?

YANGZHOUER: Because when I think of throwing a banquet and ask them
to invite ten guests, they'll get ten along. I ask them to invite twenty and
twenty will come in a minute. Uncle, isn't that worthy of my respect?

LI: Bullshit!

[Coda]

As long as you have money,
you can have three thousand swordsmen at your beck.
But once you're out of money,

they'll leave you in your castle in the air.

Yangzhouer,

one day when you have squandered all,
without the pawnshop's steady flow,
without a roof above your head,
with neither corn nor grain to your name,
how are you to sustain your life?

You are a layman in business;
you don't possess a craft or trade.

You don't have the brawn,
and you lack the brains.

All you can do is shake the rattle drum
with a broken jar in one hand,
and go from door to door,
begging for food remains.

You don't have firewood to heat frozen soup,
not even a straw mat to stop the drafts.

Your bowels will be rumbling on empty air,
icy winds will send shudders down your spine,
while you count the night drums²¹ and long for dawn.

Speaking of the drums, which drum is it now?

You'll find the chilly nights endlessly long.
Your kinfolk will bolt their door when you knock;
your acquaintances will steer clear of you.

On an empty stomach your legs collapse;
you'll be one more frozen corpse in the snow.

A public coffin will carry you off;
you'll be dumped in a pit and buried quick.

Long after, neighbors still will loathe your name;
because of you your parents will be shamed.

My candid counsel you refuse to hear,
but their rubbish you heed with eager ears.

Now I see how grief caused your father's death;
even my blood begins to boil with rage.

If I brought you before the magistrate,
he'd beat you to death, or I'll renounce my name.

Many a family may have raised a rake,

but never was one so depraved as you!
You must have a set of perverted bones,
a mulish heart and a pair of callous ears.
Ah, son!
If my reproof can't make you mend your ways,
just think of the document you have signed.

(Exit Li)

YANGZHOUER: He's spoiled my drinking mood. You can help yourselves to what remains. I'm going home.

(Exeunt)

ACT III

(Enter Yangzhouer and Jadeite, each with a shabby basket on their arm)

YANGZHOUER: Prodigals out there, look at me! I'm none other than Yangzhouer. It was all because I refused to listen to good counsel that I've sunk so low. I trusted Liu Longqing and Hu Zizhuan and squandered my money, my land and even my house. Nowadays I'm taking shelter in an abandoned brick kiln south of the town. I can't manage three meals a day – if there's breakfast there may not be dinner. We don't even have a bed, but curl up on the warm ground where we've built a fire to cook leftovers. Each day is a torture! It serves me right to suffer, but my wife hasn't had one good day in her life. Well, well, well. *Wife, I can't go on like this. Here's a rope. I'll throw it over this bough. You catch that end and I catch this end. Let's hang ourselves.*

JADEITE: Yangzhouer, when there was plenty of money, it was you who had a good time. I didn't enjoy a penny. If you want to hang yourself, go right ahead. But why should I follow you?

YANGZHOUER: *Wife, you're probably right. I had a good time and you didn't. Go and collect some dried donkey droppings to make a fire. Get a pot of water boiling and wait for me right here. I'm going to seek out those two villains and get some rice so that we can cook some porridge. Oh, heavens! What a wretch I am!*

(Exeunt)

(Enter teahouse attendant)

ATTENDANT: I'm a teahouse attendant. I got up early this morning, washed my face carefully and combed my hair till it shone. Now I'll open the door and see if someone's coming.

(Enter Liu Longqing, Hu Zizhuan)

LIU:

Firewood's on sale;

Old rice goes stale.

A jerk and a bum

Make a pair of scum.

I'm Liu Longqing and this is my buddy Hu Zizhuan. We're such close friends that we're inseparable. Since we dropped that young Master Zhao, we're out of sorts. Let's go to the teahouse to kill time and see if we can hook another patron. Waiter, got good tea? We'd like a cup.

ATTENDANT: Sure have. Do step in, please.

(Enter Yangzhouer)

YANGZHOUER: I'm Yangzhouer. In the past, whoever ran into me in the street would claim to be my very best friend. Now I'm penniless, they all steer clear of me. Here I am on my way to make inquiries at the teahouse.

(To Attendant) My respects, sir.

ATTENDANT: Go away, you beggar. I don't accept greetings from a beggar.

YANGZHOUER: Great! Great! My two buddies are here! This time I won't go home empty-handed. (To Liu and Hu) How do you do, buddies?

LIU: Drive this beggar out!

YANGZHOUER: I'm no beggar. I'm Master Zhao.

HU: Who's Master Zhao?

YANGZHOUER: I am.

HU: You? Tell me, how can you be so poor?

YANGZHOUER: It was all because of you two sons of a bitch!

LIU: Buddy, are you hungry?

YANGZHOUER: You bet! Give me something to eat.

LIU: Buddy, you wait a moment. I'm going out to buy you food. How about a roast goose and a stewed leg of pork? I'll be back in a trice.

(Exit Liu)

YANGZHOUER: Buddy, what's taking him so long? Where could he have gone to buy the food?

HU: Well, I guess I'd better go look for him myself.

YANGZHOUER: No need, buddy.

HU: Buddy, he's taking too long. Let me go and buy you some wine and salted fish. Please sit down. I'll be back in a wink.

(Hu goes out of the door)

ATTENDANT: Where're you going? You haven't paid me yet.

HU: Don't make such a fuss. Step outside please. Let me tell you something.

ATTENDANT: What d'you have to say?

HU: D'you know that man? He's Yangzhouer.

ATTENDANT: He's Yangzhouer?! How come he's in rags?

HU: As a matter of fact, he's truly rich, but he's afraid of government levies. That's why he's pretending. You just ask him to settle our tab. Remember, we two don't owe you a thing. I must go home now.

[Exit Hu]

(Yangzhouer catches lice in the creases of his clothes)

ATTENDANT: Let me tally up the outstanding items: half an ounce of silver for tea, three ounces for wine, one and two-tenths for food, five ounces to reward the singer Geng Miaolian, eight-tenths for losing at chess. That adds up to a total of ten and a half ounces of silver.

YANGZHOUER: Buddy, what are you calculating?

ATTENDANT: Don't pretend you don't know. Just now Liu Longqing and Hu Zizhuan said you'd clear their long-standing and recent debts. Here's the bill. You may like to pay now.

YANGZHOUER: Ah, buddy, if I had money, do you think I'd willingly dress like a beggar?

ATTENDANT: You say you're poor, but he said you're pretending because you're afraid of government levies.

YANGZHOUER: So they've transferred their long outstanding debts onto me, and I'm to pay for them. Buddy, if you can't see what I eat, just look at what I wear. Do I look well off? I'd rather work for you to pay off the debt. Let me carry water from the well and sweep the floor.

ATTENDANT: Poor man! Poor man! You were a man of dignity and you were my benefactor. I can't turn you into a servant and make you pay off an old debt. What if I write it off?

YANGZHOUER: Buddy, if you're kind enough to do that, I'll repay you in my next life by being your beast of burden.

ATTENDANT: Forget that. I'll let you off. You may go now.

YANGZHOUER: I'm most indebted to you, buddy. Now I'm outside again.

Those two made me believe they'd gone to buy food while they slipped away. As if that wasn't enough, they shifted their old debts onto me. I can't imagine what would have become of me if the waiter hadn't been so kind. Liu Longqing, Hu Zizhuan, you two are the most vicious crooks I've ever met!

(Exeunt)

(Enter Jadeite)

JADEITE: I'm Jadeite. Yangzhouer has gone to town to ask his old friends for help. I wonder what is taking him so long. Let me put a pot of water over the fire and wait for him.

(Enter Yangzhouer)

YANGZHOUER: Those two scoundrels! They made me wait in the teahouse while they slipped away. I haven't had a bite to eat all day. Let me go back to the kiln. (He greets Jadeite)

JADEITE: So you're back.

YANGZHOUER: Wife, is the water boiling?

JADEITE: It's bubbling hot. Give me the rice so I can cook some porridge.

YANGZHOUER: You may boil my two legs. I didn't come across one good person in town! Well, I'd better hang myself.

JADEITE: Is that all you can think of? Why don't you think of the life of luxury you led with Liu Longqing and Hu Zizhuan? What did you give me at that time? Now you've no one to turn to, let's go to beg from Uncle Li.

YANGZHOUER: Wife, you couldn't come up with a worse idea! That's like going to ask for a good beating. Whenever Uncle Li sees me, he gives me either a tongue-lashing or a thrashing. You may go yourself. I ain't going there.

JADEITE: Don't be so frightened. When we reach his gate, we can first figure out whether uncle is home. If he is, I'll go in alone. If he isn't, we can go in together. If only we can see auntie, I have no doubt she'll give us some money.

YANGZHOUER: Wife, you've got a point there. If uncle's home, you go in alone and ask him for something to eat. When you're full up, wrap up the leftovers and bring them out so that I can have a bite too. If uncle isn't home, I'll go in with you. If we can see auntie, money or no money, at least we can fill our stomachs. Oh, heavens! What a wretch I am!

(Exeunt)

(Enter Mrs Li)

MRS LI: My old self is Mrs Li. My hubby went out early in the morning, and

now it's almost noontime. Why isn't he back yet? Boys, lay the table. Master should be back in a moment.

(Enter Yangzhouer and Jadeite)

YANGZHOUER: Wife, here we are at the gate. You go in first. If uncle's home, don't even mention me. If he isn't home, you come out and wave me in.

JADEITE: I know. I'll go first. (She greets Mrs Li)

MRS LI: Boys, how can you let in a beggar?

JADEITE: Auntie, it's me, Jadeite, not a beggar.

MRS LI: Ah, indeed! Dear, how come you're dressed like this?

JADEITE: Auntie, these days Yangzhouer and I are living in an abandoned brick kiln south of the town. My heart's broken!

MRS LI: Where's Yangzhouer now?

JADEITE: He's waiting outside.

MRS LI: Why don't you call him in?

JADEITE: I'll get him.

(Yangzhouer is asleep)

JADEITE: He's dozed off. Let me wake him up. Yangzhouer, Yangzhouer!

YANGZHOUER (wakes): Damn you! I was having a wonderful dream and you interrupted it.

JADEITE: What did you dream of?

YANGZHOUER: I was singing with Pie Zhixiu at the Bright Moon Tower. We sang one tune after another.

JADEITE: You can't forget that sort of thing, can you? Go in to meet auntie.

YANGZHOUER (greets Mrs Li and sobs): Auntie, I'm a wretch! Is uncle home? If he comes in, don't let him beat me.

MRS LI: Child, have you had lunch yet?

YANGZHOUER: Lunch? Where can I get lunch?

MRS LI: Boys, get a bowl of noodles for Yangzhouer. Yangzhouer, take your time. Your uncle isn't home. Eat, eat.

(Yangzhouer eats)

(Enter Li)

LI:

*Which family's dandy son,
Topsy on the saddle,
Boasts an expensive steed?
His sleeves inflate with pride,*

*As the hoofs whirlwind past,
And kick up clouds of dust.*

Look! Bah! The dust's got in my eyes.

[The Powdered Butterfly]

Which family is that young man from,
who was in peace and comfort born?
His handsome looks aren't of the vulgar type.
Good at the lute and master of chess games,
he gives no thought to livelihood,
nor would he take instruction from wise men
and learn the teachings of the sage.

[Drunk in the Vernal Wind]

The sun and moon take turns like juggling balls;
a life is briefer than the evening rain.
I have already reached the dusk of life
– a rotten piece of wood of no account.
Age makes me comprehend
why poetry's said to make one wise,
filial piety makes one steady,
and possessions are but dispensable.

Whilst speaking, I've arrived home.

[Hawking Cries]

Leaning on a stick I came down the street.

To cross the threshold I lift up my feet.

(He sees Yangzhouer and flares up)

Who's there eating noodles?

YANGZHOUER (taken aback): I'm done for!

LI:

I raise my eyes and see him there.

He seems a bundle of poor nerves.

JADEITE: Uncle, my respects.

LI: You stand back.

[Shining the Silver Lamp]

The sight of their suffering pains my heart,
but I cannot indulge and pamper them,
for he's done a thousand disgraceful things.

If judged by law he should be put to death.

Yangzhouer, do you remember what you said?

I wanted to make you a gentleman,
one of substantial wealth,
but you grouched and griped behind my back.

I remember you said you're a Zhao and I'm a Li. No blood relation bonds you and me.

[The Wild Turnip]

How do you have the face to enter my house?

Why aren't you joining your two bosom pals?

(Yangzhouer backs off timidly)

Where are you going?

Why are your hands and legs shaking like leaves?

Am I such a terror that panics you?

Too bad my home can't offer better eats.

Put down that bowl!

Go to a posh restaurant to have a roasted sheep.

(Yangzhouer trembles as Li beats him, his chopsticks clattering against the bowl)

MRS LI: Pop, don't beat him so hard.

YANGZHOUER (runs out of the door): Auntie, he's killing me! I want to go into business now. If I had some start-up money, I'd be able to earn a living.

MRS LI: Child, here's a string of one thousand coins. You can start on this.

YANGZHOUER: Auntie, you can trust me this time. I'm going into business.

(Exits and returns) Auntie, I used the money you lent me to buy a big sack of charcoal.

MRS LI: Child, what was the business you went into?

YANGZHOUER: I sold charcoal.

MRS LI: Did you manage to make a profit?

YANGZHOUER: I had one thousand coins, and I sold the charcoal for two thousand, and here I still have two small baskets left. I'd like to give them to you to warm your feet. Take them as interest on your money.

MRS LI: We have plenty of charcoal. You can take it home.

YANGZHOUER: Auntie, I'll try something else. (Exits and returns, hawking his wares) Cabbage and spinach, carrots and onions, parsley and various greens!

MRS LI: Child, what are you vending this time?

YANGZHOUER: Auntie, please tell uncle that I'm selling vegetables.

MRS LI: You wait here. I'll go in to tell your uncle. (To Li) Pop, I'm sure you'll be glad to hear it. Yangzhouer has learned to do business, and he's making money!

LI: Him? I don't think he can do business.

YANGZHOUER: At first I sold charcoal, and now I'm selling vegetables.

LI: Did people gossip when they see you selling charcoal?

YANGZHOUER: You guessed it. They said it's most ironic to see Yangzhouer sell charcoal. When he had money, the stove in his living room was burning red hot. Now he's caved in.

LI: You caved in?

YANGZHOUER: They're alluding to the kiln.

LI: You said it!

YANGZHOUER: Now that I'm selling vegetables, people are still talking about me. They said when he had money, he would go around with Liu Longqing. Now he's carrying the gourd around.²²

LI: Who does all the carrying, you or some hired hand?

YANGZHOUER: You're joking, uncle. With such a meager principal, how can I afford to hire someone? What if he should make off with my wares?

LI: Where do you go to sell your wares, the main streets or the back alleys?

YANGZHOUER: I go everywhere.

LI: While you're carrying the baskets, do you make hawking cries?

YANGZHOUER: I certainly do, or how else would people know I'm selling vegetables?

LI: Do you do the hawking yourself?

YANGZHOUER: I hawk myself.

LI: Boys, all of you come over here to hear Yangzhouer hawk.

YANGZHOUER: Uncle, if you want to hear me hawk, you can follow me, but please don't let the boys come along. They were once my servants, and it was me who sold them.

LI: Go on and do your hawking, or I'll beat you to death.

YANGZHOUER: I guess he wants to insult me rather than hear the way I hawk. If I don't do what he says he'll beat me. Let me do it. Cabbage and spinach, carrots and onions, parsley and various greens! (He moans) Oh, heavens! I could die of shame!

LI: What a sorry sight!

[Red Embroidered Shoes]

You used to wriggle and sweat on a plush erotic bed;
you used to feast at a table inlaid with tortoise shell,
and wouldn't leave until you collapsed into rosy arms.
But now you carry baskets on a pole,
sporting a suit of rags.
If you aren't ashamed, go and hawk along the streets.

YANGZHOUER: Uncle, I regret I didn't listen to you. Now I know what poverty means; I know the weight of money. I've come to my senses now.

LI: Do you really mean that?

YANGZHOUER: I do.

LI: Aha! Son, I'm overjoyed to hear you say those words!

[Sweet Garden]

At last the drunkard in you sobers up!
From these two baskets of dewy greens,
how many more coins has your stock produced?

Yangzhouer, how much have you earned today?

YANGZHOUER: I started with one thousand coins in the morning, and now at the end of day I have two thousand.

LI:

With five hundred coins
you can return to the kiln with some flour.
As for salt, oil and sauce,
do you buy them wholesale or retail?

YANGZHOUER: You surely don't believe I can afford salt, oil and sauce, do you?

LI:

Son, you can cook a dish with the remaining greens.

YANGZHOUER: If I eat them, it will reduce my assets. I'll sprinkle them with cold water to keep them fresh so I can still sell them tomorrow.

LI:

Would you allow your mouth a taste of meat?

Yangzhouer, why not buy a roasted sheep?

YANGZHOUER: I dare not.

LI: Buy a fish then.

YANGZHOUER: Uncle, with such humble means, can I afford fish?

LI: Pork then.

YANGZHOUER: They're all beyond my means.

LI: Then what do you eat?

YANGZHOUER: I buy the stale rice from the barn, and together with some stripped-off withered leaves, we cook a pot of thin porridge. We don't even husk the rice for fear of waste, not to speak of having salt or sauce.

LI: Wife, I asked Yangzhouer if he's going to buy fish. He said he can't afford it. I asked him if he's going to buy pork. He said he can't afford it either. I asked him what he would eat then, and he said he only eats thin porridge. I asked him if he likes the tasteless porridge, and he said he does.

Wife, had he thought of this before,
he wouldn't be suffering in the kiln.

An old maxim says: You have to endure life's hardship before you can be successful.

Ah, son, this experience will do you good.

YANGZHOUER: Uncle, when life runs smoothly, one never stops to think.

Only a radical change can bring a person like me back to his senses.

LI: That's the most sensible thing you've ever said! Son, you may go now. If you do as I said, I'll make you a really rich man in four or five days.

[Coda]

The sea of sin is one of shoreless woe;
the pit of poverty is deep and grim.

A thousand somersaults won't bail you out;
a million cartwheels will not set you free.

(Exeunt Li and wife)

YANGZHOUER: Wife, let's go back. Oh, heavens! What a wretch I am!
(Exeunt Yangzhouer and Jadeite)

(Enter Li's son)

SON: I'm the young master of the Li family. My father asked me to invite Brother Zhao to a dinner. Here I am at the brick kiln south of the town. Let me call out: Brother Zhao.

(Enter Yangzhouer and Jadeite)

YANGZHOUER: Brother Li, what brings you to this place?

SON: My father asked me to come and invite you to dinner tomorrow.

YANGZHOUER: If uncle is inviting us, we'll surely go.

SON: Don't forget.

(Exit Son)

YANGZHOUER: Wife, he isn't inviting us to dinner. He's planning to humiliate me again, but since he's uncle, we have to go. When we get there, we mustn't sit idle. You'd better sweep the floor and yard; I'll fetch and carry water from the well. Oh, heavens! What a wretch I am!

(Exeunt)

ACT IV

(Enter Li, his wife and son)

LI: Today is my birthday. I've prepared a banquet and invited my neighbors over to celebrate it as well as my newly purchased house. There's also an unstated purpose, that is, to announce the reinstatement of young Master Zhao to his former wealth. Yesterday I sent my son to invite Yangzhouer. He hasn't come yet, but here are my old neighbors now.

(Enter neighbors)

NEIGHBORS: We're all residents on Pailou Alley in Yangzhou City. One of our old neighbors, Zhao Guoqi, at the time of his death, entrusted his only son Yangzhouer to the care of Uncle East Chamber. But who'd have thought it! Yangzhouer squandered away his huge inheritance and even sold his grand house to Uncle East Chamber. Today is Uncle East Chamber's birthday and he's invited us to his birthday celebration. We heard he also asked the beggar Yangzhouer and his wife to come. We wonder what he's up to.

Anyway we're coming to celebrate his birthday and his new house. Here we are at his gate. Young master, please tell your father we neighbors have come to congratulate him on his birthday.

SON (steps in to report): Father, our neighbors have come to celebrate your birthday.

LI: Please ask them to come in.

SON: Please come in.

NEIGHBORS (greet Li): We all wish you a happy birthday and congratulate you on buying such a fine house.

LI: Thank you. Please be seated. Boys, lay the tables. The banquet will start as soon as Yangzhou and his wife arrive.

(Enter Yangzhou and Jadeite)

YANGZHOU: I'm Yangzhou. Here we are at the gate of Uncle Li's house. We'll go in. (They greet Li) Uncle, my wife and I have come as bidden. Is there anything we can do for you?

LI: So you've come.

[Minitune from River Xin]

The warmth of spring breeze bursts buds into blooms;
in freshly painted halls I treat my guests.
Tables are laden with delicious food;
in silk and satin are the guests and host.

YANGZHOU (aside, sighs): It's so humiliating!

LI: Yangzhou! (Yangzhou absorbed in his own thoughts)
There he stands, seized with deep remorse;
regretful tears are stealing down his cheeks.

[Dead Drunk in the East Wind]

I told you to pursue your father's trade,
and was always ready to tutor you,
but you preferred to wallow in sensual joys.

YANGZHOU (aside, sighs): He's humiliating me in public. If I had guessed it, I wouldn't have come.

LI:

You shouldn't gnash your teeth and grumble so.
It's you who threw yourself from your own home.

YANGZHOU (clenches his fists and stretches his arms): What humiliation!

LI:

Why roll up your sleeves and clench your fists?

Son, you don't have to be so upset.

Now you've learned life's lessons the hardest way,
I'll reinstate you to your former wealth.

All you present today please bear witness to what I'm about to say. I'm a native of Dongging Prefecture, but business brought me to this city and here on Pailou Alley I took up residence. My westside neighbor was Zhao Guoqi, Yangzhou's father. Our two families had been on close terms for thirty years when, on his deathbed, he sent Yangzhou to invite me over.

I went over and inquired after his illness. He told me it was all because his only son Yangzhou was a failure, and he felt certain his vast estate would be undone at the hand of this son. That foreboding ruined his health. He therefore asked me to look after Yangzhou and his wife after his death to ensure that they come to a good end. At first I declined that responsibility, since I'm neither a relative by blood nor a person of high moral example. Ill as he was, he went down on his knees and pleaded with me, so I had to agree. Yangzhou, do you know what your father wrote in that document you signed?

YANGZHOUER: I didn't read it. How should I know? Is it about life and death?

LI: No, it isn't, son. Now you hold it up and read it out aloud so that everybody can hear clearly.

YANGZHOUER: All right. This document is in my father's own handwriting. The signature on the back is mine. Oh, father! (He moans) Now I have your handwriting with me, but where is the man who wrote it?

LI: Don't cry. Just read it aloud.

YANGZHOUER: Okay. (He reads) I, Zhao Guoqi – that's my father's name – resident of Pailou Alley inside the east gate of Yangzhou, being critically ill, do hereby place five hundred silver ingots in the hand of my old friend Li Maoqing in case my spendthrift son, Yangzhou, should lose his means of livelihood. Can this be true? Or are my eyes cheating me? (He reads again) Uncle, give it back to me.

LI: Give you what?

YANGZHOUER: Give me what? It's written here in black and white!

LI: No doubt your father wrote that, but in fact, he didn't really leave you any silver.

YANGZHOUE: Uncle, I won't even dare to ask you for all five hundred silver ingots. Just show me a piece or two, so I can put my hands on it and feel it. I'll give it back to you immediately.

LI: Yangzhouer, there you go again. After your father passed away, you started to sell your farm estates and houses. I couldn't bear to see them go like that. So I secretly purchased by proxy whatever you sold. The money came out of those five hundred ingots. I've got the date and amount of each and every transaction carefully recorded. When you tried to sell your oil-mill and pawnshop, I bought them by proxy too. The money of course came out of those five hundred ingots. Their dates and prices are recorded. As for the draft animals and servants, some left and some died. When you were selling, I bought them all by proxy out of the five hundred ingots. Here's the account book. It includes your house and a detailed catalogue of the furniture, paintings, utensils and everything. Now I'm giving all of them back to you. You may check them. If there's any discrepancy, I'll pay for it. Now, Yangzhouer, listen:

*Your father left behind a secret fund,
Which I carefully managed down the years.
And here is what used to belong to you.
I'm proud to be your father's faithful friend.*

Yangzhouer:

[A Wild Goose Alights]

Close neighbors are better than distant kin,
and I'm a man who lives up to his word.
Today I'm giving you what had been yours.
From now on you are to take care of them.

YANGZHOUE (kneels): I'm most grateful to you, uncle and aunt. I never dreamed of this day.

[The River Goddess]

LI:

Look, the front and back yards are well maintained.

YANGZHOUE: The main and side buildings have all been renovated!

LI:

All the woodwork was painted recently.

YANGZHOUER: Uncle, is the barn full or empty?

LI:

The storerooms are brimming with rice and wheat.

YANGZHOUER: Can the pawnshop go back into business?

LI:

Silver and gold are in the coffer's hold.

YANGZHOUER: Uncle, are the farms out of town still mine?

LI:

There're herds of livestock on the farms;
yours is an estate built of solid gold;
hundreds of acres spread like painted scrolls.

Yangzhouer and Jadeite,

I hope you'll never again sell your house and land.

Son, move a table here for Yangzhouer and Jadeite to offer drinks to our neighbors.

YANGZHOUER: I'm heavily indebted to uncle and aunt. If you hadn't redeemed my property and me, my wife and I would probably live in the abandoned kiln for the rest of our lives. Wife, fill the cups. I'm going to offer a cup to uncle and aunt first. Bottoms up, please.

NEIGHBORS: Master Zhao, never mind a toast. Even your own lives could never repay what your uncle and aunt have done for you!

LI: Bottoms up.

YANGZHOUER (refills the cups): Dear neighbors, bottoms up.

NEIGHBORS: We'll certainly drink on such a unique occasion.

YANGZHOUER: Another cup to uncle and aunt. If I can't repay your kindness in this life, I'll be your dog or your horse in the next.

[The False Card]

LI:

See how he proposes toast after toast,
swearing to repay us in future life.
But that was your father's secret bequest,
not kindly benefaction from the Lis.

(Enter Liu Longqing, Hu Zizhuan)

LIU, HU: We hear young Master Zhao got rich again. We must pay him a visit.

(They greet Yangzhouer)

LIU: Master Zhao, don't you remember us? Let's go for a drink.

YANGZHOUER: Buddies, I've decided to mend my ways. I must keep away from you guys. Go find somebody else.

LIU: What do you mean? You've mended your ways and so have we! We've come to help you with your business.

LI: Bah! Boys, drive these two scoundrels out!

LIU: Master Zhao, please put in a good word for us.

YANGZHOUER: Get lost! Go somewhere else!

[Paddling on the River]

LI:

The feast for my neighbors was at its height
 when those two scoundrels showed up at the gate
 with a red-skirted hussy in their wake.
 That scared and scattered my soul from its place.
 Son, if you weren't alarmed I really was.

[Happy Children Around]

I'd just made a man of this failure son
 when you came to lure him with beggars' songs.
 He's resigned for good from the bawdyhouse;
 you sordid souls have lost your hold on him.
 Cajole and wheedle as you may,
 he now has fortune on his side,
 and will not get entangled in your maze.
 You two loafers go to find
 another young man who is so destined.

Yangzhouer, listen to my summation:

*An estate as if built of solid gold
 Is squandered on soft life and sensual joys.
 My good advice and warning you ignore,
 But lend a ready ear to those two rogues.
 Your father entrusts me with secret funds;
 Now you receive interest and principal.
 The westside neighbor has a failure son;*

Uncle East Chamber shapes a gentleman.

BANNER TITLE:

***The father leaves a secret will behind;
The eastside neighbor chides the spendthrift son.***

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- ¹ Dongping Prefecture: in the western part of present-day Shandong Province.
- ² Yangzhou: a big city and commercial center on the northern bank of the Yangtze River, about 250 kilometers inland from Shanghai.
- ³ Boys: a way of addressing male servants.
- ⁴ Shao Yaofu: a philosopher of the Song Dynasty.
- ⁵ The next line is: "If in three year's time he does not change his father's ways, he can be said to be a filial son."
- ⁶ Chen Chong, Lei Yi: two prominent figures of the Han Dynasty. Their friendship became exemplary for later generations.
- ⁷ A quote from Confucius' *The Analects*.
- ⁸ In the original text, the Chinese word that means "wheedling" is split up into its two component parts as a wordplay.
- ⁹ A silver ingot weighs either five or ten ounces.
- ¹⁰ A rattle-drum: a small drum with a handle and two wood strikers attached by a piece of string to each side. One twists the handle to make clear consecutive beats. Originally a toy, it is used by street hawkers or beggars to attract attention.
- ¹¹ This refers to the story of *Outlaws of the Marsh*.
- ¹² Panhandlers often hold a cracked bowl in their hands to collect coins or leftovers. Those in worse conditions may use a dried gourd ladle instead of a bowl.
- ¹³ Lord Mengchang: a court minister of the principedom of Qi during the Warring States Period.
- ¹⁴ Gongsun Hong: a prime minister of the Han Dynasty.
- ¹⁵ Zuo Ci: a famous necromancer in the period of the Three Kingdoms.
- ¹⁶ Xiang Yu: one of the major rebel leaders who overthrew the Qin Dynasty. He was reputed

NOTES

to be physically powerful.

- ¹⁷ Lu Su: a chief military leader of Wu in the period of the Three Kingdoms. He had a name for bestowing charity, and once gave half of his store of grain to a colleague.
- ¹⁸ Liu Yi: a general of the Jin Dynasty and a reputed gambler who would stake a million upon one throw.
- ¹⁹ Bao Shu: a court minister of the principedom of Qi during the Spring and Autumn Period. He recommended his friend to the prince to supersede himself.
- ²⁰ Chen Deng: a general in the period of the Three Kingdoms, who was known for helping the weak and poor.
- ²¹ Night drums: In the old days, every major town has a bell tower and a drum tower. At approximately two-hour intervals the bell is struck during the day and drum at night to indicate time.
- ²² "The gourd" refers to Hu Zizhuan, the three Chinese words of whose name can be recombined as *huzi zhuān*. *Huzi* means "gourd," while *zhuān* could mean "to go around." The sentence thus puns on Yangzhou's leisured life in the past and his present effort at peddling vegetables. In ancient times, the Chinese word *qing*, as in Liu Longqing, could be used as a term of endearment between man and wife. Here it alludes to such singers as Yi Shijing and Pie Zhixiu.

The Tiger Badge

by

Li Zhifu

INTRODUCTION

The Tiger Badge is the only extant play written by Li Zhifu (fl. early Yuan Dynasty), himself a Juchen ethnic.

The play is about a garrison officer called Shanshoma in the early days of the Kingdom of Jin (1115-1234). When he is promoted to the rank of marshal, he passes on his gilded badge to his uncle, who promises to quit his lifelong drinking habit and abstain from wine. Yet the old man fails to keep his word and on the night of the Mid-autumn Festival he gets drunk again and thus allows the enemy to slip through the mountain pass and make off with people and livestock.

Shanshoma is caught in an awkward dilemma as to whether his loyalties should lie with the country or with the family. According to military law, punishment for such dereliction of duty is death. Despite pleadings from his aunt, his wife, and his subordinates, he insists on carrying out the execution. It is only later when he learns his uncle has actually chased down the enemy and recovered the abducted people and property that he changes the sentence to a hundred-stroke flogging.

The play ends with Shanshoma bringing lamb and wine to his uncle's home to ask forgiveness and make the old man understand that the country's interest should always come first. This way the dilemma of divided loyalties is solved.

Act II diverts from the main line of the plot, yet it is important in that it foreshadows future developments. It is also a very touching scene of brothers parting, and Jinzhuma draws on the sharp contrast of his own life to warn his younger brother that if one doesn't treasure one's chances fortune will slip right through one's fingers.

The climax of the play is when Shanshoma struggles against personal feelings to make the painful decision to execute his uncle, who is as good as a father to him. Patricide is an infamy while on the other hand compromising military discipline because of personal considerations is a serious betrayal of duty. As filiality to one's parents and loyalty to the country are both fundamental requirements of the moral code, it is a most awkward and testing situation when the two come into conflict. The search of a satisfactory solution to this dilemma has been a

recurring motif in Chinese literature.

The Kingdom of Jin was established by the Juchens, an ethnic minority originating in northeast China. After conquering the Kingdom of Liao (907-1125), it defeated the Northern Song empire and occupied the vast territory north of the Yangtze River. The Wanyan family was the kingdom's ruling clan.

Originally nomadic tribes, the Juchen military force was based on a household system and organized into a hierarchy of hundred-household commands, thousand-household commands and ten-thousand-household commands. Thousand-household commanders had three ranks: lower, middle and upper.

The commanders at the three levels were given badges of wood, silver (gilded silver for upper thousand-household commanders), and gold respectively as symbols of their status and authority. Genghis Khan later adopted a similar system and improved on it.

A Yuan Dynasty badge was unearthed in Inner Mongolia in 1998. It was silver plated, measuring 30 by 8 centimeters, with an inscription stating that the bearer was invested with authority from the sovereign. The badge that Shanshoma first wears must be similar to this. The next badge he receives is a gold badge with two tigers head to head, called the double-tiger gold badge, the highest of its kind bestowed upon regional commanders. The person granted this badge has *carte blanche* to maneuver troops or carry out executions without waiting for permission from central government.

The Tiger Badge provides a vivid example of how difficult it is to guarantee that law prevails over power or person. To be an honest and upright official, one not only has to put aside personal feelings and interests, but also has to face the numerous "pleaders" and withstand crushing social pressures, among which is the Confucian doctrine of filial piety.

The play also reveals the widespread practice of nepotism. However, it is not disapprovingly portrayed, for the kingdom, in particular its military force, was actually based on a household system. The problem is we can still find traces of it now.

The Tiger Badge

CHARACTERS

CHACHA (*dan*), wife of Shanshoma

LIUR, a houseboy

YIN. (*chong mo*), short for Yinzhuma (Silver Horse), uncle of Shanshoma

WIFE (*lao dan*), wife of Yinzhuma

SHAN. (*zheng mo*), short for Shanshoma (Mountain Horse), a garrison force commander

ENVOY (*wai*)

JIN. (*zheng mo*), short for Jinzhuma (Golden Horse), elder brother of Yinzhuma

MESSENGER

LIEUTENANT (*wai*)

OFFICERS (*jing*)

SERGEANT (*wai*)

DOGGY (*jing*), a family steward

ACT I

(Enter Chacha with Liur)

CHACHA:

*The first thing I learned was to ride a horse;
The dressing table doesn't suit my taste.
Although I would abstain from rouge and paint,
I boast a loveliness of natural traits.
If you ask me about the man I chose,
On his belt he dangles a golden badge.
Do not mistake me for a common skirt;
My way of charm is irresistible.*

My name is Chacha, a Juchen of the Wanyan family. I'm married to a man called Shanshoma, an upper rank thousand-household commander entitled to wear a gilded badge. Today he's out hunting. Boys, get dinner ready. Master may soon return.

(Enter Yinzhuma and his wife)

YIN: My old self is Yinzhuma. After leaving Bohai Encampment, we've traveled several days and have now arrived at the mountain pass at Cleft Peak. This is Shanshoma's house. Attendants, hold the reins. Liur, please announce that uncle and aunt have arrived. (Liur announces)

CHACHA: Ask them to come in. (She greets them) Uncle and aunt, please take a seat in the front hall. Excuse me a minute so that I can put on an outer dress to pay you my formal respects. (She changes clothes and bows) Uncle and aunt, the long journey must have been tiring.

YIN: Chacha, where's my nephew?

CHACHA: He's gone hunting.

YIN: Please send Liur to bring him back. Tell him that his uncle and aunt have come to visit him.

CHACHA: Liur, hurry to the hunting ground to inform master. Uncle and aunt, please come into the rear hall to have a drink while waiting for him.

(Exeunt)

(Enter Shanshoma, riding,¹ followed by subordinates)

SHAN:

*A sword is girded to my side;
A feather cloak adorns my back.
Of any people north and south,
I sure am the most gallant man.*

I'm a Juchen of the Wanyan family. My adopted surname is Wang,² and my given name is Shanshoma. I'm an upper rank thousand-household commander entitled to wear a gilded badge. My duty is to guard this mountain pass at Cleft Peak. Today I'm not busy, and it's nice and warm. So I've decided to go hunting with my lieutenants.

[Painting Cherry Lips]

It's partly a heritage from grandpa
and partly an achievement predestined
that I can wear this gilded badge.

In combat and in war
I've proven myself an intrepid man.

[A Roiling Dragon]

Many a time we faced attacking foes,
and I won glories on the battlefield.
To build up a solid provisions base
herds and flocks are raised.
We have hundreds of well-fed battle-steeds;
I have a thousand households of garrison troops.
How do I spend the lengthy days of peace?
Hunting has always been my favored sport,
with hounds and eagles chasing prey.

(Enter Liur)

LIUR: Here I am at the hunting ground. Isn't that my master? Master, some relatives have come to visit you.

SHAN: Liur, what did you say?

LIUR: Some relatives have come to visit.

[The Glib Cricket]

SHAN:

So that's why magpies have been chirping in the trees.
They're heralding a piece of happy news.

Liur, who are they?

LIUR: They just said they're relatives. I don't know them.

SHAN:

He hums and hahs, not knowing who is who;
he mutters on and on as if confused.
Why's he so flustered and about to flee?
His puzzled eyes keep roaming left to right;
spittle sputters and splutters from his mouth.
He acts in an exaggerated way;
it seems he is performing in a trance.

LIUR: Let me think.

[Universal Happiness]

SHAN:

The more he thinks the more confused he looks,

as if his soul
has wandered off.

Let me guess.

Is it Brother Te from his distant post?

LIUR: No.

SHAN:

Is it the aged matron of Dalu?

LIUR: No.

SHAN:

Is it the youthful master of Pucha?

LIUR: No.

SHAN:

Is it my aunt and uncle visiting?

LIUR: Yes, it's uncle and aunt!

SHAN: If it's uncle and aunt, we must stop hunting and hurry home.

(Exeunt)

(Enter Yinzhuma with his wife [and Chacha])

YIN: What is taking him so long to come?

CHACHA: Boys, go to the gate and see if master is returning.

(Enter Shanshoma)

SHAN: Catch the reins. Chacha, where are uncle and aunt? (He greets them)

YIN: Son, it has been years since you left home. We miss you badly. So we've come all the way to see you.

SHAN: Uncle and aunt, please take a seat.

[Drunk Midday]

Uncle, you must be worn out by the ride;
aunt, the long distance must have been a strain.
Since we parted it's half a dozen years,
and we have been completely out of touch.
Closer than you I have no other kin;
it's hard to put emotions into words.
Thanks for coming so far to visit me.

YIN: Son, remember how we raised you from the cradle? Now you enjoy a high position, don't forget what we did for you.

SHAN: Uncle and aunt, how could I!

[Golden Cups]

I lost my parents when I was a babe,
left alone and poor.
I'm most grateful you raised me as your own,
taught me both words and martial arts.
Thanks to that I now hold a leading post,
and command the troops at this mountain pass.
I did experience hardship in my youth.
But for that, I would not have risen high.

Boys, butcher sheep and pigs and prepare a banquet.

(Enter an envoy)

ENVOY: I'm a Juchen of the Wanyan family, now an imperial envoy. His Majesty has dispatched me here to proclaim the promotion of Shanshoma, thousand-household commander at Cleft Peak Pass, in recognition of his excellent services and victories over the enemy. Here I am at his gate. Attendants, hold the reins. Announce that an imperial envoy is at the gate.

(Liur announces)

SHAN: Light the joss sticks. (He kneels)

ENVOY: Shanshoma, hark His Majesty's decree: In recognition of your outstanding services at Cleft Peak Pass, you are promoted to the rank of marshal and commander of all forces in the military region. You are entitled to the double-tiger gold badge, and are given *carte blanche* to execute criminals without prior approval of the Court. Transfer your thousand-household commanding position at Cleft Peak to any competent subordinate of your choice, and pass on to him the gilded badge. Kowtow and express your gratitude. (Shanshoma kowtows)

SHAN: Sir, I'm much obliged to you for riding over such a long distance.

ENVOY: My congratulations on your admirable promotion.

SHAN: Sir, please join us at a banquet.

ENVOY: My thanks, but I must be leaving. I have much to do.

SHAN. (seeing off the envoy): Have a pleasant journey, sir.

ENVOY: Farewell. It's said:

*Generals in their saddles stay,
Each galloping toward his fate.*

(Exit Envoy)

SHAN: Boys, is the banquet ready?

LIUR: It is.

YIN: Wife, just now the imperial envoy made Shanshoma a marshal. I heard him say he can give his gilded badge to any subordinate he likes. Look at me! I've already reached this advanced age but have never held a position, not even as the head of a household group!³ Would you speak to Chacha and ask her to put in a word for me before the Marshal? Perhaps he can pass on his gilded badge to me and let me take charge of this mountain pass. Wouldn't that be far better than giving the position to somebody else?

WIFE: Hubby, all your life you've been so fond of the cup. I'm afraid you might muddle up your duties.

YIN: Wife, if I wear that badge and become a commander, I'll never drink another drop.

WIFE: I can't believe you said that!

YIN: I'll not drink one more drop!

WIFE: If you can keep your word, I'll go to talk with Chacha. (To Chacha) Dear, there's something on my mind, but I'm not sure it's right to say it.

CHACHA: Tell me, please.

WIFE: Just now the envoy gave Shanshoma a double-tiger gold badge, and said he can give his gilded badge to any subordinate he likes. Wouldn't it be better to give it to uncle rather than someone else?

CHACHA: That sounds quite reasonable. Let me speak to the Marshal. (To Shanshoma) Marshal, just now uncle and aunt mentioned that since you now have the double-tiger gold badge, and you can give the gilded one to any subordinate, why not give it to uncle rather than someone else?

SHAN: Whose idea was this?

CHACHA: Auntie's.

SHAN: Uncle loves to drink. I'm afraid he might neglect his duties.

CHACHA: Uncle said if he wears the badge and is made a commander, he won't have one more drop.

SHAN: Well, if that's the case, fetch me the gilded badge. [To Yinzhuma] Uncle, just now the envoy pronounced His Majesty's appointment of me to Marshal of All Forces, and conferred on me the double-tiger gold badge with the privilege to execute criminals without prior approval of the Court. He also said I can give this gilded badge to any competent

subordinate of my choice and thus appoint him a thousand-household commander. Uncle, you rendered good service to the kingdom in your youth. So there's every reason for you to wear this gilded badge and be a commander of a thousand households. It's certainly better than giving it to someone else.

YIN: I'm sure you have many competent people under you. As for me, I haven't performed any laudable service. How can I assume that position?

SHAN: Uncle, you don't have to be so modest.

[The Halves]

Our ancestor was a founder of the state,
and early on you joined the corps of braves.

Those reasons amply justify this badge.

I see a smile blooming on auntie's face.

Uncle, please accept this badge.

YIN: I'm afraid I can't.

SHAN:

I see he half declines and half accepts.

YIN: Marshal, thank you for this favor. I'll take it.

SHAN: Uncle, once you accept this badge, you should be a different man.

Always put state affairs first and abstain from the cup.

YIN: Don't you worry. When I wear this badge, I won't drink another drop.

SHAN: Quite right.

[Golden Cups]

Why I go to such lengths to caution you?

Because I'm afraid you get sloshed.

That badge means much more than its weight in gold,
and we can't disappoint His Majesty.

I hope you'll be a buttress of the state
in defeating the devilish hordes.

It's said: Poverty makes a filial son;
difficult times reveal a loyal heart.

YIN: I'll go back to Bohai Encampment right away to move home to Cleft Peak Pass.

SHAN: Uncle, I'm leaving too, for the regional headquarters at Daxing. Take care on the road.

[Coda]

Over mountain passes and river fords,
we travel town to town.
Unexpected encounters may occur,
and victory belongs to the braver one.
We're from a glorious line of royal guards.
Don't neglect your duties
and think you can fall back on kin support.
The strongest army is the dads and sons.
Jointly they can engulf barbarian foes.
Together we defend the border pass
to repay the confidence of the crown.

(Exeunt Shanshorma, Chacha and Liur)

YIN: My nephew has left. I must hurry back to Bohai to move home.

(Exeunt Yinzhuma and Wife)

ACT II

(Enter Yinzhuma and his wife)

YIN: I went back to Bohai Encampment to move home to Cleft Peak. When my kinfolk and friends heard I'd been made a thousand-household commander, they vied to invite me. I'd have two bottles with one and three bottles with another. Every day was a drinking day. But I didn't forget the date I must report for duty. So here I find myself outside this village on my way to my new post. I have an elder brother named Jinzhuma living in the village. I must say goodbye to him before moving on to Cleft Peak Pass.

WIFE: Hubby, you go say goodbye to brother and I'll wait for you here. Don't be long.

(Exit Wife)

YIN: I see someone coming this way. It looks like my brother.

(Enter Jinzhuma)

JIN: I'm none other than Jinzhuma. I have a younger brother named Yinzhuma. He was recently appointed thousand-household commander and is going to assume his new position at Cleft Peak Pass. I heard he's passing through my village. Poor as I am, I've bought a bottle of wine to see him off.

[Five Offerings]

Woe hangs in the air;
 grief unfurls through years.
 All I have is a pair of empty hands.
 I borrowed a fistful of meager coins
 to pay for this bottle of village brew
 for a farewell toast with my brother young.
 I know he's pressed for time and cannot stay,
 but this time he departs
 when can we meet again?

Isn't that my young brother!

YIN: Isn't that my elder brother! (They greet each other) Brother, I was appointed thousand-household commander and now I'm going to guard Cleft Peak Pass. I've come to say goodbye to you.

JIN: Brother, I heard you were made commander and you're going to Cleft Peak. I don't have much to offer you, only this bottle of wine for a farewell toast.

YIN: That's so kind of you. But you lead a hard life. How have you got money to buy wine?

[The Plum-ripening Wind]

JIN. (offering a cup):

I wipe clean the bottle mouth with my hand,
 and pour for you a brimming cup of wine.
 (Yinzhuma receives the cup)

Just a moment.

Let's first make a libation to the sun.
 My rustic tongue can't make a moving speech;
 I just pray we brothers can meet again.

(They sprinkle wine on the ground. Jinzhuma offers another cup) Brother,

bottoms up.

YIN: Brother, you first.

JIN: All right, I drink. Now you.

YIN: I drink.

JIN: Brother, have another cup.

YIN: I really shouldn't drink any more, brother, but I'm so happy to see you.

When I reach Cleft Peak Pass, I won't have another drop.

JIN: Brother, I don't even have a decent gift for you.

YIN: I'm coming to say goodbye to you, not coming to ask you for anything.

[Tenderness]

JIN:

If I were in my former easy days,
I would like to give you a better gift
than these two arrows which my old hands glued.

YIN: I'll keep them.

JIN: And

this hunting bow which I have waxed and waxed.

YIN: These things will be most useful to me.

JIN: Brother, drink less and think more.

YIN: Brother, don't worry about me. At Cleft Peak, I'll drill the troops and watch against the enemy. I won't drink a single drop.

[Golden Cups, Adagio]

JIN:

Remember these words spoken from my heart:
Do guard against the lure of wine;
do guard against the lure of greed.
Then you will safely hold the southbound route.
Now you are in command,
you needs must stand your ground.
Provided that the pass stays safe and sound,
you'll surely rise in rank,
and never fall from grace.

YIN: Brother, my nephew Shanshoma is Marshal of the Regional Command.

Who would dare say anything against me even if I did slip up?

JIN: Brother, I wouldn't think that way.

[The Dianthus]

I know my nephew is a kindly man,
but should you err he wouldn't bend the rules,
even if the penalty calls for death.
A marshal's discipline is harsher than the laws.

YIN: I remember you once led a comfortable life.

[Bowing at the Gate, major]

JIN:

I never expected to live like this.
Would that I could relive the past
when I was surrounded by kin and friends,
and took delight in playing pipes and strings.
Oh, how my dear wife's parents feasted us
when we visited with our firstborn child!⁴

YIN: I still remember the elegant clothes you had when you were young.
How come you're so desperately poor now?

[Mountain Pomegranates]

JIN:

I used to wear only the stylish clothes
– I was always a well-groomed man.
My shining deerskin boots were cotton soft;
a cummerbund of blue adorned my padded gown.

[The Topsy Dame]

The pearls I wore were round like perfect peas
– I was very picky about my wear.
My headwear was laden with brilliant flowers;
my belt was embellished with jade and gold.

YIN: Brother, how handsome you were! How is it you look so old now?

[My Love Returns]

JIN:

My face was cream white like a silver plate,
my jet-black hair braided with colored wool.
With high officials I would sit
and play drinking games with the guests,
offering in that way a round of wine.

[Bowing at the Gate, minor]

The flutes piped the melodious *Partridge* tune;
the camel-skin drum boomed like thunderclaps.
I danced and whirled before the feasting crowd,
and what applause I received after that!

[Lo-ho]

I'm at a farewell party once again;
this time the officer's my brother, you.
Away you have to go, reluctant though.
A reunion is but a dream!

YIN. (sadly): Brother, once parted, when shall we meet again?

[Happy News]

JIN:

After we take leave today,
it can only be in dreams that we meet.
Yet, even dreams may fail that modest wish.
The future is that brothers hope in vain;
your spouse is to endure a pain,
and you'll incur our nephew's blame.
Unpredictable is one's life
– no way to tell what's good or bad.

YIN: Brother, it pains me to leave you.

[The Topsy Dame]

JIN:

Heaven has forsaken my humble self!
Heaven has forsaken my humble self!
I don't have anything to sell or pawn;
I don't have anything to eat or wear.
One year is just worse than the one before!

YIN: I remember you have a son called Dog Skin. Where's he now?

JIN: Why mention him? I've clean forgotten him.

[The Crescent Moon]

Why mention that base and disgraceful son?
Someone had seen him in the capital,
going in and out of teahouses,
as well as theaters and wineshops,
among a gang of wayward men and girls.
Many years have since passed without his news.
I have a few words hanging on my tongue,
but when I try to speak they're swallowed down.

YIN: My brother seems to be hesitating over something.

JIN. (aside): I'd like to ask him for something to wear, but I find it difficult to put that in words. I may drop him a few hints. Brother, all four seasons round the year, spring, summer, fall and winter, life is hard for me.

[The Shifting Winds]

In springtime,
in springtime the weather is warm and fine;
in summertime,
in summertime the south wind carries fire;
fall, late fall,
fall, late fall, is the season I dread most,
not to mention,
not to mention winter when snow flakes roll.

[Suddenly Gone]

Oh, brother! Once I did rejoice in wealth,

and had farmland of my own,
but now there's not a roof above my head.
A crude needle makes stitches coarse and sparse.
Fine rice and wheat flour are beyond my means,
gone too are satin coats and warm, light quilts.
Oh, brother! We're by the same parents born.
If you have an old coat to throw away,
would you give it to me to fend off cold?

YIN: If you hadn't told me, how could I've possibly guessed? I'll have them
unpack the pannier and give you a heavy padded coat for the winter.

JIN:

I didn't want to bother you
with small talk and regretful tears,
but if I do not speak them out
I'll never have a second chance.

YIN: You once had the luxury of scented balls and ornaments of all kinds
hanging in your curtained rooms. What happened to them?

[The Silly Guy]

JIN:

Once I reposed behind embroidered screens,
now on a frayed mat on a tamped-earth bed
I sleep with a half brick beneath my head.
What a sharp contrast is my life!

Brother, when you're in office, set your mind to the defenses and keep
away from wine.

YIN: Don't worry, brother. Peace now reigns over the land and there's no smoke
of war in any of earth's four corners. What's the big deal if I have a few cups?

JIN: Brother, I wouldn't think that way.

[Coda]

Although no war is going on,
arms and armor are laid aside,
you still have to train the troops in their skills
of spears and swords, and archery.

With total dedication to your work,
 you'll have no troubles in your camp,
 no uncertainties in your heart,
 and no fear on the battlefield.

YIN: (bowing farewell): Farewell, brother. I must be moving on to Cleft Peak Pass.

JIN: Brother, have a safe journey.

YIN: Attendants, bring my horse here. (He mounts) Take care, brother.

JIN:

Hoof-clatter trails off on the distant road;
 I drag my feet back to my humble hut.

YIN: You're still in good health.

JIN:

Do I have the looks of a healthy man?
 I doubt if I can live another year.

YIN: When I've settled down, I'll send for you.

JIN:

It will be hard for us to meet again.

Brother,

the road to reunion is strangely long.

(Exit Jinzhuma)

YIN: My brother's gone home. I must move on with my family to my new post at Cleft Peak Pass. A poem has it:

Now I'm going to guard the mountain pass,

I need to ginger up to do my task.

No barbarian would dare to make a thrust.

Let them blabber about my drinking lust.

(Exit)

ACT III

(Enter Yinzhuma and his wife)

YIN:

Never has life been such a joy;

Pleasures flock in to fill my days.

After I took up my post at Cleft Peak Pass, I didn't find much to do, so I had a lot of time to drink. I did send for my brother Jinzhuma, but as luck would have it, he had already passed away.

Today is the fifteenth of the eighth lunar month, the Mid-autumn Festival. Wife, tell the boys to prepare a big dinner and wine. I'd like to have a good drink with you while we watch the full moon rise. (Music within)

(Enter a messenger)

MESSENGER: Disaster, sir. The enemy has broken through the mountain pass.

(Yinzhuma panics)

WIFE: Hubby, I told you not to drink that much. What now?

YIN: It's already lost. What can I do? Attendants, fetch me my weapons and armor. I'll chase them away.

(Exeunt)

(Enter a lieutenant)

LIEUTENANT: I'm a Juchen of the Wanyan family. My family has been garrisoned at the borders since the time of my grandfather, and we've held military office from generation to generation.

My grandfather was engaged in a persistent war with the Kingdom of Liao, and the bloody fights grew into deadly hatred. They insulted us by calling us barbarians and claimed we didn't even have family names. My grandfather thus assigned seven family names to our people according to the ways of heaven and earth and the five musical notes: DO, RE, MI, SOL, and LA. Heaven includes the Nalu family, and they took the surname Liu. Earth includes the Wendehan family, and they took the surname Zhang. Auguo belongs to DO, and they took the surname Zhou. Wanyan belongs to RE, and they took the surname Wang. Pufu belongs to MI, and they took the surname Li. Jiagu belongs to SOL, and they took the surname Tong. Shimi belongs to LA, and they took the surname Xiao. Of course there are other families besides those seven, such as Babao, Baowu, and Gulun. They simply adopted the names of their ancestors as their respective family names. My grandfather's name was originally Zhulichan, a Muslim Juchen. He gradually expanded his territory and became a major power. It was he who moved the family to the middle capital and spread the clan to seven places. To the kingdom he devoted his whole life, and left

his descendants a glorious heritage. It wasn't easily gained. A poem puts it clear:

*One ancestor fought hard to build a name,
So his offspring can harvest on his fame.
Our most cherished hope is that wars will cease
And our kingdom thrive in perpetual peace.*

I'm a lieutenant with the regional command. The old Wanyan in charge of the defense at Cleft Peak Pass is immersed in wine every day and he allowed the enemy to sneak through. That dereliction of duty is a serious felony. We've issued three summonses, but instead of appearing at court, he beat up the mission officers every time. He is counting on the fact that he's our marshal's uncle. My superior is very much annoyed. Today, another group of officers has been dispatched to summon him. If he still refuses to come, we'll send a team of beefy sergeants with papers bearing the Marshal's seal to drag him here. Then he'll have no choice. Attendants, tell the officers to be careful and there should be no delay. Report to me as soon as the old man is brought in.

(Exit)

(Enter Yinzhuma [with his wife], attended)

YIN: On the night of the fifteenth the enemy sneaked through the pass. But the very next day I personally led my troops to chase them down. After a fight, we seized back the people and livestock they made off with. My subordinates have arranged a banquet to celebrate our victory, and we're having a hearty drink. (He drinks)

WIFE: Boys, fetch more wine and offer the commander big toasts for his victory.

(Enter an officer)

OFFICER (greeted Yinzhuma): The Marshal is summoning you.

YIN. (shouts): Damn you! Who the hell are you?

OFFICER: By the Marshal's order, I'm here to summon you.

YIN: I'm his uncle! How dare you summon me! Attendants, drag him down and flog him!

(Attendants beat Officer)

OFFICER:

*The ancient Wanyan doesn't know the rules;
He dares say no right to the Marshal's face.
I summon you, you treat me to the rod.*

I'll screw you wife upon your very sod.

(Exit Officer)

(Enter another officer)

OFFICER: You are hereby summoned.

YIN. (shouts): Damn you! Who the hell are you?

OFFICER: By the Marshal's order, I'm here to summon you.

YIN.: Bah! I'm his uncle! How dare you summon me! Attendants, throw him out and flog him! (Attendants beat officer)

OFFICER:

*The ancient Wanyan doesn't know the ways,
And he orders the rod to kiss my ass.
I summon you and you refuse to come.
The sergeants will come next and you'll succumb.*

(Exit Officer)

(Enter a sergeant)

SERGEANT: I'm a sergeant from the rough-tough west. By order of the Marshal, I'm sent to summon old Wanyan for losing the mountain pass to the enemy. Officers before me had tried to bring him in, but they all failed. So here I am to summon him. (He greets Yinzhuma) Old commander, the Marshal has sent for you. How come you ignored him? (He throws a chain around Yinzhuma's neck)

*The ancient Wanyan has a fiery streak,
And the Marshal's decree he dares defy.
Don't argue with me, don't put up a fight;
Take issue with the Chief, as well you might.*

YIN.: Wife, I'm done for this time. The Marshal is summoning me to the headquarters. Old as I am, how can I bear the flogging? Wife, warm a flask of wine and bring it along.

(Exeunt Yinzhuma and Sergeant)

WIFE: Oh, what shall I do now? Better follow him to the Marshal's office.

(Exit Wife)

(Enter Shanshoma with Lieutenant and attendants)

[Minitune from River Xin]

SHAN.:

The bellow for silence like thunder roars;⁵
my sword of authority fiercely glares.

He lost the mountain pass,
and dared to disobey.

Sergeants were sent to bring him in.
Lieutenant, any news from Cleft Peak?
Isn't the old man coming to report?

SERGEANT (leading Yinzhuma by the chain): Hurry up!

YIN: What's the fuss? I'm the Marshal's uncle. I ain't afraid.

SERGEANT (greets Lieutenant): I've brought in the commander of Cleft Peak Pass.

SHAN: Is he brought in? Bring him here!

LIEUTENANT: Bring him over here.

SHAN: Take off the chain, and remove his gilded badge as well. (Yinzhuma refuses to kneel) What insolence!

[Dead Drunk in the East Wind]

See how he stands there in a sullen mood.

I couldn't but be angered by his doubts.

To say the least,

I have been delegated by the crown
to command the army force.

How can he disrespect the rule of rank!

You're my subordinate,

but you pretend you're unaware of that,
and dare refuse to go down on your knees.

You've committed a felony. How can you still be so arrogant! Lieutenant, ask him why he doesn't kneel. If he refuses, give him the rods and break his shanks.

LIEUTENANT: Yes, sir.

YIN: Lieutenant, I'm his uncle. Wouldn't it be ridiculous for a senior to kneel before his junior relative?

LIEUTENANT: The Marshal said if you don't kneel, he'll have the rods break your shanks.

YIN: Well, I kneel, but that'll certainly take some years off him.

SHAN: Lieutenant, ask him to sign his confession.

LIEUTENANT: Old Wanyan, you must sign this paper.

YIN: Lieutenant, I don't know how to sign.

LIEUTENANT: You just put a dot on this paper and I'll let you have a cup of wine.

YIN: I make a dot and can have a cup of wine? Give me the brushpen. I'll happily make dots till the sun goes down.

LIEUTENANT: Sign here.

YIN: Here it is.

LIEUTENANT: He has put a dot on the paper and signed it.

SHAN: Lieutenant, read out the indictment to him.

LIEUTENANT (reads aloud): Defendant Wanyan Ake, age sixty, healthy, a Juchen descendant of a thousand-household commander and native of Hulidahai, Jingdu Province, is Commander of the Advance Guard of the South Regional Command. He was recently ordered by the Marshal of the Regional Command to defend Cleft Peak Pass against enemy invasion. He should have maintained vigilance and had his troops combat-ready, but on the night of the fifteenth of the eighth lunar month he was drunk and neglected his duty, thus allowing enemy troops to sneak through the pass and make off with men and women, cattle, sheep and horses.

At the summons of the Marshal he should have come without delay, but he violated orders and refused to report to headquarters. Besides that, on more than one occasion he flogged the mission officers. Those are the deeds committed by Ake in respect of military discipline, and he has admitted his crime.

The above case is presented to Your Highness for a ruling. According to military law, the penalty for a frontier commander who refuses to carry out orders is death. The penalty for a frontier commander who indulges in drinking and is lax about training is death. The penalty for a frontier commander who does not confront the enemy but allows the enemy to break through is death.

Signed by Wanyan Ake, such and such a date in the eighth month.

YIN: If you make the case this way, I'm finished. (He weeps)

[Plucking the Strings]

SHAN:

Even if you are my blood relation,
I have to uphold army discipline.



Since you're entitled to official dress,
flaunt double racks of weapons at your gate,⁶
why didn't you put up a fight
against the foes,
but just got pickled down to dregs?
Had you been a strategic mastermind
like Jiang Shang, Guan Zhong, Fan Li or Zhang Liang,⁷
what would be the use if you do not fight?
Were you so wronged you make this show of tears?

Lieutenant, hand me the indictment.

LIEUTENANT: Here it is.

SHAN: The sentence is capital punishment. Get him out of here and report back after the execution is carried out.

LIEUTENANT: Yes, sir. Attendants, take that old Wanyan outside and cut off his head. (Attendants tie up Yinzhuma and push him out)

YIN: Oh, heavens! He's killing me! Where's my wife? Why don't you come and plead for me?

WIFE (rushes onstage): Oh, brothers, give me a moment please. I'm the Marshal's aunt. Please allow me to have a word with him. (She kneels before Shanshoma and cries)

SHAN: Aunt, please get up.

WIFE: Marshal, excuse me, I know this is no place for womenfolk, but I heard you're going to have your uncle executed, because he lost the mountain pass and let the enemy sneak through to plunder the people. For a gilded-badge commander, he's too fond of the cup. But please consider the fact that you were born an orphan, and it was we who raised you up to become such a high officer. Although we didn't give birth, it was we who fed you and washed your diapers. We ate coarse food and saved every bite of good food for you. For my sake, could he be spared from the knife? You may give him a flogging to teach him a lesson. Wouldn't that be better?

SHAN: Do you have any idea how he performs his duties?

[Eighteen Twists]

He cares for naught but food and wine,
accompanied by singing girls.

Guarding against invaders slips his mind.

To him every day is a feast with flutes and drums.

WIFE: Your uncle is old.

SHAN: You said he's old? How old is he?

WIFE: He's sixty.

SHAN:

So you think sixty is a good excuse.

Jiang Shang was eighty when he was invited by Ji Chang, the founding father of the Zhou Dynasty, to be commander-in-chief. One day he defeated the seven hundred thousand troops of Shang on the Meng River, and in less than a week he took the capital town of Shang and helped establish the eight hundred years of the Zhou Dynasty.

Uncle's more than twenty years younger than Jiang Shang.

Aunt, please get up. I can't pardon him. This is a military matter.

WIFE (walks out): Hubby, I can't make him change his mind. What can we do?

YIN: Wife, ask Chacha to come. She may be able to put in a word.

(Enter Chacha)

CHACHA: Uncle and aunt, why do you look so dejected?

WIFE: Chacha, the Marshal is going to have your uncle executed, because he was drunk and lost the mountain pass. Could you go in and plead for uncle's life?

CHACHA: Uncle and aunt, let me make a try. Don't be angry with me if I fail, and don't flatter me if I succeed. (She greets Shanshoma)

SHAN. (angrily): Chacha, what brings you to this place?

CHACHA: I know I shouldn't come to your office, but you mustn't forget you were born an orphan and it was uncle and aunt who raised you up to become such a high officer. How can you kill your uncle now? For my sake at least, would you please pardon him?

SHAN: Chacha, affairs within this official mansion are beyond a housewife's business. What makes you so bold?

[Lauding Harmony]

Who invited you to this office place?

A good wife shouldn't meddle in her man's affairs.

That will set a bad example. My subordinates will think it only takes the

Marshal's wife to reverse a verdict on a convicted uncle.

Although you have arrived in time to plead,
Chacha, if you don't leave this place right now,
I can no longer save your face,
save your face!

Go home!

CHACHA: Don't be angry with me. I'll go. (She walks out to meet Yinzhuma) The Marshal just wouldn't pardon you. It's said: When justice is done, nice weather comes. He thinks: When officers are upright, people by the law abide, and that I should think: When the wife is modest, her husband blessed. Bah! What about: When the son is filial, his father genial?

(Exit Chacha)

WIFE: What can we do now?

YIN: Mr Lieutenant, would you and your colleagues speak for me?

LIEUTENANT: Your Highness, please pardon him. (Lieutenant and attendants kneel)

SHAN: What do you think you're doing?

LIEUTENANT: Your Highness, of course we understand that "Law and punishment apply to all alike, even to relations; reward and promotion go to all alike, even to adversaries." We have nothing against that. It's certainly no slight matter that old Wanyan prided himself on his venerable age and let wine interfere with his duties so that the enemy succeeded in sneaking through the pass. But on the other hand, you owe him a great debt of gratitude for raising you from an orphaned infancy. In our humble opinion, a death sentence would no doubt testify to your impartiality and justness, but you may fail to observe the fidelity to both the country and the family as the sage has advocated. A poem says:

*We hope you'll turn it over in your mind,
Weigh up once more the sentence you have passed.
What we said is for consideration.
It's up to you to make the decision.*

[Coy Steps]

SHAN:

All you officers kneeling down the steps

are an impudent bunch of featherbrains.

He is my uncle and I'm his nephew;
the fire is always warmer than the ash.

Don't you attempt to make me change my mind!

We're next of kin but I don't hesitate to execute him for committing this felony. If you make mistakes,

look at this example he set for you.

Get up and leave. I won't pardon him.

LIEUTENANT (steps out): He won't pardon you.

YIN: What's to become of me?

LIEUTENANT: Old Wanyan, after you lost the mountain pass on the night of the fifteenth, why didn't you chase after the enemy?

YIN: I did. On the sixteenth I chased them down and seized back all the people and livestock they'd abducted.

LIEUTENANT: If that's the case, why didn't you say so earlier? (He goes back to Shanshoma) Your Highness, just now old Wanyan said on the sixteenth he chased and fought the enemy, and seized back all the people and livestock they'd abducted. This meritorious deed can atone for his fault.

SHAN: If he really chased and fought the enemy and seized back all the people and livestock they'd abducted, that can partially atone for his dereliction of duty. His life can be spared. Change the sentence to a flogging of one hundred strokes.

LIEUTENANT: Yes, sir. (Reads out the indictment) Defendant Wanyan Ake, age sixty, healthy, a Juchen descendant of a thousand-household commander and native of Hulidahai, Jingdu Province, is Commander of the Advance Guard of the South Regional Command. He was recently ordered to guard Cleft Peak Pass. He should have maintained vigilance and had his troops combat-ready, but on the night of the fifteenth of the eighth lunar month he relaxed his vigilance so as to allow enemy troops to sneak through the pass and abduct a certain number of men and women, cattle, sheep and horses.

On the sixteenth instant Ake personally led his troops to confront the enemy and successfully seized back the people and livestock they had abducted. He also drove away the enemy and recaptured the lost land. That victory can atone for his dereliction, but he should not have drunkenly

disobeyed the summonses on him to appear at headquarters. Those are the facts as committed and admitted by Ake.

The above case is presented to Your Highness for a ruling.

Signed by Wanyan Ake.

SHAN: He is sentenced to a one-hundred-stroke flogging. Case concluded.

LIEUTENANT: Old Wanyan, the Marshal changed your death sentence to a flogging of one hundred strokes.

YIN: I may save my neck, but how can I survive the one hundred strokes? Hold a moment, please. Who can save me now? Wife, we had a steward called Doggy. He's working at headquarters now. Go and ask him to plead for me. (He calls out for Doggy)

(Enter Doggy)

DOGGY: I'm none other than Doggy. I'm the Marshal's favorite servant. If I weren't present, he wouldn't eat or drink. As soon as I appear, he breaks into a smile. Whatever I ask for, he always says yes. I was working in the kitchen when someone called me. Let me see who it is.

YIN: Doggy, it was me calling you. (He kneels before Doggy) Save me, please.

DOGGY: So it was uncle calling me. Don't kneel. Please get up. (He stumbles and falls) Just fancy you had tripped and fallen on your face. Uncle, is there anything I can do for you?

YIN: Doggy, the Marshal is going to give me one hundred strokes. Take pity of me and go in to say a few good words for me.

DOGGY: No problem, uncle. Last night I already mentioned your case.

YIN: Please do so once more for me now.

DOGGY: Don't worry, uncle. You can count on me. (He greets Shanshoma)

SHAN: Why are you here?

DOGGY: I wouldn't come if it wasn't something important. Uncle just slipped up on wine. Wouldn't one hundred strokes be very painful? It's said, "Big things can hide small things; the sea can hold the rivers." For my sake, don't beat him. If you do, you'll make me most unhappy. Grant him a pardon, please.

[Shopping for Sweet Wine]

SHAN:

See how he speaks with an affected air,
and on his face he wears his sweetest smile.

“Pardon him, pardon him,” his mouth repeats.
I have turned the case over in my mind,
but rules cannot be compromised.

[Peaceful Minitune]

Several times I told him to go away,
but again and again he begs and pleads,
referring to officials here and there,
swearing by heaven and by earth.

Doggy,
come closer here
and answer me:
Would you like to take it for him?

DOGGY: I will, I will.

SHAN: If you will, attendants, get the heavy rods ready.
I'll flog you, flog you till your back is cracked.

Attendants, drag him down and serve him forty strokes. (Attendants flog Doggy) Throw him out when you've finished.

(Doggy stumbles out)

YIN: Doggy, did you manage to change his mind?

DOGGY: I said everything I could.

YIN: Go in and talk to him again.

DOGGY: He told me to come tomorrow.

YIN. (pushing Doggy in): Plead for me again.

(Doggy goes in)

SHAN: What brings you back so soon?

DOGGY: I'm coming for the second meal. My lord, uncle is old and feeble. Just think how he raised you up when you were young. If you don't care much about uncle, just think how aunt cradled you in her arms, and you were such a piss-baby you often wet her clothes. For her sake at least, grant him a pardon.

SHAN: Are you ready to take another serving?

DOGGY: I am, I am.

SHAN: Serve him another twenty strokes. (Attendants flog Doggy) Throw him out.

(Doggy stumbles out)

YIN: Doggy, did you manage to change his mind?

DOGGY (with hands covering his behind): I can't do it any more. (Yinzhuma again pushes Doggy in) My lord.

SHAN.: To the floor with him!

DOGGY (in panic): Pity me! I can't take it any more.

SHAN.: Prepare the head-chopper^a to cut off his ass head.

(Doggy stumbles out)

YIN.: Go in and talk to him again.

DOGGY: You old son of a bitch, you go in yourself!

(Exit Doggy)

SHAN.: Bring the culprit in! How many have already been served?

LIEUTENANT: Sixty strokes.

SHAN.: Serve him the remaining forty. (Attendants flog Yinzhuma)

[A Wild Goose Alights]

SHAN.:

The lackeys wave and thrash their muscled arms,
but my heart goes against the very act.
Those near the stove are heated by the fire,
yet I myself bear him no burning grudge.

[Minitune of Victory]

Each stroke falls like a cutting knife;
each stroke yanks off a piece of skin.
He writhes and shudders in a pool of blood;
I feel I'm sitting on a chair of pins.
He failed his duty as an army man;
he can't shirk his responsibility!

How many strokes are done?

LIEUTENANT: Thirty.

SHAN.:

Only thirty? Damn it! Isn't it true
that lackeys are more awesome than their boss?

SHAN.: Continue!

LIEUTENANT: The forty strokes are served. Help him out.

YIN.: Wife, I'm dead! Who would have thought that of all men he'd feel no pity for me and treat me like this! The flogging has finished me off!

WIFE (sobbing): Hubby, remember what I said? I told you you shouldn't drink so much.

YIN: I'm finished anyway. Wife, warm up a cup of wine for me.

(Exeunt Yinzhuma and Wife)

SHAN: Lieutenant, we shall take lamb and wine to console uncle tomorrow.

[Coda]

You should have trained your troops in snow and sleet;

you should have held relentless weapon drills.

To me you made a solemn pledge

that you would not succumb to wine.

Had you remembered what you said,

you would have nothing to regret,

but you indulged in wine from dawn to dusk!

Who can you blame but you yourself?

Now you suffer the consequence of wine and song.

(Exeunt)

ACT IV

(Enter Yinzhuma and his wife)

YIN: When I heard Shanshoma was promoted to Marshal, I thought he'd heap favors on me. Who was to know he'd give me one hundred strokes!

Wife, bolt the door. Don't open it to anyone, whoever he is.

WIFE: My hubby must have been terribly hurt. Let me fasten the door. As long as we stay indoors, misfortune can't fall on us out of the blue.

(Enter Shanshoma, Chacha, Lieutenant and attendants)

SHAN: Lieutenant, my wife and I are taking lamb and wine to console uncle today.

LIEUTENANT: We're ready, sir.

SHAN: Here we are at uncle's door. Why is his door bolted fast? Attendants, call at the door.

(Attendants call)

[Base Tune Perfect]

SHAN:

He neglected his duty and was flogged;
 I sentenced him according to the law.
 I know that this has breached respect for age.
 That's why I've come here to redeem myself.

[Rolling the Embroidered Ball]

In haste we came,
 beyond the gate.
 Don't say it's Marshal of the South Command,
 just say we're relatives with wine and lamb.
 Don't accuse us
 of coming late;
 don't be alarmed to find a noisy crowd.
 Come and open the door to let us in.
 Tell my uncle his nephew and Chacha
 have come to make up and apologize.
 He should dismiss his doubts.

They've been calling quite a while. Why has nobody come to answer the door? Lieutenant, you go in person to call at the door.

LIEUTENANT: Yes, sir. (He calls out) Old Wanyan, please open the door. I've got something to tell you.

YIN: No, I won't open the door!

LIEUTENANT: You really won't open?

YIN: I won't!

LIEUTENANT: The first indictment is still valid. You have to face the other charges.

YIN: Charge me as you please. It couldn't be anything worse than another one hundred strokes! I just won't open the door even if you threaten to kill me! Do what you like!

LIEUTENANT: Your Highness, he just won't open the door. What shall I do?

[A Reading Companion]

SHAN:

A bitterness has risen from the trial,

and caused a rift between uncle and nephew.
Whatever yesterday's indictment said,
he wouldn't bow to it and change his mind.
He would rather enjoy his daily cup
than choose to admit he is in the wrong.

Chacha, you go and call at the door.

CHACHA (calls out): Uncle and aunt, it's me, Chacha. Please open the door.

WIFE: Yesterday Chacha did put in a good word for you. It was your nephew Shanshoma who refused to pardon you. For Chacha's sake, let's open the door.

YIN: If she can come today, why couldn't she make another try yesterday? Don't open the door. Just suppose I was beaten dead yesterday.

[The Smiling Monk]

SHAN:

He is asking why we have come today
and was it right to flog him yesterday
with no regard at all for flesh or face.
So he flatly declines your soft concern,
and prefers to remain a hardened drunk.
He just won't throw open the door to welcome you.

Let me go forth myself. Uncle, it's your nephew Shanshoma outside. Please open the door.

WIFE: The Marshal has come in person! We must open the door and let him in. (She opens the door)

(Shanshoma, Chacha, and Lieutenant kneel)

SHAN: I've come to apologize.

YIN: Yesterday you gave me a good beating. How do you have the face to come and see me today?

SHAN: Uncle, that wasn't my idea.

WIFE: Your uncle is old and feeble. Didn't you realize you might have killed him?

[Paddling on the River]

SHAN:



Don't gripe and grumble like a child.
I was simply enforcing law
and that was what the rules dictate.
How could I be oblivious to your age
and voluntarily had you flogged?

YIN: You flogged your old uncle and you say that wasn't your idea! You mean that was my idea?

[Seven Brothers]

SHAN:

You don't need to blame
this one or that one.
Since you were wearing the gilded badge,
you should have been devoted to defense.
Why on earth have a booze-up on the full-moon night?
Was the piss liquor more important than your life?

[Plum Wine]

Ah, yours was indeed a distressing case.
It wasn't ordered by the Court,
nor by the Supervision Commission
that you were beaten black and blue.
You may put your hand on your heart
and ask yourself if you were wronged.
Now carry forth the one who punished you
for old Wanyan to have a closer view.

YIN: According to you, who was the one that ordered my flogging?

[Recovering the South]

SHAN:

Look here, the tiger badge grants me *carte blanche*!

YIN: So I was punished by army discipline.

SHAN:

You cried and howled when the rod kissed your ass.
Such misfortune could have been predestined.

Don't accuse your nephew of being cruel,
and say he's forgotten our common root.

Chacha, have the lamb butchered and the wine warmed up. I'll exchange
toasts with uncle to ease his pain.

[Coda]

Let's warm up the pain-killing wine,
and cook the fattened lamb to go with it,
so uncle can show his capacity.
He shall be blessed with tipsy senility!

YIN: As you've said, I'll forget the unpleasant happenings and immerse
myself in wine.

WIFE: Remember the beating and don't drink too much.

SHAN:

*It's not that I forgot our ties of blood;
It is the calling of the tiger badge.
In retrospect we see fidelity
To both country and family is achieved.*

BANNER TITLE:

***The Marshal is faced with a touchy case;
The tiger badge gives Shanshoma carte blanche.***

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- ¹ Riding a horse was represented by riding a bamboo stick on stage. Later on, a horsewhip was used to symbolize the horse.
- ² After closer contact with the main part of China, the Juchen people adopted Han family names. For example, the Wanyans made Wang their family name.
- ³ A household group: the bottom level in the hierarchy of the household system. It is composed of about 20 households.
- ⁴ It was a Juchen custom to visit the bride's parents not immediately after marriage but after their first child was born.

- ⁵ When the chief magistrate held court, his attendants lining the sides of the hall would bellow out a threatening and protracted sound to call for silence and attention.
- ⁶ There used to be racks of weapons flanking the hall and/or gate of an official mansion as a show of rank and status.
- ⁷ The four are renowned strategists in history.
- ⁸ Head-chopper: originally a broad knife for chopping fodder, which is still used in the rural areas. One end of the blade is pivoted on a heavy wood base with a slot in it for the blade to sink in and the other end thins down into a handle so that it can lift and push down the blade. It became a head-cutting tool in ancient courtrooms, functioning as an equivalent to the French guillotine.

The Quilt
with Mandarin Ducks

Anonymous

INTRODUCTION

The Wedge lays out the background to the action. A local official, Prefect of Henan, is impeached by the State Secretariat and has to go to the capital to stand trial. As he lacks even traveling expenses, he has to take out a loan at usurious rates from a rich man called Squire Liu.

One year has passed without news from him and Squire Liu is pressing for repayment of the loan. As Yuying, the daughter of the Prefect, has no means to repay the debt, she has to agree to Liu's proposal and be his wife. An arrangement is thus made for their meeting at a nunnery.

The turning point of the play is that Squire Liu is detained by the night patrol for breaking the curfew. As coincidence would have it, a young scholar on his way to the capital happens to have put up at the nunnery for the night, whom Yuying mistakes for Squire Liu. Before they part, she gives him her handsewn quilt as a token of betrothal, on which she has embroidered a pair of necking mandarin ducks.

Withstanding Squire Liu's threats and maltreatment, Yuying manages to stay faithful to the scholar. The young man, as is often the case in Chinese plays, wins top place in the imperial examination and is appointed magistrate of Luoyang County. He returns to town incognito and happens upon Yuying waitressing in a tavern.

Recognizing the quilt, Yuying realizes that the young man is none other than the man to whom she has engaged herself. Just as Squire Liu is creating a ruckus over her marital status, the Prefect returns, acquitted from the false charges, so that father and daughter, man and wife, are reunited after their trials and tribulations.

The Wedge is particularly worthy of note, because through Prefect Li's mouth we can learn something about officialdom in the Yuan Dynasty. His statement that "The Court abounds with corrupt officials, and they all prosper in wealth and glory" is most likely a genuine picture of the day. In times when corruption is widespread, upright and honest officials are ostracized and slandered. He knows full well that the reason for his impeachment is that he has "never sought to strike up private relations with them," that is to say, offering "gifts" to his superiors and to courtiers in order to cement

INTRODUCTION

relationships and friendships. Although it could be an exaggeration to say that a prefect can't even cover his traveling expenses, he makes it perfectly clear that what he really cannot afford is the "numerous expenses to meet in the capital."

The play also shows that the interest rate on loans was shockingly high. In just one year, the interest doubles the loan. Many other literary works have exposed the evil of usury, from which we know it was not uncommon for people to sell their land, their house, or even children to repay a loan; this play shows that even the daughter of a frustrated official has to sell herself into slavery.

The play highlights an essential aspect of Chinese culture, that is, of all walks of life the officials' social status is unparalleled. It follows that the ideal future of any young man is to enter officialdom. There is also an intrinsic disdain of the merchant class. However rich they may be, their social status cannot be compared to that of officials or even Confucian scholars.

Yuying's marriage preference is an illustrative example. Though she agrees to meet and marry Squire Liu, deep in her heart she looks down upon him. It is not so much because of his person, for he, according to the nun, is handsome and unmarried, but more because of his lowly social status. Her resentment and reluctance are clearly revealed in Acts I and III.

In contrast, she would rather rest her future on an unknown and unestablished scholar. Being a scholar does not per se mean high social respect, but it is the way into official circles. One's success in the imperial examination, even at the lowest level, would win "status," and success in the final round of the Court examination would mean a direct appointment to an official position, as is the case with Zhang Ruiqing in this play. Even the nun thinks Squire Liu is beneath Yuying's consideration for a spouse. Her contempt is undisguised when she exclaims: "She's the daughter of a high official. How could she marry you!"

To become an official, one who receives a salary from the government and can look forward to a steady income and pension, is still considered the most envied job even today.

The Quilt with Mandarin Ducks

CHARACTERS

LI (*chong mo*), Li Yanshi, an impeached Prefect
NUN (*chou*), a Taoist nun, called Mother Liu
LIU (*jing*), Liu Yanming, a rich man
MEIXIANG, a serving maid to Yuying
YUYING (*zheng dan*), daughter of Li Yanshi
NEOPHYTE (*chou*), neophyte to Mother Liu, the nun
PATROLMAN
ZHANG (*wai*), Zhang Ruiqing, a young scholar
QIAN, Zhang Qian, an attendant to Li Yanshi

THE WEDGE

(Enter Prefect Li, attended)

LI:

*At the temples the hair turns gray and thin;
Ambition dies with the advance of age.
To the official circles I belong,
But what I value most is health and peace.*

My name is Li Yanshi. I hold the office of Prefect.¹ My wife died long ago, leaving me an only daughter named Yuying. She's eighteen this year and not yet betrothed.

Recently I was impeached by the State Secretariat on murky grounds. Unfortunately, His Majesty believed the slanders and sent a gold-badge officer to take me to the capital. Alas! The Court abounds with corrupt officials, and they all prosper in wealth and glory, while I, being upright and faithful to my duties, am being impeached! Is there any justice?!

Well, the capital is a long way off. Besides the traveling expenses, I imagine there will be numerous expenses to meet in the capital. But as lean as my purse is, how can I raise the money? I've sent for Mother Liu of Pure Jade Nunnery. She should be coming soon.

(Enter Nun)

NUN:

*Way that can be explained is not The Way;
Name that can be expressed is not The Name.²*

I'm a Taoist nun with Pure Jade Nunnery. People call me Mother Liu. I was studying the scriptures in the hall when a messenger arrived and said Prefect Li wants to see me. I wonder what the matter is. So, here I am at his gate. [To attendants] You don't need to announce me. I'll go straight in. (She greets Li) Your Excellency has sent for me. Is there anything I can do for you?

LI: I'm happy to see you, Mother Liu. I have to go to the capital to stand trial, but I can't even scrape up enough money for my traveling expenses. That's why I've sent for you. Could you find someone, it doesn't matter who, to lend me ten silver ingots? Try your best. It's urgent. I'll be waiting for you right here.

NUN: I think I know where to go. Squire Liu is a big lender. What are ten silver ingots to him! He can lend you twenty if you want. I'll go straight to his place.

LI:

*Too bad my wallet is as clean as washed.
Now I depend on you to get a loan.*

NUN:

*Squire Liu has gold and silver mountain high,
But prompt repayment is a total must.*

(Exeunt)

(Enter Liu Yanming)

LIU: My name is Liu Yanming. Because I've got lots of money, people respectfully address me as Squire. This is my pawnshop. Let me see if there's anyone coming.

(Enter Nun)

NUN: This is Squire Liu's place. Let me go over. My respects, Squire.

LIU: Mother, what brings you here?

NUN: I wouldn't come without some specific business. His Excellency, Prefect Li, is going to the capital. He'd like to borrow ten silver ingots from you for his traveling expenses. He'll pay back both the principal and interest when he returns.

LIU: Is there anyone in his family staying behind?

NUN: He has an only daughter.

LIU: If that's the case, I'll loan him the ten silver ingots. Tell him to write me an IOU. You shall be the guarantor, and ask his daughter to sign her name as well in case I lose track of him in the future. Let me get the silver for you.

NUN: All right. Give me the silver now. Prefect Li is waiting for me.

(Exit Nun)

LIU: The ten ingots are handed over to the nun. There seems nothing else for me to do here. I'll go around the town to collect outstanding debts.

(Exit Liu)

(Enter Li)

LI: I asked Mother Liu to go and get a loan. What can be keeping her so long? The delay has got me worried.

(Enter Nun)

NUN: Now I've got the silver, I'll report back to Prefect Li. (She greets Li) Your Excellency, I've borrowed ten silver ingots from Squire Liu. He asks you to write him an IOU, with your daughter as the co-signatory and myself as the guarantor.

LI: Well then, ask mistress to come from her boudoir.

NUN: Meixiang, ask mistress to come here.

MEIXIANG: Mistress, please come.

(Enter Yuying)

YUYING: I'm Yuying, the daughter of Prefect Li. I'm eighteen and not yet engaged. My father is calling me to the front hall. I wonder what the matter is. I'm coming. (She greets Li) Father, you called me?

LI: It's like this. I've been impeached by the State Secretariat and must go to the capital to stand trial. But I lack money for the traveling expenses. So I asked Mother Liu to get me a loan of ten silver ingots from Squire Liu. He asks me to write him an IOU, with Mother Liu as the guarantor. He says you must sign the paper too so that he can be sure of getting his money back in the future.

YUYING: Father, I'm an innocent girl. I don't know how to sign a document.

LI: Child, watch how I do it and you do likewise.

NUN: Here's the pen. Miss, you sign. (Yuying signs while Li watches)

LI: Mother, it's done. You can take it to Squire Liu.

NUN: I'll do that.

(Exit Nun)

YUYING: Father, come back as soon as you can.

LI: Child, don't worry about me. I certainly want to come back early, but I'm not sure if that day will ever come. I don't have any friends at Court because I'm an honest man and have never sought to strike up private relations with them. If there's justice, maybe I can return. Otherwise, there's nothing but death. I'll simply be another wronged ghost. (Sighs) Child, you're already eighteen, old enough for marriage. Look for a husband yourself. I probably won't be able to do that for you.

YUYING: Don't say that, father. (Sadly)

[Xianlu Proper]

Tears fall out from the sky;
woes stretch to yonder land.
Farewell said, he will hit the dusty road,
leaving his daughter alone in the world.
Father, please send me a letter from time to time.

(Exit Yuying)

LI: My daughter has returned to her boudoir. Attendants, bring me my horse. I'm leaving for the capital.

*Hot tears keep rolling down my cheeks;
The road ahead is packed with threat.
The sun can be eclipsed by clouds.
Where on this earth is justice done?*

(Exeunt)

ACT I

(Enter Liu)

LIU: I'm Squire Liu. A whole year has passed since Prefect Li took out a loan of ten silver ingots, and so far I've received neither the interest nor the principal. I heard his daughter is quite a beauty and has a graceful figure. I suspect her father will never be able to repay the debt. What if I take her as my wife? I've sent for Mother Liu. She should be coming soon.

(Enter Nun)

NUN: I'm Mother Liu. Squire Liu has sent for me. I must go over to his place. (She greets Liu) Squire, you sent for me?

LIU: Yes, it's about the ten silver ingots Prefect Li borrowed. A whole year has passed and he isn't back. The principal and interest now add up to twenty ingots. You go and ask him to pay up immediately.

NUN: Why don't you just wait a few more days till His Excellency returns? He'll pay you back.

LIU: Mother, what you said is bull ...

NUN: What bull?

LIU: Bullshit! I've been waiting a whole year already! What if he doesn't return in ten years? Wait ten years? Do you do things like that? Let's cut to the chase. You go and ask his daughter to pay me. If she has the money, great. If she doesn't ... I'll level with you. I'm still single even at my age and even though I'm such a rich man. If she agrees to be my wife, both the principal and interest will be written off. And, if you can have this marriage arranged, I'll give you a substantial reward. Please do me this favor!

NUN: Sir, what are you talking about? Money is money. She's the daughter of a high official. How could she marry you!

LIU: Sweet Mother, I'm begging you. Please accept my bow.

NUN: You bow and I'll kneel.

LIU: You kneel and I'll kowtow. Do me this favor, please.

NUN: Sir, you're demanding your money back and that's strictly a money transaction. As for marriage, I can't promise you anything.

LIU: Shall I take this as a refusal? Remember it was you who came to borrow the money, and you are the guarantor. What if I drag you before the magistrate? How can a nun get involved in money transactions? They'll torture you. Boy! They'll beat the asshole out of you!

NUN: How can a lust for a wife make you so shameless?!

LIU: Mother, if you can help me bring this off, I'll give you a substantial reward! Better hurry and bring me some good news.

(Exit Liu)

NUN: You see, I'm a nun and should have remained above worldly affairs. But now, if I don't humor this man, he may really bring me before the magistrate as he's said. For the moment, I must swallow my coy modesty and go to the Li's to talk it over.

Disputes arise because one speaks too much;

*Troubles befall because one's ego bloats.
If I do not comply with his demands,
I fear in future he may seek revenge.*

(Exit Nun)

(Enter Yuying and Meixiang)

YUYING: I'm the daughter of Prefect Li. It's been a year since my father left for the capital and there's been neither a letter nor an oral message from him. To ease those worrying thoughts, I've kept myself occupied in doing needlework.

MEIXIANG: Miss, brighten up. Master will surely return.

[Painting Cherry Lips]

YUYING:

After father left for the capital,
my desolate days are in worries spent.
In sole charge of this big and empty house,
I'm in want of a helping hand.

[A Roiling Dragon]

What will become of me at twenty-one
with still so little prospect of a mate?
It now seems meaningless to comb my hair,
or rouge my cheeks or paint my brows.
Lone nights are spent in tracing flower designs;
long days are buried in my needlework.
Every day I am lost in thought
– haunting scenes,
touching soft,
lasting long.
When can I be matched in unison,
male-female
like paired wings
or roots entwined?
Until I find a handsome man
I cannot call this a rewarding life.
Only to prove heaven and earth are fair
lonely souls should be saved from drifting round.

(Enter Nun)

NUN: Whilst speaking, I've already reached Prefect Li's gate. Meixiang, please announce that Mother Liu is at the gate.

MEIXIANG: Miss, Mother Liu is outside the gate.

YUYING: Ask her in.

MEIXIANG: Please come in.

NUN (greets Yuying): My respects, young mistress.

[The Glib Cricket]

YUYING:

What wind has carried Mother to my place?

NUN: I came straight from my nunnery to see you.

YUYING: Please take a seat.

Here let me pay my due respects.

NUN: Young mistress, how do you spend your days since His Excellency left home?

YUYING: I've been working on the embroidery of a quilt.

I've been sewing a pair of mandarin ducks.³

With golden thread I sewed the characters;

with bright green floss I stitched their pretty wings.

Look, the branch is entwined in flowers,

flowers twine around the branch.

NUN: Young mistress, does this pattern have any special meaning?

YUYING:

It represents betrothal to a man.

The birds' eyes won't be done until that day.⁴

NUN: This piece of work must have consumed a lot of time.

[Universal Happiness]

YUYING:

The mandarin ducks stand for lifelong trust.

NUN: Young mistress, why don't you find a rich man or a young scholar for your husband? Even if you don't want to marry into his family, you could certainly find one willing to marry into yours.

YUYING: Mother, you've touched a painful spot.

Ohoo, that is a haunting thought.

But my father is now away,
and he did not arrange it previously.
That often makes me toss and turn in bed;
incessant sneezes further torture me.⁵
I am pining away in my boudoir.

NUN: Young mistress, while you're still young, I think you should seize the chance to find a husband to provide for you. (Yuying opens her mouth to speak but words fail her) Young mistress, why not talk to me? It's just between you and me. No one can hear us.

YUYING: It's not that I don't want to find a husband; it's simply that no one will make introductions for me. You know there's a saying that a man without a wife means his home is incomplete, and a woman without a husband means her life is incomplete.

NUN: Young mistress, now I see why you look somewhat thin and sallow.

[Backyard Flowers]

YUYING:

My figure has become slender and slim;
my waistline has reduced a finger-width
– the belt seems to be getting loose,
the skirt-waist has added an extra fold.

Oh, father!

He's been away for such a lengthy time,
without tidings of any kind,
leaving me all alone with trickling tears
to wash away my listless days.
Stitch by stitch I tried to compose a poem;
for the couplets I racked my brains.
On the open letter sheet no words came,
and I had to fold up the empty page.
It's not an invitation to parties;
Meixiang is the only one to address.

MEIXIANG: Lately my mistress has been in low spirits and sleeps badly. That makes her all the thinner. In my opinion she really should find a handsome and intelligent husband. That would be my fortune too.

NUN: You're right. You're right. Young mistress, you must make up your mind. Don't waste your youth.

[The Willow Leaf]

YUYING:

Whom d'you think I can trust this matter to?
This predicament pales my rosy cheeks.
How can I know who is to be my mate?
For I, Li Yuying, am a virgin girl,
and Mother, you're above such worldly cares.
For all you said, there's nothing you can do.

NUN: Young mistress, just now you said a woman without a husband means an incomplete life. What if your father doesn't come back in ten years? Are you going to wait ten years for him to make marriage arrangements? What about twenty years? Wait twenty years? You would be too old by then.

[A Verdant Song]

YUYING:

I'm not that kind of picky choosy girl,
but marriage is an honest earnest thing.
Though it's suggested one should wed in time,
I'm as pure a virgin as flawless jade,
not a plucked-off flower or a snapped-off branch.
How could I behave like a lovesick wench,
willing to throw herself into any arms?!
I'll not disgrace myself to find a man
by scaling walls or crawling through a hole!⁶

NUN: Young mistress, it won't really matter as long as the man you find is a good one.

YUYING: Where can that man be?

NUN: He's Squire Liu, the one your father borrowed money from. He's from a respectable family and is a millionaire. Isn't he a good one?

[Parasitic Grass]

YUYING:

You say he's from a respectable home,
and his heaped-up riches are past compare.

NUN: Your father borrowed ten silver ingots from him, and now the principal and interest have added up to twenty ingots. It's time to pay back.

YUYING: Let him wait till my father returns. What has it to do with me?

He can only get money from the loan.

NUN: He said you're a co-signatory to the IOU.

YUYING:

But it was not a contract for marriage!

NUN: The IOU has me as the guarantor. He said he'd drag me before the magistrate. I'm a nun. I shouldn't be a guarantor of a business deal. You aren't going to let me suffer because of you, are you?

YUYING:

I would shoulder the blame instead of you.
Even if he possessed a hundred mints,
he couldn't strike a love chord in my heart.

NUN: Young mistress, if he really takes the matter to court, it'd be a horrible loss of face.

YUYING (sighs): We shouldn't have borrowed from him and got you involved. How old is this Squire Liu?

NUN: He's twenty-three. Many families have tried to marry their daughters to him, but so far he hasn't found one to his liking. That's why he's still single.

YUYING: What does he look like?

NUN: He's quite a handsome man. Exactly your match.

YUYING: Well, I'm afraid I have to accept this proposal.

NUN: Since you agree, come to my nunnery tonight. I'll ask Squire Liu to come as well to have this marriage settled. Then the ten-ingot debt will be cleared, even if it were a hundred ingots.

YUYING: Mother, take this mandarin-ducks quilt with you. He who has the quilt has my future. You may go now. I'll come later. (She hands over the quilt)

NUN: Young mistress, don't be late, and don't go back on your word.

玉清善婦送駕為奴



做關公華

MEIXIANG: I'll go with my mistress tonight. When they're married, I'll have a future, too.

YUYING: Meixiang, this isn't something where you should tag along.

[Coda]

Your nunnery should be a holy place.
 How come it's turned into a trysting ground?
 Two souls are united behind the screens;
 the mandarin ducks' new life will unfold.
 What am I to say on this blushing night?
 My virgin body is preserved like ice;
 now it's to melt before the vernal branch.
 Oh, young gallant, I have a word to say,
 a modest wish:
 Do not abandon me at dawn's first ray.

(Exeunt Yuying and Meixiang)

NUN: I thought the young lady would turn down the proposal, but she did agree to it! I must hurry back to Squire Liu's place with this quilt to tell him the good news.

(Exit Nun)

(Enter Liu)

LIU: I sent Mother Liu to Miss Li with the IOU and with a marriage proposal. She should be back by now.

(Enter Nun)

NUN (greets Liu): Congratulations, Squire Liu. Miss Li has agreed to a rendezvous with you at my nunnery tonight. She gave me this quilt with embroidered mandarin ducks as a token of faith.

LIU: So it's true! Many thanks, Mother. After the marriage tonight, I'll give you a substantial reward.

*I racked and cracked my brains to find a wife;
 Like mandarin ducks I'll be paired tonight.*

NUN (smiling): It's said:

*Ill fated, face to face, they'll fail to meet;
 For lovers, fate can bridge a thousand miles.*

(Exeunt)

ACT II

(Enter Nun with a neophyte)

NUN: I've had it arranged that Squire Liu will come to my nunnery tonight to meet with Miss Li. But a patron happens to have invited me to his home tonight to preside over a service. If I turn him down, I may lose an important food source. Neophyte, listen. That mandarin-ducks quilt belongs to the daughter of Prefect Li. She's coming to our place tonight for a rendezvous with Squire Liu. She may be the first to arrive. When she knocks, open the gate to let her in. I'm going to a patron's to hold a service.

(Exit Nun)

NEOPHYTE: Master is gone and it's already dark. Who knows when that Miss Li will come. Let me close the gate. It's said:

*I close my door and lock the moon without;
The plum trees shall be master of the court.*

(Exit Neophyte)

(Enter Liu)

LIU:

*Nothing can disturb my heart,
Yet it flutters for something.*

It's already dark. I have an assignation with Miss Li at Pure Jade Nunnery. I must go now.

(Enter a patrolman)

PATROLMAN: I'm a night patrolman. It's dark and quiet all around, but just now I saw a figure hurry past. He must be a thief. I should catch him and hang him up on a beam in the guardhouse. When we turn him in to the magistrate tomorrow morning, we can be sure of getting a good reward. (He arrests Liu)

LIU: Oh, heavens! What lousy luck!

(Exeunt)

(Enter Zhang Ruiqing)

ZHANG:

*Mountains rise like stairs to the sky;
Trails eventually peter out.
To seek a dwelling for the night,
Ask woodcutters across the stream.*

My name is Zhang Ruiqing, a native of Gusu.⁷ I'm on my way to the

capital to take the final round of the imperial examination, and now I've reached Luoyang.⁸ It's dark already. I must find a place to put up for the night. People told me there's a Taoist nunnery ahead, named Pure Jade Nunnery. I might be able to find lodging there. Since I'm leaving early in the morning, I don't think that will cause them too much inconvenience. Let me knock. Is there anyone there?

(Enter Neophyte)

NEOPHYTE: Let me open the gate. So you've come, Squire Liu.

ZHANG: That's odd. There must be some scandalous goings-on in this nunnery. Well, that gives me an idea. Yes, Mother. Don't light the lamps.

NEOPHYTE: I won't. I know how to handle things when the young lady comes. She should be coming soon.

(Exeunt)

(Enter Yuying)

YUYING: I'm Li Yuying. I've made an appointment with Squire Liu at Pure Jade Nunnery tonight. I'm a virgin girl. It's so embarrassing!

[Base Tune Perfect]

I can't help feeling jumpy jittery,
for I'm not used to walking in the streets,
much less edging along the walls at night.
Now I see why it's said lust makes one bold.

[Rolling the Embroidered Ball]

What am I doing?
Is this decency?
I didn't ask heaven about his will.
Hopefully, this marriage was predestined
– he made for me
and I for him.
Though that's a puzzle gnawing at my heart,
sincerely I look forward to a happy bond.
But why no light shines through the windowpanes?
Why have suspicious clouds obscured the moon?
Well, that at least frustrates observing eyes.

Here's the gate of the nunnery. I must call out. Mother, please open the gate.

[Enter Neophyte]

NEOPHYTE: It must be the young lady. Let me open the gate. Young mistress, why are you so late? You kept me waiting such a long time. If it were winter, my feet would be frostbitten.

YUYING: Young mother, is Squire Liu here?

NEOPHYTE: He's waiting for you inside. I've made the bed and spread out the mandarin-ducks quilt for you. Everything is ready for your wedding night. Don't forget what I'm doing for you.

YUYING: I certainly won't.

NEOPHYTE: Now I'm helping you, in the future you must help me find a nice man too.

[Removing the Shirt]

YUYING:

Don't chit chit chat chat in the open air,
blattering endlessly before the steps.

Honestly, tell me whether he has come.

As a nun, you shouldn't be kidding me.

NEOPHYTE: He's been waiting quite a while. No kidding. You'd better hurry.

[Liangzhou Minor]

YUYING:

Mother, I implore you to lend me strength.

Pity me, this parentless little girl.

I'm so scared that my hands and feet are limp.

My legs won't budge;

my heart seems sizzling in a red-hot pan.

NEOPHYTE: Young mistress, relax and trust me. We're all the same.

[Ditto]

YUYING:

What should I say to someone never met?

My hand is on the door, my face inflamed.

NEOPHYTE: Hurry up. He's waiting inside.

YUYING:

Don't push so hard and urge me on;
 fear has seized and entrapped my legs.
 Since it is just past the initial drum,⁹
 I could as well turn round and go back home.

NEOPHYTE: Let me make an announcement for you. Sir, mistress has come. I'm leaving her with you.

[Exit Neophyte]

ZHANG: So I've guessed it! Miss, if I had known you were coming I should have gone out to welcome you. Please forgive me for this inattentiveness. Take a seat please. (Aside) Since this is really happening, I must act accordingly. (To Yuying) I appreciate your sincerity.

YUYING: I hope you'll never abandon me.

ZHANG: If I turn out to be such a heartless man, let there grow an abscess as huge as a bowl on the head – [aside] of that young nun. What the fuck has it to do with me?

[A Reading Companion]

YUYING:

I often let the pins slip from my hair,
 for there is none who cares about my looks.
 Unquenchable tenderness fills my heart;
 tiny beads of sweat soak my handkerchief.

What if someone should happen to come here?

ZHANG: Miss, no one would come at this late hour. There are just the two of us.

YUYING:

Excited, I forgot to bolt the door.
 I hear scraping footsteps approaching us.

ZHANG: Miss, you're too nervous. Nobody is coming. There's nothing to fear.

[The Smiling Monk]

YUYING:

So it was the iron bells clinking on the eaves;
 it was the naughty draft rustling the hanging scrolls;

it was a bird disturbing the raspberry bush;
it was the court bamboos scratching their slender stems;
it was moonlight shimmering on the window screen.
They gave my trembling heart a wild wild jump.

ZHANG: If in the future I win an official position, you'll be a titled lady,
wearing a coronet and robe and riding in a four-in-hand.
YUYING: I hope you'll keep your word.

[The Stupefied Scholar]

He tries to bluff me with impressive words,
and yet I'm too amazed to trust my ears.
Ah, sir, quit that big talk to charm a girl.
What if we're seen?
What if we're caught?
We shall be put to public shame.

ZHANG: Miss, the day is going to break. You'd better go home now. I'll
surely repay you for this unforgettable night.

[Rolling the Embroidered Ball]

YUYING:

Just hold a moment, Mister Liu.
There's a question I want to ask.

ZHANG: I'm no Mister Liu. My name is Zhang Ruiqing.

YUYING (furiously):

So every word you uttered was a lie!

ZHANG: I wasn't lying.

YUYING:

Don't treat me like a drifting flower on the waves.¹⁰

ZHANG: Miss, I'm really Zhang Ruiqing.

YUYING:

You're not the person I'm supposed to meet;
your name does not match the one I expect.
You stole and cheated my innocent heart.
Who the devil are you, you shameless rogue?

ZHANG: Miss, I won't disgrace you. When I win an official position, you'll be

a titled lady.

YUYING:

What was done tonight cannot be undone.

Never again will I visit this nunnery.

Oh, heavens! I may die of shame!

May I ask, young scholar, where you're from? What's your name? And why are you here?

ZHANG: Miss, since we've become man and wife, there's nothing to hide between us. My name is Zhang Ruiqing, a native of Gusu. I'm on my way to the capital to take the final round of the imperial examination. My route leads me through Luoyang, and as it was getting dark, I happened upon this nunnery and decided to put up for the night. Thanks to the arrangements of heaven and earth, we encountered each other and are thus united in wedlock. Miss, tell me who you are so I can come and pick you up after the examination.

YUYING: I'm the daughter of the former prefect of this prefecture. My maiden name is Li Yuying. A year ago my father was impeached and he was summoned to Court to stand trial. Upon his departure he borrowed ten silver ingots from Squire Liu for his traveling expenses. And now the principal and interest add up to twenty ingots. Squire Liu is pressing for the money and he's threatening the mother of this nunnery – she is the guarantor of the loan – that he'll bring her before the magistrate if I do not pay back the sum. I can't let Mother Liu suffer for me – it really had nothing to do with her. As a kind of settlement, Mother Liu said Squire Liu would be more than willing to take me as his wife, and therefore I made a date with him at this Pure Jade Nunnery. That's why I came last night. Who knew you showed up for the rendezvous! Since I've given myself to you, it would be totally wrong to marry him. I'll just go home and wait for you to return.

ZHANG: So all is clear now. Miss, I happen to be single too. If I'm successful in the exams and can get an official position, I won't forget what you did for me tonight. You'll be my wife. Now I must be leaving for the capital. Miss, can you give me something as a keepsake, or rather, as a betrothal gift?

YUYING: Yes, you're right. Scholar, look at this quilt. This pair of necking mandarin ducks was embroidered by my own hands. Take it with you.

When I see this quilt again, I'll know my husband has come for me.

ZHANG: Thanks. I'll take it with me. Dawn is breaking. I must be leaving.

You can go home and wait for me in unwavering faith.

YUYING: Scholar, don't forget me. Come back as soon as you can, no matter whether you get an official position or not.

ZHANG: Believe me. Heaven be my witness.

[Coda]

YUYING:

The essays you present before the throne
will arch like perfect rainbows in the sky.

I wish you come out at the top of all,
holding a court-tablet¹¹ before your chest.

Flowers decorate your official hat;
you come tipsy from the imperial feast.

Then you're appointed to official post,
and I become your titled bride

– I'll be riding a carriage you a steed.

Won't we be the couple most admired!

(Exit Yuying)

ZHANG: Zhang Ruiqing, is this a dream you're dreaming? How come you find a wife at this nunnery? And here's this quilt with a pair of embroidered mandarin ducks! If I can win an official position, I swear I'll come back for a formal wedding ceremony to show her how indebted I am. I can't linger. It's time to continue my journey to the capital. A poem says:

*A person's life is predestined,
As his marriage will verify.
Like mating swallows in springtime,
We are phoenixes in the sky!*

(Exit Zhang)

(Enter Neophyte)

NEOPHYTE: Miss Li and Squire Liu have been cooing all night, leaving me alone and unable to drop off. I can't help feeling really turned on, and I can't wait till my master comes back. Let me be master of myself and go to look for a sturdy young man somewhere in the neighborhood. A poems says:



*Squire Liu demanded an absurd return;
Miss Li came for a secret rendezvous.
On their example I shall seek a monk
So that I too can blitbely bill and coo.*

(Exit Neophyte)

(Enter Liu)

LIU: How could I have run into such bad luck – caught on my way to a tryst by a damned night patrolman! Instead of sweet pleasures, I was detained at the guardhouse and hung on the beam all night! I've sent for Mother Liu. Why hasn't she come yet?

(Enter Nun)

NUN: Squire Liu seems eager to see me. Last night he must have had a good time with Miss Li. So here I am. I'll go in. (She greets Liu) Congratulations, Squire Liu.

Your hat shines bright;

You get a bride.

Your hat wears plumes;

You are a groom.

Now it's time to buy me a new coat and a new habit.

LIU: Your mother's farts! Who said I met her?

NUN: What?! You feasted on the food and dare say you didn't have a bite? You didn't meet her?! You aren't suggesting I went for the rendezvous, are you?

LIU: Don't wrong me. I didn't even get a glimpse of her.

NUN: You stand straight and watch my eyes. Open your mouth and stretch out your tongue. You didn't screw her! Why is it wet?

LIU: She's mistaking my mouth for her cunt.

NUN: Last night I happened to be called away to a patron's place to conduct a service, so I asked my neophyte to open the gate for you. How can you say you didn't go?

LIU: I was intercepted halfway by a damned night patrolman. He accused me of breaking the curfew and locked me up in the guardhouse. I was hung on the beam all night! I swear I didn't make it to your nunnery!

NUN: If it wasn't you, who was it then that went to my place and coupled with Miss Li? Squire Liu, yesterday I told my neophyte that she should usher you into my sitting room to wait for Miss Li and you two could get intimate there. If you didn't go for the appointment, which scoundrel

grabbed the opportunity?

LIU: Mother, since she's already had sex with somebody else, she's now no better than a cheap cracked jar. She can no longer give herself airs. You go and bring her here. Let her be my wife, publicly. If you can make it, I'll still stand by my word and give you a substantial reward. Hurry and come back quick. A poem says:

*I ponder over the disgrace,
But can't give up the pretty face.*

NUN:

*The trouble is the night patrol,
Who beat the hot wind out your hole.*

(Exeunt)

ACT III

(Enter Liu with a club in hand, together with Yuying)

LIU: What an unfaithful woman you are! That day we had a tryst at Pure Jade Nunnery and I wasn't able to make it. Who knows where came a vagabond, and you allowed him to lay you! Tell me, suppose it had been me, wouldn't you first ask me my name? If the name doesn't match the man you're waiting for, you shouldn't sleep with him!

That famished son of a bitch simply snatched the food out of my mouth!

Well, what is past is past. Now I've taken you into my home and said so many nice things to please and plead with you, how can you still snub me! Whenever I speak to you, you just avoid my eyes and lower your head. Look at your miserable face and look at me. How handsome I am! Will it disgrace you to be my wife? What! You won't? Down on your knees then! Let's see about that.

YUYING (kneels, sadly): Oh, father! It pains terribly!

LIU: She's young and inexperienced. This heavy club in my hand might be scary. That could be the reason why she rejects me. Well, I'll throw away the club. Miss, get up. I won't beat you. I was just teasing. (Yuying rises to her feet) Miss, I ain't bad looking. Why don't you consent? No? Down on your knees again! (Yuying kneels) You're such a pervert! With all my beseeching

and imploring, even that nun, Mother Liu, would have consented. Now give me a clear and definite answer, yes or no? Don't court the anger of my club.

YUYING: I won't marry you as long as I live!

LIU: Think again, think again. Or shall I kneel to you and prostrate myself at your feet? Oh, my goddess, say yes! What? No? Then why should I kneel to you? Aha, I've got an idea. Get up. (Yuying rises to her feet) Well, I have a tavern. Since you don't want to be my wife, you can be the waitress there. Your job is to warm up wine, serve food, clean tables, wipe chairs, and look after the customers. You'll be safe if the customers are satisfied, but if they make complaints, I'll beat you till your two legs become four. You want to know why? Because that's the way to treat a bitch who betrays good people and can't be brought to reason.

(Exit Liu)

YUYING: I'm the daughter of a high official and used to live an easy life. Now I've fallen into his hands, I have to bear all this suffering!

[Fighting Quails]

In grand official mansions I grew up,
 even my bed was finely carved.
 Candles glowed on their silver stands;
 incense burned softly in bronze pots.
 I had a bright array of clothes,
 and utensils of various kinds.
 I left the Temple of Pujju¹²
 only to enter this tavern.
 He's more insensitive than Yingying's mom;
 he's more malicious than Zheng Heng.

[Purple Blossoms Overture]

Now Junrui has left for a distant place,
 so has Hongniang disappeared,
 leaving poor Yingying to herself.
 It was because we lacked sufficient means
 that I now bear insults and swallow shame.
 Indeed this was in part my father's fault.
 He should not have asked me to sign black on white
 – a piece of evidence in others' hand,

which turned a decent family's virgin girl
into a tavern slave!

I'll stand at the door to see if there's anyone coming.

(Enter Zhang Ruiqing)

ZHANG:

*I left with a bunch of books on my back,
And return with a gold fish on my belt.¹³*

*My essays may not bring on such results
But the good deeds I did in previous lives.*

My humble self is Zhang Ruiqing. After I reached the capital, my paper won the top place in the imperial examination. Consequently I was appointed Magistrate of Luoyang County. I'd like to find out how Miss Li is doing while I've been away, so I've taken off my official robe and changed into plain clothes. Now I'm going to make a private investigation. There's a tavern ahead. I'll go in and buy a cup of wine. (He enters) Waitress, get me two-hundred-coins' worth of wine.

YUYING: Coming. Please take a seat, sir, and enjoy your wine. Sir, call me if you need a refill. I'll be in the next booth.

(Exit Yuying)

ZHANG: Why isn't there a waiter? It's strange to find only one waitress taking care of such a big tavern. She looks rather graceful and charming, quite unlike those country dames. A refill would be a good excuse to bring her here. Waitress, another flask.

(Enter Yuying)

YUYING: How much do you want, sir?

ZHANG: Just a moment. I have a question. Are you really the waitress here? You don't look the part.

YUYING: Sir, how did you find out? I'm no waitress at all.

ZHANG: Your looks tell me you were not born poor. So why are you here keeping shop and doing this servant's job? Tell me in detail. I'm curious to know.

[Little Peach Red]

YUYING:

I'm the daughter of a distinguished house;

three generations held government posts.

ZHANG: So you're the daughter of an official. What happened to your father?

YUYING:

My father is an honest, upright man,
which was the cause of hate,
and was summoned to stand trial at the Court.

ZHANG: Is your father still holding an office position?¹⁴

YUYING:

Having reached the position of *zuocheng*,¹⁵
he now in retirement lives.

ZHANG: How long has your father been away?

YUYING:

He has been detained there for several years.

ZHANG: Miss, this is your father's fault. He should have made arrangements for your marriage before he left. How could he make you a tavern waitress?

YUYING: If you aren't already bored, sir, I'll tell you some more about myself.

[The Flirting Minitune]

It's hard to put it into words.

Ah, those smooth-tongued students!

They are the least reliable in the world!

ZHANG: Aren't there any good ones?

YUYING:

Like beasts, they dip from one trough to another.¹⁶

Innocent girls should be wary of those prigs.

ZHANG: So you've had a husband.

YUYING:

His eloquence is merely quotes from books.

In my view it is just archaic fart.

ZHANG: The time he married you he must have sent over a matchmaker with betrothal gifts. How could he abandon you and simply disappear?

[On Three Terraces]

YUYING:

There was no matchmaker or any gifts.

ZHANG: How could there be a marriage without those?

YUYING:

It was a secret and impulsive match.

No one knows when and where the knot was tied.

All I know is I'm an unlucky girl.

I intended to marry Liu Yanming,

and out of nowhere came a Zhang Ruiqing.

ZHANG (aside): It's surprising that she should mention my name. There's something mysterious here. Let me question her further. (He turns around)

Who made the arrangements for you?

YUYING:

It was the busybody Mother Liu.

ZHANG: What's your name, miss?

YUYING:

I'm Yuying who looks forward to her man.

ZHANG (aside): The person she's talking about is me! Well, I must get to the bottom of it. Miss, what's the name of the man you met? Where's he now?

[The Medicine God]

YUYING:

Out goes my heartless man;

in steps a master new.

ZHANG: Who owns this tavern you're working in?

YUYING:

He is a loan shark who loves every coin.

ZHANG: Then why are you working for him?

YUYING:

He laid a trap

and waited till the time was due,

so there was only one way I could go,

and then he pushed me into this abyss.

ZHANG: Miss, he must be coveting your beauty. Is it because you refused him that he's making you suffer?

[The Pockmarked Man]

YUYING:

So often he threatens to break my legs,
 so often he threatens to smash my skull,
 if I refuse to do what he dictates.
 At his bidding here I am serving wine.

ZHANG: Why not consent to be his wife rather than suffer such humiliation?

[Ditto]

YUYING:

For him, I never felt a tinge of love.
 Let him torment me any way he likes.

ZHANG: I don't understand why you refuse to be his wife.

YUYING:

Since I married a Zhang, I'll stay a Zhang.
 How can I step into the door of Liu?

ZHANG: So you're braving it out. Miss, are you the daughter of Prefect Li named Yuying?

YUYING: I am. How do you know me?

ZHANG: You're my sister! You were very young when I left home to seek education, and that was nearly twenty years ago. During all that time I've never been back, and now I've finally found you. Sister, you haven't told me yet why on earth you're suffering at this place.

YUYING: Let me tell you, brother. When father was summoned to the capital, he didn't even have enough for his traveling expenses. So he asked Mother Liu of Pure Jade Nunnery to solicit a loan of ten silver ingots from a Squire Liu, and I was asked to co-sign that IOU. Father has been away for quite a long time and the principal and interest added up to twenty ingots. Squire Liu was pressing for the money, and as Mother Liu was the guarantor, he threatened to bring her before the magistrate if I do not repay the debt.

On the other hand he made it clear through Mother Liu that if I consented to be his wife, that debt of twenty ingots could be considered a betrothal gift. So I had to agree to a rendezvous with him at Pure Jade Nunnery that night. But at the appointed time he didn't show up. Instead

there came a young scholar named Zhang Ruiqing, and he and I were thus engaged. After that, he set out for the capital to take the imperial examinations, and I was forced to come home with Squire Liu. But as the old saying goes: "A horse can't bear two saddles; a cart can't leave four tracks," how can I be wedded to two men! That's why I'd rather die than be his wife. And he's punishing me by making me a waitress at his tavern. Brother, you must help me!

ZHANG: I see. Don't worry. I'll take care of things. You just call Squire Liu here.

YUYING: Squire, come over here. My brother has arrived.

(Enter Liu)

LIU: Who's calling me? (To Yuying) What did I say? You can't bear it any longer, right? I knew you'd change your mind sooner or later. I'll buy sweet rice-balls for you.

YUYING: My brother wants to see you.

LIU: Where is he?

YUYING: This is my brother.

LIU: You two do look alike. Both of you have a nose.

ZHANG: So you're Squire Liu. How much does my sister owe you?

LIU: The loan was ten silver ingots and now the principal and interest total to twenty ingots.

ZHANG: What's twenty ingots! I'll pay it for her.

LIU: Dear brother-in-law, did you know your father had engaged her to me?

ZHANG: If that is the case, come to my place in three days with the betrothal gifts: lambs, wine, red silk flowers and so on for a formal ceremony. That would be the proper procedure for a wedding.

LIU: That really sounds like a brother-in-law. Forget those twenty ingots. They're written off. Boys, prepare a banquet. I'd like to have a good drink with my brother-in-law.

ZHANG: Thanks, but don't trouble yourself. Sister, come home with me.

YUYING: Oh, heavens! I never thought I'd live to see this day.

[Coda]

My brother is to clear the debt for me.

A predicament thus resolves itself.

Now I have a big brother at my side,

I can wait unworriedly for my man.

(Exeunt Yuying and Zhang)

LIU: I didn't know I had a brother-in-law. He's a nice man. I'll take lambs and wine to his place in three days to bring the bride home. Then she'll be a willing wife. A poem says:

*To be man and wife
I kill dogs and frogs.
Glee on wedding night
Depends on the cock.*

(Exit Liu)

ACT IV

(Enter Zhang Ruiqing and Yuying)

ZHANG: Fancy me acquiring a sister at a tavern. Tell me, sister, do you really owe Squire Liu silver?

[Minitune from River Xin]

YUYING:

He, a notorious loan shark of the town,
won't let you go until your debts are cleared.
He contrives a scheme when he frowns;
he drives a bargain when he speaks.
Be you the toughest of all rogues,
you have to pay back every cent.

ZHANG: Sister, it's father who borrowed from him. So he should ask father to pay back. If you're not willing to marry him, he can't force you to do that.

[Coy Steps]

YUYING:

It's all because I signed that IOU
that he asserts I should become his wife.
But my fidelity would never shift,

in spite of tortures of a thousand kinds.
Now I've returned home safe and sound,
I thank brother for my deliverance.

ZHANG: Sister, can you make me a cup of hot tea?

YUYING: Of course.

(Exit Yuying)

ZHANG: Now I'll spread the mandarin-ducks quilt on the bed and make an excuse that I'm going out for a drink. When she sees the quilt, she should know who I really am. (He unfolds the quilt)

YUYING (reenters with a cup of tea): Brother, here's your tea.

ZHANG: Sister, I'm going out for a drink. You may make my bed up for me in case I get tipsy and need to take a nap.

(Exit Zhang)

YUYING: Brother went out for a drink. I'll make his bed before he comes home. (She makes the bed)

[A Wild Goose Alights]

His baggage is simple but clean and neat.
His room reflects a polished taste
— a lute hangs on the whitewashed wall,
a long sword stands beside the bed.

[Minitune of Victory]

Here I hang up his sea-green gown,
and unfold his wisteria mat.
I lay the pillow on the bed,
and lift up his embroidered quilt.
My eyes are puzzled by the sight.
It is the quilt embroidered by myself!
How can its presence be explained?
Never did I expect to find it here!

That's strange. This is the very quilt I embroidered and gave to Zhang Ruiqing. How come it's in my brother's possession? I must ask him when he returns.

(Enter Zhang, pretending to be drunk)

ZHANG: I'm drunk. Sister, where are you?

YUYING (supporting Zhang): Brother, you seem to have drunk a bit too much. What would you like to have for dinner?

ZHANG: I won't eat anything. I'm drunk.

[Shopping for Sweet Wine]

YUYING:

I wonder what's the food he used to eat.
Can he manage with pickles and coarse rice?
If you're thirsty I've iced a honey drink,
and a question is balanced on my lips.

ZHANG: Sister, you don't need to hesitate.

YUYING:

I must prelude my bluntness with a smile.
(She smiles)

ZHANG: Don't stand there grinning. What do you want to ask me?

[Peaceful Minitune]

YUYING:

Brother, I beg you to be frank with me.
Who on earth gave you this embroidered quilt?

ZHANG: It's from my sister.

YUYING:

Besides me, do you have other sisters?
Besides you, I have no other brothers.
I, Yuying, cannot stand a fib or lie.
Here I am kneeling at your feet.
Honestly tell me where this quilt is from.

ZHANG: What makes you so interested in this quilt?

YUYING: Brother, this quilt was mine.

ZHANG: Suppose it was. Don't you recognize me?

YUYING: I don't.

ZHANG: I'm Zhang Ruicong.

YUYING: How I missed you! And for three days you made me call you brother!

ZHANG: I'll call you elder sister for ten days in return. Let me close the door

so we can have a good talk. (He drinks)

YUYING: Zhang Ruiqing, this reunion fills me with so much joy!

(Enter Liu)

LIU: It's three days already and time for me to go to the Li's to collect my bride. Why is their door so tightly closed? I'll kick it open. Wow! What are you two up to?! She's my wife!

ZHANG: She's my wife!

LIU: Your wife? You pretended to be her brother just to abduct a respectable woman. I'll take you before the magistrate!

(Exeunt all)

(Enter Prefect Li, followed by Zhang Qian¹⁷)

LI:

*For three vain years I was detained at Court;
Now I'm returned to Luo¹⁸ in hat and robe.
My dear peers, do not pin your hope on luck;
Your grave is where you may redeem your name.*

My old self is Li Yanshi. I was impeached by the State Secretariat and detained in the capital for three years. As fortune has it, His Majesty is most benevolent and omniscient. He announced that the impeachment was groundless, and the prosecutor was demoted and exiled. Not only did he let me resume my office as Prefect of Henan, but also gave me a gold badge and a sword. That means I'm granted *carte blanche* to execute any corrupt official without his prior permission. Now I've reached Luoyang. Zhang Qian, who are those making such a ruckus over there? Bring them here.

QIAN: Yes, sir. All you there, come over here.

[Enter Liu, Yuying and Zhang] (They kneel before Li)

LIU: Pity me, Your Excellency. Give me justice.

LI: Aren't you my daughter Yuying?

YUYING: Father, is that you?

LI: How is it you're involved in this brawl?

YUYING: Father, don't you remember you borrowed ten silver ingots from Squire Liu the time you left for the capital? The principal and interest now add up to twenty ingots. Since I lacked the means to repay him, he forced me to be his wife. Father, give me justice!

LI: Who's this man?

YUYING: He is the man I engaged myself to after you left home.

ZHANG: I'm Zhang Ruiqing, the newly appointed magistrate of Luoyang County.

LIU: Oh, my! I'm finished! It's said: Officials cover each other's asses.

LI: How could there be such a scoundrel? Zhang Qian, get the heaviest rod and give him forty strokes. Then send him to the justice department.
(Zhang Qian performs the flogging)

[Too Many Flowers]

YUYING:

He thinks his money can buy anything
and gives him bluffing power
to force a virtuous girl
to yield and be his wife.
He scolds me all the time,
and beats me as he likes.
Even murky rivers have limpid days.
How can one's luck be always down?

[Ditto]

I suffered so much at his hand;
now I'm to get revenge.
The thick and heavy rods
will serve him forty strokes.
Then at the court of law
he will be fairly judged.
Money may buy the gods;
the law cannot be bent!

LI: Zhang Ruiqing, come with me to my official residence. Today happens to be an auspicious day, a good day for a wedding ceremony. Let's have lamb and wine for a grand wedding party.

(They arrive home. Zhang and Yuying perform the wedding rites)

[River Qing Interlude]

YUYING:

Considering the briefness of one's life,

happy moments are scarce and rare.
Now dad and daughter reunite,
so do the scattered man and wife.
Today must be the most auspicious day!

LI:

*The man who tries to take a wife by force
Now ends up condemned to the pillory.
There's no question that a debt must be paid,
But the rich can't thereby abuse the poor.
Thank heaven that I've managed to return,
And get a magistrate for son-in-law.
Let's prepare a banquet of lamb and wine
To celebrate my daughter's wedding day.*

BANNER TITLE:

***The man from Gusu fills the wedding night;
The quilt with mandarin ducks is misplaced.***

¹ Prefect: the chief magistrate of a prefecture, a level of jurisdiction between the province and the county.

² These are the opening lines of *Lao Zi*, the principal work of Taoism.

³ It is popularly believed that mandarin ducks are mated for life. The paired ducks thus are a symbol of true and lasting love, somewhat similar to turtledoves in English literature.

⁴ It is a common belief that the painted animal, most often the dragon, would not gain life until its eyes are painted. The eyes therefore are kept for a ceremonious finishing stroke.

⁵ Grassroots wisdom holds that one sneezes because there is someone thinking about him or her.

⁶ About marriage Mencius says: One must obtain permission from parents and be introduced by a matchmaker. If one peeps through a hole or a crack at the other sex, or even climbs over a wall to meet, then one will be despised by parents and countryfolk alike.

⁷ Gusu: the ancient name for the City of Suzhou, about 80 kilometers west of Shanghai.

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- ⁸ Luoyang: the capital city of the then Henan Prefecture, and a major city in present-day Henan Province.
- ⁹ The initial drum, or the first drum, is at about 8 p.m. Please refer to *The Eastside Neighbor*, Note 21.
- ¹⁰ An expression suggesting a loose woman.
- ¹¹ Refer to *The Bubbles Bear Witness*, Note 10.
- ¹² The Pujia Temple is the setting of *The Western Chamber Romance*, a well-known story and play. This and the following six lines all refer to that story, in which Yingying and Zhang Junrui are the heroine and hero respectively, Hongniang is the maid to Yingying, and Zheng Heng is Yingying's would-be husband chosen by her father.
- ¹³ A kind of ID badge issued to high officials in the Tang and Song dynasties. It was made of either copper, silver or gold in the shape of a fish, and hung on the belt.
- ¹⁴ This and the following two lines seem out of place and illogical. They may be the result of miscopying when editing different editions.
- ¹⁵ *Zuocheng*: the fourth highest rank on the nine-rank scale of the Tang Dynasty. Here it merely refers to a high official position.
- ¹⁶ When feeding, draft beasts are in the habit of pushing against each other and reaching into neighboring troughs. Here the analogy is drawn between the beasts and men who are unfaithful to his wife.
- ¹⁷ Zhang Qian: a common name for any male servant to an official.
- ¹⁸ Luo is short for Luoyang. See Note 8.

A Late-Born Son

by

Wu Hanchen

INTRODUCTION

Little is known about the playwright Wu Hanchen, except that he was a native of Jinan, the capital city of present-day Shandong Province. There are altogether 12 plays attributed to him, but of the three extant, the authorship of two are controversial. *A Late-Born Son* is the only one through which we can have a sure look at his accomplishment.

The play is about a rich man called Liu Congshan. At age 60, he is facing the disturbing problem that he is going to die without a male heir, though he has a daughter and a nephew, the latter his wife dislikes and drives from home. The announcement of his concubine Little Plum's pregnancy inspires jealousy in his wife and becomes a threat to his son-in-law, both of whom readily accept the story made up by his daughter that Little Plum has eloped.

His hopes dashed to pieces, Liu concludes it is all because of his career in business and his craving for wealth that he has offended the gods. Consequently, he decides to give away his money to the poor at Kaiyuan Temple.

At Qingming Festival, Liu and his wife are aggrieved to find that their son-in-law, who is to inherit the huge family property, does not come to sweep the tombs of their ancestors, while the only person who has come to perform the memorial rites is the ousted nephew. Liu makes use of the sorry sight to awaken his wife to the bleak prospects of the family future. The nephew is asked to come back and the daughter and her husband are driven out.

At his birthday party, Liu is surprised to learn that under his daughter's secret arrangements Little Plum has safely given birth to a boy, and at long last he is rewarded with a son.

Liu Congshan's self-reproach is clearly a reflection of the social prejudice against businessmen. He sings:

There's no honesty in the business world,
and kindness is simply a luxury.
It is my insatiable love for wealth
that withers and uproots my family tree.

— Act II "The Inert Baton"

INTRODUCTION

The Quilt with Mandarin Ducks shows us the social disparity between the businessmen and officials. Liu makes an even more forceful comparison:

The businessman makes money multiply;
the scholar changes plain dress for purple robes.
But if we take a long-term view and judge,
it's the official who has high prestige.
People admire the winners in exams.
A salesman's sweat will never lead to that!

— Act II “Rolling the Embroidered Ball”

More importantly, this play vividly portrays the humiliation and apprehension of an heirless man. Being sonless was almost a sin in Chinese culture, and the cause of it was traditionally attributed to the evil one had done in either his present or past lives. More than two thousand years ago Mencius unequivocally stated: “Of the three most unfilial things, heirlessness is the worst.” Much of China's population problem and the disproportionate ratio of male to female births can be further understood in this light.

A Late-Born Son

CHARACTERS

LIU (*zheng mo*), Liu Congshan, a rich man

MRS LIU (*jing*), wife of Liu Congshan

YINZHANG (*dan*), daughter of Liu Congshan

ZHANG (*chou*), husband of Yinzhang

YINSUN (*chong mo*), nephew of Liu Congshan

PLUM (*cha dan*), Little Plum, concubine of Liu Congshan

XINGER (*chou*), a male servant of the Lius

BEGGAR A (*jing*)

BEGGAR B

BEGGAR C, a young beggar

ELDER, a town elder

CHILD, the son of Little Plum and Liu Congshan

THE WEDGE

(Enter Liu Congshan with his wife, his daughter and her husband, his nephew, and his concubine Little Plum)

LIU: My name is Liu Congshan, a native of Dongping Prefecture. I'm sixty this year. This is my wife. Her maiden name is Li. She's fifty-eight. This one is my only daughter Yinzhang.¹ She's twenty-seven. This is her husband. His family name is Zhang. He's thirty years old. I also had a younger brother named Liu Congdao. This is his only son, Yinsun. (Sighs) Poor child! My brother died early, leaving the child with his mother. She was from the Ning family in Cai Prefecture. As she and my wife were not on good terms, she took her son back to her parents' place to observe the mourning period. She thought in that way she could not only depend on the support of her parents, but could also earn a little money and send this child to school by taking odd jobs, such as washing and sewing. But unfortunately, she died too, leaving this child alone in the world. "Why cling to us?" his maternal relatives would often say scornfully. "You have an uncle in Dongping Prefecture. He's quite well off. You should go live

with him."² So they gave him some traveling expenses and sent him off. He carried his mother's remains on his back and managed to find his way here. I paid a modest sum out of my own pocket to have her buried beside my brother. And now their child is twenty-five already. Oh, but my wife! As she hadn't got along well with his mother, she shifted her bitterness onto the child. On the slightest pretext she would scold or even beat him. She just can't bear the sight of my nephew.

MRS LIU: Who said I can't bear the sight of your nephew?

LIU: I wasn't starting an argument. I was just saying you should be more prudent, or it might scandalize our neighbors. Yinsun, you're a clever boy. You don't need me to make it plain, right? There's a two-roomed thatched hut on the outskirts of town. If you find it hard to live under the same roof with us, you can clean it up and move there. You could earn a living by collecting a group of village boys to teach.

MRS LIU: Keep your eyes off my property. I need that hut to keep my donkey.

LIU: Why must you keep that donkey?

MRS LIU: I feed him and in return he'll plow the fields for me, he'll pull the millstone for me, he'll carry grain and hay for me, and I can ride him here and there. Isn't that reason enough to feed him? If you like, Yinsun can have one room.

LIU: Listen to that! Well, one room is okay. Son Zhang, go and get two hundred ounces of silver in banknotes³ for Yinsun.

ZHANG: Okay.

MRS LIU: Do I owe him something? He can't have two hundred. One hundred will be enough.

LIU: As you say. Give him one hundred ounces.

ZHANG: Okay. Here's one hundred. He's no good at business dealings. I guess I can pocket twenty ounces. Yinsun, you poor son of a bitch, you'll never be somebody in your life. Take this bloody money.

LIU: Yinsun, here's one hundred ounces of silver in banknotes. Learn to be thrifty. Child, be a man.

YINSUN (accepting the money): I'm most grateful to you, uncle and aunt, sister and brother-in-law. (He steps out) Now I'm outside the gate. My uncle intended to give me two hundred and my aunt said no. She told Zhang to reduce it to one hundred, and that Mr Zhang is well known for his dishonesty in money matters. I'd better count the bills. Sixty, seventy,

eighty. Only eighty! I must go back and tell uncle. (He steps in)

MRS LIU: Are you coming to return the money? If you don't want it, you can give it back to me.

YINSUN: I just want to make clear how much uncle gave me.

LIU: I gave you one hundred ounces.

YINSUN: But there's only eighty here.

LIU: Son Zhang, I told you to give Yinsun one hundred ounces. Why did you give him only eighty? Did he owe you twenty?

ZHANG: Father, it was one hundred.

YINSUN: Here's the money you gave me. You can count it yourself.

ZHANG: Let me count. Seventy, eighty. (He flings out his sleeve) Isn't that twenty? You must have dropped it.

YINSUN: You just tossed it out of your sleeve. Uncle and aunt, I'll never again enter your house, even if I'm dying of hunger and cold. Sister and brother-in-law, I must thank you for all the trouble I've given you.

Now I'm out of their gate for good. My uncle took care of me because my father was his brother, but my aunt couldn't bear the sight of me. She'd either scold or beat me every time she saw me. She has a soft spot for her son-in-law.⁴ However good he may be, he's a Zhang; however bad I may be, I'm a descendant of the Lius. Oh! Why should I accuse him or her? It's my fate! A poem says:

I look up at the sky and sigh;

I look down at the earth and cry.

People gather around the rich;

Poverty sours the family ties.

(Exit Yinsun)

LIU: Yinsun is gone. I would have liked to divide my property between my daughter and nephew, because I'm quite aware of the saying that a man's lifespan is eight by eight, that is sixty-four years, and a woman's is seven by seven, that is forty-nine years. That's how much one can reasonably expect. If that is true, I only have four more years to live, while Little Plum is only twenty. She's meek and submissive. That's probably why my wife can put up with her and allowed me to take her as a concubine. Now she's pregnant, I wonder whether it's a boy or a girl. It worries me to think that the family property I've amassed may actually turn out to be the cause of discord among my children after my death. Better make things clear today in order to prevent future quarrels. Son Zhang.

MRS LIU: So you remember your son-in-law now your nephew is gone?

LIU: Do you know what I want to say?

MRS LIU: What do you want to say?

LIU: Son Zhang, you're my son-in-law. You've been married into my family for ten years now. In our old age, we have but an only daughter. Child, you won't abandon us, will you? From this day on, you move in and live with us.

MRS LIU: Child, you should thank father.

LIU: See how pleased he is! Now, Son Zhang, bring out all the IOUs into the courtyard, no matter whether they were signed recently or long ago, and add up the total.

ZHANG: Here they are. I've collected all of them.

LIU: Little Plum, bring a lamp here.

PLUM: Here it is.

LIU: Burn all the receipts. (Zhang tries to save some out of the fire) Oh, no! You could burn your hands doing that. Child, is money so important to you?

MRS LIU: Old man, have you forgotten that when you were young, you traded between the north and the south trying to make a profit? You traveled by horse and by boat, you crossed rivers and sailed seas to expand your business. That was how you built up such a huge estate. These papers are all receipts for loans. How can you commit them to the flames without once discussing the matter with us?

LIU: What do they count for? Altogether, they're no more than a trifle as compared to the hundred thousand ounces of silver of our family property.

MRS LIU: A hundred thousand at the very least.

LIU: Now, I'm dividing up this hundred thousand. Half of it goes to Yinzhang and her husband. My wife takes care of the other half.

MRS LIU: You two should thank father.

ZHANG: We thank you, father.

LIU: See how pleased he is! Wife, now put away this half. People in Dongping Prefecture used to say Squire Liu is a miser. He's loaded but won't spend a coin. Wife, let's spend this half of the money with our old friends and neighbors, and enjoy our lives for the few years that remain to us.

MRS LIU: Well said, old man. Well said.

LIU: Wife, I want to go and stay on our farm for a few days.

MRS LIU: Boys, harness the horse and see master to the farm. You don't have to worry about household affairs. I'll take care of everything. Go and have a good time.

LIU: Wife, I have something to say.

MRS LIU: Old man, what do you want to say? Speak it out.

LIU: I'll be waiting on the farm for you to send me some good news. Wife, do you see that Little Plum bears an analogy to something?

MRS LIU: Tell me what it is.

LIU: Wife, this girl is like a vat we borrowed to make wine.

MRS LIU: What makes you think she's like a borrowed vat?

LIU: Isn't she like a vat borrowed from a neighbor? Once the wine is made, you return the vat to its owner. Wife, now she's in the family way. Whether she gives birth to a boy or a girl, it'll be your child. After that, it's up to you to decide whether to keep her, to sell her or to give her away.

MRS LIU: I see what you mean.

LIU: Wife.

MRS LIU: What else, old man?

LIU: Wife, this Little Plum has no way with words. If she should offend you and deserve a beating, for my sake, just give her a scolding.

MRS LIU: Why make this fuss about her? I know what to do.

LIU: Wife, I just said if this Little Plum should offend you and deserve a scolding, just give her a warning.

MRS LIU: Old man, put your heart at ease and go. I said I know what to do.

LIU: Wife.

MRS LIU: Old man, are you still going on about Little Plum?

LIU: Wife, look at the ashes. Look at the ashes.

MRS LIU: Old man, just now you burned up all the old and recent loan receipts. Are you caught up in regret?

LIU: Wife, you don't know what is weighing on my mind.

[Watching Flowers]

Why did I burn up the two-hundred-ingot loan receipts?

Because I want to change my sixty years of heirless fate.

Wife, what do you think I'm like?

I feel like an old tree that sprouts new shoots.

Wife, Little Plum gives me some hope,

and you can see she's a kind-hearted girl.

Wife, what do you think she's like? She's like the tender sprout of a vegetable. All you need do is sprinkle it with fresh water from time to time.

Wife,

please don't pour boiling water over it.

(Exit Liu)

MRS LIU: I know. Boys, lead the reins and see master to the farm.

(Exeunt all)

ACT I

(Enter Zhang and Yinzhang)

ZHANG:

*Happiness doesn't come
Without a host of woes.*

I'm Zhang. This is my wife Yinzhang. Why did I marry the daughter of Squire Liu and agree to be his half-son?⁵ It was simply because the old man has an estate as vast as the sky and he was without a natural son and heir. I had my eyes on his property. But lately the old man has taken a concubine, Little Plum, and she's now pregnant. If she gives birth to a girl, she'll take half of the family property, but if it's a boy, I'll have to hand over everything. If that happens, all my sweat and pains would be wasted.

YINZHANG: Zhang, why are you always frowning these days?

ZHANG: There's something you don't know. To tell you the truth, it was all because your father didn't have a son that I agreed to be his half-son. That means after his death, the entire family estate would be mine. But now he's got Little Plum pregnant. If she gives birth to a girl, I won't mind letting her have half of the estate. But if it's a boy, I'll have to give him everything with both my hands spread open. All my sweat and pains would come to naught. I can't help worrying about that.

YINZHANG: Zhang, you're not alone there. In fact, I've been thinking about it too. What if we get rid of Little Plum?

ZHANG: You're more than a wife to me. You're as good as a mother! Tell me

your plans.

YINZHANG: I'll tell mother that Little Plum went out to buy silk floss for embroidery and took that chance to run away.

ZHANG: That's a good idea.

YINZHANG: Then let's talk to mom. Mother!

(Enter Mrs Liu)

MRS LIU: Dear, what's the matter?

YINZHANG: Mother, this morning Little Plum said she was going to buy matching color floss and she took that chance to run away. I didn't lay a finger on her.

MRS LIU (sighs): You must know how much hope your father has placed in her. At an advanced age he finally sees signs of having an heir. He's now waiting on the farm for me to send him the good news. How could this have happened? Have you two got anything to do with it?

YINZHANG: She left early in the morning soon after she got up. What has it to do with us?

MRS LIU: If Little Plum is gone, we must let father know. Boys, hitch up the donkey to the cart. You two come along with me to the farm.

(Exeunt)

(Enter Liu, followed by Xinger)

LIU: Ever since I came to live on the farm, I've been expecting good news from my wife. A man shouldn't grab what doesn't belong to him in this world, for retribution will catch up with him in old age. I remember, when I was young I used to get up early and work late into the night. Oh, how much time and effort I put into trading! But all the time as I planned and plotted, swindled and cheated, I must have been planting the seeds of retribution. Who knows what is in store for me?

[Painting Cherry Lips]

With money one seeks more,
so he leaves home to trade,
in hope it quickly grows,
and rolls in from all ports.
Thus he piles up eternal moral debts.

One day when my old woman was invited out by friends, Little Plum suddenly sidled up to me and said, "Daddy, I've got something to tell you.

Would you like to hear it?"

"What is it? Just tell me," I said.

"I'm six months pregnant," she said.

"Little girl, don't talk nonsense," I warned her. "If my wife hears you, she'll beat you to death."

"I dare not lie to you," she replied.

"Is what you said true?"

"Yes," she affirmed. So I immediately sent for a midwife.

[A Roiling Dragon]

A midwife came to feel her pulse.

"You should buy me new clothes," the midwife announced after she had felt the pulse. "Tell me first," I replied, "and then I'll buy you new clothes."

"Congratulations, old man!" she said.

The pulse, she said, shows every sign of a boy.

I patted my forehead to thank my luck.

Gone are the worries that had pestered me.

To have a wayward son to see me to my grave
is far better than have a girl to sweep my tomb.

In the past I so often broke my word;

I profaned Buddha and the gods,
insulted monks and Taoist priests.

As punishment I am deprived of sons
and have declined into this sapless age.

To get a son I have tried every means.

I chanted scriptures for my soul,
and gave alms to atone for sins.

I consulted midwives and herbalists,
and was ready to bow to any pile of clay.

Sons and grandsons are no light matter.

Physical strength seems not the key to birth;
it's up to the arrangements of the gods.

Xinger, you went back to town yesterday. Did you hear people of my generation talk about me?

XINGER: Sir, I went to town yesterday to buy cooking oil. I heard the older generation say that if you get another daughter, they won't make a fuss; but

if it's a son, they'll put you on a donkey, whip you with straw, and parade you through the streets. They'll also expect you to invite them to a grand celebration party.

LIU: Xinger, don't kid me.

XINGER: How would I dare?

LIU: Ah! Even if they didn't actually say that, my guess is they wouldn't hesitate to do it.

[The Glib Cricket]

The dogmatic pedants and family heads
are likely to brew up such cruel mischief.

I can guess what they're saying behind my back. They say that old guy Liu Congshan has hoards of money, but it pains him to spend a coin. If he has another girl, so be it. But if it's a boy, we should humiliate him in public.

They would whip and parade me through the streets.

Little Plum, if you can give me a son,

I'll gladly offer flowers and incense to the gods,
and throw lavish banquets for friends and folks.

I'd rather ride a donkey through the streets
and be whipped with straw,
anything but be called the heirless Liu.

Let whatever rods kiss and smack my butt.

[Universal Happiness]

Even if the boy were born handicapped,
I would have nothing to complain about,
for that would be the lot destined for me.

Oh, heavens! By my reckoning, today is the expected date of birth, and it's already late into the day. Is my Little Plum in difficulties?

She doesn't have to wait for an auspicious hour.

If only I could rock and cradle him,
say, at the cost of dropping in my grave,
I would then be the most contented ghost.

Xinger!

XINGER: Sir, I'm here.

LIU: Go to the gate to see if there's anyone coming this way.

(Enter Mrs Liu, Yinzhang and Zhang)

MRS LIU: Here we are. Xinger, tell master I've come to visit him.

XINGER: Sir, madam is at the gate.

LIU: She's finally come! Xinger, have a sheep butchered and ready. Ask her to come in. Ask her to come in.

XINGER: Yes, sir. Madam, master invites you in.

MRS LIU [to Yinzhang]: Dear, wait here. I'll go in and talk to him first. I know what to say. (She greets Liu) Old man, this rest on the farm must have done you a lot of good. Nothing to trouble your ears.

LIU: Take a seat, please. Glad to see you. Glad to see you. Is it a boy?

MRS LIU: A good boy he is!

LIU: Don't kid me. Tell me whether Little Plum gave birth to a boy or a girl.

MRS LIU: I hope you won't be annoyed by what I have to say.

LIU: I won't. Just tell me.

MRS LIU: After you left for the farm, everyone in the family has been courteous toward Little Plum, for your sake at least. Nobody beat her, nor even scolded her. But this morning soon after she got up she made an excuse to buy floss and ran away.

LIU: She ran away?! Don't scare me. That's enough kidding. Is it a boy or a girl? Let me share the good news.

MRS LIU: I'm not kidding at all. If you don't believe me, you can ask our daughter. She's at the gate.

LIU: So Yinzhang has come too. Ask her to come in.

XINGER: Miss, master asks you to go in.

YINZHANG: Zhang, you wait here. I'll go in. (She greets Liu)

LIU: Daughter, glad to see you. Is it a brother? I hope you'll take good care of him.

YINZHANG: Father, what brother are you talking about?

LIU: I mean the child of Little Plum. Of course he won't be as important to me as you are.

YINZHANG: Nobody mistreated her. She eloped with someone.

LIU: She eloped? Why don't you both just come out with it? Are you afraid I can't bear the good news? I guess this is your mother's idea. She told you when you see your father, you should say Little Plum ran away. If you tell him directly he's got a son, the exhilaration would be too much for his old heart. That's your mother's thoughtfulness.

MRS LIU: Little Plum really ran away.

LIU: Daughter, no need to lie to me. What of Little Plum or her son? I've always looked up to you and your husband.

YINZHANG: Father, if you don't believe us, Zhang is at the gate.

LIU: So he has come too. Both you and your mother must be working together to play a trick on me. Xinger, ask Son Zhang to come in.

XINGER: Mr Zhang, master asks you to go in.

ZHANG (greets Liu): Father, it seems being away from home is doing you a lot of good.

LIU: Son-in-law, glad to see you. You're his big brother. Take care of him.

ZHANG: Me, a big brother?

LIU: Won't Little Plum's child call you big brother?

ZHANG: Little Plum? Nobody beat her or scolded her. She eloped because she was afraid of being found out.

LIU: Shut up! How's that possible?

MRS LIU: We told you she ran away and she did run away. Nobody is trying to fool you. She's just a concubine. Why make a fuss?

[Nalakuvara Minitune]

LIU:

Oh, wife! You are the mistress of the house.

Old as you are, aren't you ashamed of what you did?

MRS LIU: I didn't so much as fart at her. What have I got to be ashamed about?

LIU:

You're jealous of her in your heart.

Oh, daughter!

Why don't you abide by a woman's three obediences and four virtues?⁶

Perhaps we pampered you too much.

You're willful and lack self-restraint.

And you, my son-in-law,

tens of thousands are placed in your hand. Isn't that enough? You're as good as sitting in the square hole of the copper coin.

Your heart is gripped by avarice!

(He sobs) You disappoint me!

MRS LIU (sneers): Bah! I didn't crush her under my palm, nor did I clutch her throat and strangle her. She was ashamed of herself and left of her own

accord. Why are you making those grimaces and howling?

LIU:

You have extinguished my remaining hope
that the bitter past
will at last give way to a sweeter end.

[Magpie on a Branch]

You condemned her as an unfaithful girl,
but did you consider my hoary age?

MRS LIU: She's nothing but one cheap maid. What makes you so concerned
about her and talk all that nonsense?

LIU:

She may be only one cheap maid,
but she is carrying my flesh and blood.

Son Zhang,

see what a worthy half-son you have been!

No, I shouldn't blame any of you. It's all my fault.

Heavens! My wealth has ruined my afterlife!

MRS LIU: She's gone. It can't be helped. If you wish, I can find you another
concubine.

LIU: Shut up! How can you say that in front of the children!

[Parasitic Grass]

It seems you cannot understand my woes.

Are you a total stranger to my thoughts?

Let me tell you something. It's said

at age twenty a man can take his pick;

at thirty he with luck can find a wife;

a sonless man at forty is despised.

How can I give up the boy or girl in her womb!

MRS LIU: I'll find you a young one with good looks. You'd still be able to
make her pregnant.

LIU:

I wasn't pleading for a pretty face!

Son Zhang, as soon as you get home, prepare one or two thousand strings

of copper coins in cash.

MRS LIU: Is that a betrothal gift? So you do have a particular woman in mind!

LIU: You can't stop me from marrying one if I want to!

MRS LIU: What's one concubine? Even if you marry ten, I'm still your first wife, and they would all have to wait on me!

LIU: Why should they wait on you?

MRS LIU: How could it be otherwise?

LIU: You didn't contribute to the family line.

MRS LIU: The family line? I also did the washing line!

LIU: Son Zhang, go and put up posters at all the four city gates. Let everyone know I'm going to dole out money to the poverty-stricken at Kaiyuan Temple tomorrow morning. Oh, heavens! From now on Liu Congshan is going to repent and undo his past misdeeds!

[Backyard Flowers]

I was too engrossed in collecting wealth
that now I find myself an heirless man.

One has to pay for one's miserly ways.

Had my heart been more generous,

I wouldn't have come to this dismal end.

Son Zhang, go and put up the posters right away.

ZHANG: All right.

LIU:

I can't wait to part with life's encumbrance.

Let the poor in villages and in town

come to the temple for a share of alms.

The starving can have money to buy rice;

the freezing can have money to buy cloth.

May cold and hunger go away,

and the wretched be free of woes.

MRS LIU: So you're thinking of giving out alms. If you don't, no one will blame you; if you do, no one will be grateful to you.

LIU: You don't understand what a few coins can mean to the poor and homeless!

[A Verdant Song]

They may light up joss sticks and pray for me,

treating me the same as their ancestor.

MRS LIU: For all your sympathy for the poor and humble, for all the money you may dole out and for all the good things you may do, you're still old and won't have many years to enjoy your fame. How many will then know your name and remember you?

LIU: Wife, you think no one will remember me?

It's true I'm almost at the end of life.

After my death please bury my remains
beside an ancient trail among the hills.

Lay me deep underground;
let pines my grave surround.

In case future generations forget my name,
encase my tomb with bricks
and raise a stone in front
with my story thereon.

Then the passers-by will be sad to learn
that there lies Squire Liu who doled out his family wealth.

MRS LIU: Old man, I obey your wish. Come home with me.

LIU: Wife, let's go home.

[Coda]

Of the sixty years I lived in this town,
thirty witnessed an affluent life.

I was obsessed by profit day and night,
but all goes to another family name.

This adversity must be in my fate!

Wife,

it's occurred to me that I must not wait
till the Buddhist services after death.

These next two things might be the cause.

No longer shall I practice usury,
nor use a lawsuit to repudiate a loan.

If I stop doing those two things, heaven above must be able to witness it.

And one day it may bless me with good luck.

(Exeunt)

ACT II

(Enter Zhang)

ZHANG: I'm Zhang. Father told me to prepare cash so that he can dole out money at Kaiyuan Temple. One thousand coins per adult and five hundred per child. Here is the money. It's time to ask father and mother to come and preside over the event.

(Enter Liu, Mrs Liu and Yinzhong)

LIU: Son Zhang, when poor people come, don't let any of them go away empty-handed. Oh, money! You ruined my life!

[Base Tune Perfect]

For you I toiled and moiled half my life.
Through the decades
I hustled and bustled day and night
simply to amass the almighty coins.
Oh, money!
For you I would have liked to build a shrine!

[Rolling the Embroidered Ball]

When I was young
and short of funds,
I even thought of getting quickly rich
by robbing people at the point of knife.

MRS LIU: To make money, you left home and trekked north and south.

LIU: Oh, money!

For you I turned my back upon my parents' tears;
for you I left my wife alone at home.

MRS LIU: Old man, to make money, you traveled to Su and Hang,⁷ and even ventured down the deep south. You risked your life and kept me worrying about you. The money did not come easy.

LIU: Oh, money!

There was no place I didn't look for you;
no efforts were spared in collecting you.
The tiger roaring mountains didn't stop my steps;
the dragon roiling rivers couldn't block my way.
I shudder to recall the past.

Son Zhang, set up a sacrificial table and have the incense burner ready.

ZHANG: All right.

LIU: Wife, let's offer incense to heaven.

MRS LIU: My old man thinks he doesn't have a son because he had no respect for heaven. Now he's going to repent his ways and ask for forgiveness. I'm with you. I'm with you.

LIU: I, Liu Congshan, in business dealings have done many things with a guilty conscience. To atone for my sins I've burned the debtors' papers and today I'm giving away my property. May heaven bless us!

[The Stupefied Scholar]

When I was poor I dreamed of growing rich.

Now rich I find myself without an heir

— a swift retribution for my immoral youth.

Oh, money! For you,

I made empty promises and broken vows.

Now I've come to see

I flagrantly offended the deities.

MRS LIU: So it was a punishment for your cunning and your fraud. Just now why did you throw the blame on me?

[The Inert Baton]

LIU:

There's no honesty in the business world,
and kindness is simply a luxury.

It is my insatiable love for wealth
that withers and uproots my family tree.

Today I'm giving alms to help the poor,
and repenting myself before the gods.

May heaven entitle me to a son!

MRS LIU: You don't need to worry about that. I'll find you another concubine,
and you can have a son.

LIU:

A son will be a comfort in old age.

(Enter two beggars, followed by a child)

BEGGAR A: Man, someone is doling out money at Kaiyuan Temple. If we want to get a share, we must hurry. Let's take this child along and say he's on his own. Then he might be able to get a full share himself, and we can divide it between us and buy ourselves a drink. [To Zhang] Sir, please help us.

ZHANG: Is this child yours?

BEGGAR A: No, he's not our child.

ZHANG: Then he can have five hundred coins himself.

BEGGAR A (dividing up the money): Man, each of us take half of his five hundred. Let's go and buy a drink.

BEGGAR B: This kid is mine! I'm not sharing my money with you! Why don't you have a son of your own?

BEGGAR A: You miserable son of a bitch! We'd agreed on that and now you want to take the lot! Is he really your son? (They quarrel and fight)

LIU: Son Zhang, what's going on at the gate?

ZHANG: Father, it's the beggars. They're fighting over the money.

LIU: Child, not only beggars fight over money, the rich do the same. I'll go over and talk to them in person. Stop quarreling.

[Removing the Shirt]

Why fight when each of you have got a share?

For my sake you should make peace and forgive.

What good will a stiff neck and red face do?

Why must you glower and yell instead of talk?

BEGGAR B [To Beggar A]: Bah! You sonless scum! I despise you!

ZHANG: Shut up, you son of a bitch!

[Liangzhou Minor]

LIU:

He called him a despised and sonless scum.

His venom sent a shudder through my limbs.

(Moaning) It's piercingly painful,

as if he's pouring hot oil on my heart!

Though he flashed an apologetic smile,

I suspect there's a hidden knife behind.

BEGGAR A: Sir, he's already got a share himself and he ripped off a second for his child.

[Ditto]

LIU:

So both the child and father got a dole.

Don't you know one can't enjoy extra gains?

BEGGAR B: I guess I've spoiled him.

LIU:

You should teach him manners at early age.

How can you let him grow up unrestrained?

So not only rich people spoil their young!

BEGGAR C: Daddy, aren't you hungry?

BEGGAR B: I sure am.

BEGGAR C: Let's have something to eat and then come back.

BEGGAR B: You're right. Let's go.

(Exeunt the three beggars)

(Enter Yinsun)

YINSUN: I'm Liu Yinsun. After my aunt drove me away from home, the one hundred ounces of silver they gave me has petered out. Now I'm living in this abandoned brick kiln. To fight against the cold weather, I build a fire and then curl up on the warm ground. I can't even manage three meals a day – if there's breakfast there may not be dinner. I heard that my uncle and aunt are doling out money at Kaiyuan Temple, a thousand coins to an adult beggar and five hundred to a child. If they can give money to complete strangers, they certainly can give me a little, for I'm their nephew. I'm not afraid of going there to ask, but it worries me to think of meeting that Mr Zhang, for he's absolutely sure to say a lot of nasty things. Well, come what may. I'm already at the gate of the temple. (He sees Zhang) Oh, heavens! What lousy luck I have! He's standing right there at the gate. What shall I do? I'd better tough it out and go over to greet him. Brother-in-law.

ZHANG: Where's that waft of pauper stink coming from? So it's you, you poor son of a bitch Yinsun. What are you doing here?

YINSUN: Poor is poor. What pauper stink is there? Brother-in-law, I've come to get a share.

ZHANG: The money is all doled out. There's nothing left for you. Go away!

LIU: Who's at the gate?

ZHANG: It's Yinsun.

MRS LIU: What's he doing here?

ZHANG: He wants to get a beggar's share.

MRS LIU: So he's learned to beg. No money for him!

LIU: Wife, why grudge a beggar a handful of coins?

MRS LIU: Old man, if that poor son of a bitch sees we have so much money here, it may fire his greed. Then how could we satisfy him? (She hides the money)

LIU: Wife, just let him come over. Yinsun, what brings you here?

YINSUN: I heard uncle and aunt were doling out money, so I came to borrow some.

LIU: Wife, lend him whatever sum you think fit.

MRS LIU: Yinsun, if you want to borrow money, you need to get three people, a guarantor, a witness and a law scribe. If you bring those three here, I'll lend you money; if you don't have those three, I won't lend you a coin.

LIU: He's our own nephew. Why need such legal formality?

MRS LIU: If he should die of a sudden illness, how could I get my money back?

ZHANG: Mother, you're right.

LIU: Bah! You bastard! This is none of your business!

MRS LIU: Bah! Are you afraid your promising nephew is going to drop dead?

LIU (pointing at Zhang): Wife, let me ask you. Who's this man related to?

MRS LIU: To me of course.

LIU: And this one?

MRS LIU: He's your relation. It's like the kernel of a walnut – there's a partition separating the two sides of "flesh."

LIU: So he's my nephew. That means if he does something wrong, it's up to me to scold or beat him. It's none of your business.

MRS LIU: Hold it. Hold it. Don't you make a fuss too. Okay, you lecture him now.

LIU: Yinsun.

YINSUN: I'm here.

MRS LIU: Tosh! Yinsun, Yinsun. What's the good of these niceties? Just show me how you're going to teach him. Are you afraid of scaring him witless? Then plug his fontanel with a handful of mud to stop his wits escaping through his skull!⁸

LIU: Do you want to see me beat him to death?

MRS LIU: Nobody's asking you to kill him.

LIU: Then why can't you leave me in peace? Give me those thirteen keys.

MRS LIU: Old man, here are all the thirteen keys. Let's see what you're going to do with them.

LIU: Yinsun, you see these keys?

YINSUN: Yes.

LIU: Daughter, you and Son Zhang come over here. Now you two keep these keys. I'm putting the whole household in your charge.

MRS LIU: You should thank your father.

LIU: See how pleased they are!

ZHANG: Thank you, father. Yinsun, look here. The thirteen keys are all in my hands. If I give you this one key, you'll have enough to eat for a lifetime.

YINSUN: To which door is that key?

ZHANG: It's the key to the east outhouse!

LIU (sadly): Child, what happened to the money I gave you the other day?

YINSUN: As I'd received help from many friends, I used that money to repay their kindness.

MRS LIU: You wretched son of a bitch, you have friends?

LIU: Child, you're not yet in a position to treat friends.

[The Stupefied Scholar]

You lavished your money on friends and flowers.⁹

That's why you've turned out penniless.

You come to beg from relatives. "Uncle and aunt," you beseech, "please help me out."

You plunged yourself into embarrassment!

Ah, son!

You should know how to handle money well.

Rather than looking for investment funds,

you'd better go to teach some village kids.

That's what is right for you.

YINSUN: I've just come to ask uncle and aunt for a loan to start a business.

LIU: Yinsun, it's better to keep on with your studies.

YINSUN: Uncle, I think it's better to go into business.

LIU: Child, listen, it's better to keep on with your studies.

YINSUN: Uncle, it's better to go into business.

[Rolling the Embroidered Ball]

LIU:

Learning expands the outlook of a man;
while money-dealings often make one mean.
Each person carries a potential strength,
you, I think, should apply yourself to books.
The businessman makes money multiply;
the scholar changes plain dress for purple robes.
But if we take a long-term view and judge,
it's the official who has high prestige.
People admire the winners in exams.

What pomp it is to have two columns of uniformed honor guards clearing
the way for you and a canopy above your head!

A salesman's sweat will never lead to that!

Which course is better is as plain as day.

Son Zhang, hitch up the animal to the cart. You take mother and your wife
home first. I'll follow you.

ZHANG: I'm hitching it up.

LIU: Wife, you and Yinzhong go home first. Yinsun isn't learning properly. I
need to teach him a lesson.

MRS LIU: Old man, take your time. We'll go home first. (She moves toward
the exit)

LIU: Son, I was trying to protect you.

YINSUN: Uncle, I understand.

LIU (sobbing): What a miserable man I am!

MRS LIU (returning): Old man, what are you doing? Are you crying?

LIU: Me crying? No.

MRS LIU: Do I see tears in your eyes?

LIU: Wife, at this feeble age, isn't it only too natural to have bleary eyes?

MRS LIU: I didn't know you had that problem. How come it developed so
fast?

LIU: Yinsun, there's a two-ounce bill in my bootleg. Take it. Yinsun, don't
forget to visit our family cemetery from time to time. In a year or two, I'll

make you a rich man.

YINSUN: I'll remember that.

[Coda]

LIU:

One waits on one's parents when they're alive;
one should also learn to respect the dead.

As I have no sons to depend upon,
I look to you to sweep my future tomb.

Beg for the money to buy paper coins,
and solicit for the libation wine.

I hope you'll remember my heartfelt words,
and come to visit my grave every day.

If you refuse to mend your ways,
Yinsun, you will remain a beggar all your life.

(Exit Liu)

MRS LIU: You short-lived son of a bitch, what are you doing here? I'd love to see you drop dead right before my eyes. Don't let me see you at my place again, or I'll break your legs! I hate the sight of you! Old man, wait for me.

(Exit Mrs Liu)

YINSUN: My aunt is gone. My uncle pretended to punish me but gave me a two-ounce bill instead. That may tide me over for a bit back in the abandoned kiln. Oh, heavens! What a wretch I am!

(Exit Yinsun)

ACT III

(Enter Zhang and Yinzhang)

ZHANG:

*Although we say that life is predestined,
You must know how to best employ a chance.
If you do not make some dishonest deals,
Who would bestow on you their hoarded gold?*

I'm Zhang. Life has become so exciting after father placed the keys in

my charge. Now it's the Qingming Festival,¹⁰ one hundred and five days since Winter Solstice. Every family is going to honor the memory of their ancestors and sweep the tombs. I've prepared two baskets of sacrificial food and strips of cured red meat, and have also invited the town elder of our community to join our memorial rites.

(Enter Town Elder)

ELDER: I'm a town elder. Today is the Qingming Festival. Mr Zhang has invited me to join their memorial rites. Mr Zhang, let's go.

ZHANG: Wife, in the past we used to sweep your ancestors' tombs first. This year we'll first sweep my Zhang's family tombs.

YINZHANG: Zhang, we should first sweep the tombs of my ancestors.

ELDER: Elder sister, you're wrong there. Although you're a Liu, your husband is a Zhang. It's only proper to sweep your husband's family tombs first.

ZHANG: Wife, since you're married to a Zhang, you'll be buried in the Zhang's cemetery after your death, not in the Liu's. That's why we should first sweep my ancestors' tombs.

YINZHANG: All right, let's sweep your family's tombs first.

(Exeunt all)

(Enter Yinsun)

YINSUN: I'm Liu Yinsun. The two ounces of silver my uncle gave me the other day have dribbled away. Today is the Qingming Festival. All families, large or small, are going to sweep their ancestors' tombs. I remember that day my uncle said, "Yinsun, don't forget to visit our family cemetery from time to time. In a year or two, I'll make you a rich man." It sounds as if he had buried silver in the graves. Whether he did or not, they are my ancestors. My parents are buried there too. I'm going to sweep the tombs anyway, not because my uncle told me to. Even if he hadn't brought up the matter, I would still go to honor their memory. Although I'm poor, I'm a Confucian student. The classics have taught me what propriety is. I begged these paper coins from the undertaker by making a deep bow at his door, this half bottle of wine from the wine seller, and this loaf of steamed bread from the food seller. I've also borrowed a shovel from a neighbor, and bearing my uncle's words in mind, I'm going to my family cemetery to offer a libation, burn these paper coins, and add a few shovels of fresh earth onto the tombs. Though it's not much of an offering, it'll be a proof of my filial piety. Whilst talking I've reached the cemetery. Squire Liu, just

think, for all your great wealth, there isn't a single person here sweeping your ancestors' tombs. (He kowtows) Grandfather and grandmother, you were successful in life; may you be gods after death. Please accept my respects. This one is my parents' tomb. Dad and mom, your son is flat broke. When you two were alive, you exploited grandfather and grandmother's favoritism and won advantages over uncle and aunt. Now you're both dead, the retribution falls on me. Oh, father! Oh, mother!

*Use only nine tenths of your intellect,
And reserve a tenth for your descendants.
Should you exhaust the last bit of your wit,
Your offspring would survive on benefit.*

Ah! "In a year or two, I'll make you a rich man!" Liu Yinsun doesn't have much to offer you. I'll just pile some fresh earth on your tombs. Look at this shovel in my hand. It puts me in mind of my aunt, whose heart is as hard as iron. She would not be moved even if I cried my eyes out. Now, the enormous family wealth lies entirely in the hands of that Mr Zhang, while I, Liu Yinsun, am living a beggar's life! I've added fresh earth to the tombs. Now to perform the rites, but I have only one loaf of steamed bread. If I give it to my grandparents, I'll have nothing to offer my dad and mom. What if they should fight for this loaf? Well, that's no big problem. I can split it into two. One half for my grandparents, one half for my dad and mom. I sprinkle wine on the ground for a libation and burn the paper coins. Now the memorial rites are performed, I can eat the food. A couplet says:

*From Winter Solstice count one hundred five,
The Cold Food Festival¹¹ in time arrives.*

Look! What a grand spectacle the rich families have put on, while on this side my family cemetery looks desolate and forgotten! I don't have strips of cured red meat. I don't have well-aged wine. All I have with me is this shovel. Anyway, I've honored the annual observance. (He picks up the wine bottle) The wine is too cold to drink. I'll take it to the nearby village and find a place to warm it up. I'll come back later for the shovel. Now let me go and find a place.

(Exit Yinsun)

(Enter Liu and Mrs Liu)

LIU: My old self is Liu Congshan. Today is the Qingming Festival. I'm going to sweep the tombs of my ancestors. Wife, have the children gone to the

tombs?

MRS LIU: Old man, they set out long ago. By now they should have rigged up a mat marquee, had a lamb butchered, made the starch noodles and steamed the bread. The sacrificial objects, the strips of cured red meat should be laid out, and the wine warmed up. The whole clan must have gathered there waiting for us to conduct the ceremony so that they can start the feasting.

LIU: Wife, are you sure our children are there already?

MRS LIU: Old man, they left ages ago.

LIU: Wife, are the children at the cemetery?

MRS LIU: Old man, they're waiting for us there.

LIU: Let's go. Let's go. You see, I was engrossed in talking and nearly went past the place. Wife, isn't that our family plot? Let's go over.

MRS LIU: Oh! Old man, we almost walked right past it.

LIU: Here we are, but where's the marquee, the butchered lamb, the starch noodles, the steamed bread and the warmed-up wine? Where are the sacrificial objects, the strips of cured red meat, and the waiting relatives?

MRS LIU: Maybe they've been delayed.

LIU: Wife, next time if you don't know, just say you don't know.

MRS LIU: I was making it up just now.

LIU: Look at the cemetery. It looks painfully bleak!

[Fighting Quails]

Look at the stone bench and the tombs.

From the brick walls and rammed-earth walls
thistle and thorn have sprouted out.

Where are the pine and poplar trees?

Wife, it seems somebody has just been here to sweep the tombs.

Was it our daughter or nephew,
a close or distant relative?

Look, in front of the barren tombs,
and on the damp ground all around,
there's not the scent of fish or meat,
nor the fragrance of wine or tea.

[Purple Blossoms Overture]

He added only shovels of fresh earth;

the ash of paper coins is thin and scarce,
with tiny wet stains of libation wine.

Wife, isn't this evidence that someone has already been here to sweep the tombs?

MRS LIU: Old man, I guess you're right. It's heartbreaking though.

LIU:

Whoever he is he's a man of faith,
although he leaves behind a sorry trace.
The wet spring has perhaps
encouraged wild grass but discouraged men.
Nothing here shows a thriving family line.
No lines of sheep or tigers carved in stone;¹²
only cattle and horses come to graze.

Wife, never mind the children. Let us pay our respects first.

MRS LIU: Old man, you're right. We won't wait for them. Let us pay our respects.

LIU: Wife, this one first.

MRS LIU: Old man, whose tomb is this one?

LIU: This is my grandfather and grandmother's.

MRS LIU: Grandfather and grandmother, give us your blessing so that our family may prosper and thrive. We wish you an early elevation to heaven.

LIU: Let's pay respects to this tomb.

MRS LIU: Whose tomb is this?

LIU: It's my parents'.

MRS LIU: They're my father-in-law and mother-in-law. You were successful in life; may you be gods after death.

LIU: Let's pay respects to this one as well.

MRS LIU: Whose tomb is this?

LIU: It's my younger brother and his wife's.

MRS LIU: So they were Yinsun's parents! Old man, you've got it wrong. You're the senior. They were younger. How can we kowtow to the younger ones?

LIU: When he was alive, he was younger. Now that he's passed on, it doesn't hurt to say: You were successful in life; may you be gods after death. For my sake, make a few kowtows.



MRS LIU: Okay, okay. As you like. Junior Liu and wife, you two listen in your grave: When you were alive, you exploited grandfather and grandmother's favoritism and won advantages over us. Heaven saw to it you drew a short straw and died early, leaving behind that damned son Yinsun, who often comes to bother us. I wish he'd go limp and get run over by a cart or trampled by a horse. Even better if he dropped dead on the road right before my eyes!

LIU: Wife, what are you muttering while doing the kowtows?

MRS LIU: I didn't say a word.

LIU: Wife, after we've expired, where shall we be buried?

MRS LIU: Old man, I've already selected a site. What do you say to that knoll over there? You see that big tree on it? It looks like a canopy. After we've passed away, we should be buried there.

LIU: Wife, perhaps we can't be buried there.

MRS LIU: Why not? Where else should we be buried?

LIU: Wife, that's not the place for us. We're to be buried over there.

MRS LIU: Old man, that's a stretch of lowland and it's often flooded. Why should we be buried down in that depression rather than up there on the knoll?

[The Flirting Minitune]

LIU:

We are a pair of ancient boughs.

Without new sap the tree will cease to live.

Into oblivion we'll then fall and sink.

According to the rules of *yin* and *yang*,

we should be buried at a barren site.

Wife, on New Year's Day and other festivals,

who'll offer incense to us and shed mourning tears?

Wife, we can't be buried on the knoll because we don't have a son.

MRS LIU: Who says we don't have a son? We have a daughter and her husband.

LIU: Oh, I've forgotten them. Wife, while we wait for them to come, let's have a little chat. Tell me, what's my family name?

MRS LIU: How can you be so old as to forget your family name? Your family name is Liu. You're Squire Liu.

LIU: So my family name is Liu and I'm Squire Liu. What's your family name?

MRS LIU: My family name is Li.

LIU: I'm of the Liu family and you're of the Li family. Why did you come to live with the Lius?

MRS LIU: You surely remember that your parents had sent matchmakers to my family with lambs, wine and betrothal gifts to make me your wife.

LIU: How do people address you now, Mrs Liu or Mrs Li?

MRS LIU: Old man, how can you get so muddleheaded? It's said if you're married to a rooster you fly with it; if you're married to a dog you run with it; if you're married to a tomb you sit on it. When alive, you and I sleep on the same bed; after death, we'll lie in the same pit. This load of bones and bag of flesh of mine all belong to the Liu family. Who would call me Mrs Li?

LIU: So even your bones belong to the Liu family. What's the family name of our daughter?

MRS LIU: She's also a Liu. Her full name is Liu Yinzhang.

LIU: What's the family name of our son-in-law?

MRS LIU: His family name is Zhang. He's called Son Zhang.

LIU: Let me ask you, when our daughter passes on, will she be buried in the Liu family cemetery or in the Zhang family cemetery?

MRS LIU: She'll certainly be buried in the Zhang family cemetery. (Suddenly saddened) Why! Old man, what made you think of that? Really, without a son, we're humbled.

LIU: Wife, at long last you've come to see the point.

MRS LIU: How good it would be to have a Liu with us!

(Enter Yinsun)

YINSUN: I'm Yinsun. Just now I went to warm up the wine, and now I'm back to pick up my shovel. (They spot each other)

MRS LIU: Yinsun, my child, how nice to see you here! Where have you been these days? Why didn't you come to have dinner with us? Your uncle is here too.

YINSUN: Aunt, don't beat me. I came to sweep the tombs.

MRS LIU: Child, I won't beat you. Wait here. I'll tell your uncle of your coming. Old man, big Liu of the younger Liu has come.

LIU: Wife, who do you mean by big Liu of the younger Liu?

MRS LIU: It's our nephew Yinsun.

LIU: Why don't you just call him Yinsun, but twisted your tongue to say "big Liu of the younger Liu?"

MRS LIU: Old man, he's a grown-up now.

LIU: Let him come over. I'll question him. Yinsun, what brings you here?

YINSUN (greet's Liu): Your nephew came to sweep the tombs.

LIU: Wife, listen. He said he came to sweep the tombs.

MRS LIU: Old man, I guessed it was him.

LIU: Was it you who burned the paper coins?

YINSUN: It was me.

LIU: Wife, he said it was he who burned the paper coins.

MRS LIU: It must have been him.

LIU: Was it you who added fresh earth on the tombs?

YINSUN: It was me.

LIU: Wife, he said it was he who added fresh earth on the tombs.

MRS LIU: Old man, I know.

LIU: Yinsun, so it was you who came to sweep the tombs, burn paper coins and add fresh earth upon the tombs. You thought without you, no one else would be coming? You're a disgrace. I must beat you.

MRS LIU (trying to dissuade him): Squire, why are you beating him?

LIU: Wife, don't try to stop me.

{Little Peach Red}

All members of the Liu are buried here,
according to their generation and their age.
Memorial rites are held from year to year.

Yinsun,

at least we're senior to your dad and mom.

MRS LIU (dissuading): Old man, don't beat him.

LIU: Ah!

You growing soft? Let go my angry stick.

I'm beating him for nothing but

his stinginess in holding the memorial rites.

Why didn't he make it a spectacular sight?

MRS LIU: Old man, give him a chance to speak before you beat him.

LIU: Wife, I'll beat him before I give him a chance to speak.

MRS LIU: You give him a chance to speak before you beat him.

LIU: Wife, take your hands off me.

I'm going to beat him before he speaks.

Yinsun, was it you who came to sweep the tombs?

YINSUN: It was me, your nephew.

LIU: Then why didn't you erect a marquee, butcher a sheep, make starch noodles, steam bread and warm up wine? Where are the strips of cured red meat, sacrificial objects, and our relatives?

MRS LIU: My old man is being ridiculous. He doesn't even have money for food and clothes. How could he afford those things?

LIU: You said he has no money. Yinsun, don't you see that over there?

YINSUN: See what?

LIU: Don't you see the farm that stretches as far as a bird can fly? Why don't you go to sweep the tomb that boasts stone sheep and tigers, but come to this cemetery?

MRS LIU: Old man, you're mistaken. Those tombs may belong to the Zhangs or the Lis, but Yinsun is a descendant of the Liu. Where shall he come but here?

LIU: Who did you say is a descendant of the Liu?

MRS LIU: Yinsun is.

LIU: I didn't realize Yinsun was a member of the Liu family. I thought only Yinzhang and her husband were descendants of the Liu.

MRS LIU: Old man, I was wrong. You don't have to keep rubbing it in. Who doesn't err sometimes? I admit I was swayed by prejudice. Child, in the past I scolded you and beat you, but from this day on, you come back to live with us. I'll take care of your meals and clothes. You won't remember those unpleasant things, will you?

YINSUN: Uncle, auntie said she'll no longer scold me or beat me. She asked me to come back and live with you. She said she'll take care of my meals and clothes.

LIU: Who said that?

YINSUN: Auntie said that.

LIU: Your aunt said that! Oh, heavens! Am I dreaming?

[Devil on the Terraces]

When good news falls out from the blue,
it strikes stupid the praying fool.

YINSUN: Thank you, uncle.

LIU: Don't thank me.

You should thank your aunt who has changed her mind.

(Mrs Liu and Yinsun weep)

See how the aunt and nephew wail and moan!
 The hot tears have melted their frozen hearts.
 It was only yesterday when hate prevailed.
 Oh, child, from now on you won't have to beg.

Wife, whose family cemetery is this?

MRS LIU: Old man, this is my family cemetery.

LIU:

Since we are the descendants of the Liu,
 how can we give the estate to a Zhang!

(Enter Zhang, Yinzhang, and town elder)

ELDER: That was a wonderful feast.

LIU: Which family invited you to such a grand memorial feast?

ELDER: It was Squire Liu-Zhang.

LIU: Who's Squire Liu-Zhang?

ELDER: Old man, don't you know that when a son of the Zhang is married
 into the Liu family, he is called Squire Liu-Zhang?

LIU: I must tell my wife that. Wife, our son-in-law has come. Let's go join
 the family feast.

MRS LIU (beats Zhang): What makes you two scoundrels so late? Where have
 you been?

[Purple Blossoms Overture]

LIU:

Ah! You were such a wise discerning mom.

Why do you beat your favored filial son?

Please release him. What wrong did your son-in-law do?

Why don't you first ask him his whereabouts?

MRS LIU: Child, why did I beat you? Because your father was annoyed. Dear,
 why didn't you put on some better clothes?

YINZHANG: These are fine.

MRS LIU: Give me the keys. I'll send the servants home immediately to fetch
 you some nice clothes.

ZHANG: Wife, shall I give her the keys?

YINZHANG: No problem about that. Mother is on our side. Here are the keys.

MRS LIU (takes the keys): You two scoundrels, never step into my door again.

Old man, here are the thirteen keys. I've wangled them back.

LIU: Ah!

Throw the son-in-law out of home;
send the daughter back to her room.
That's fair enough.
Now you can take your wife and go away,
for you've sown discord in my house.
Never again shall you enter my door,
and I no more need to depend on you.

MRS LIU: Old man, here are all the thirteen keys. You'd better keep them and run the house yourself. I'm getting old.

LIU: Wife, you said you're old, but I'm no longer young. Wife, you run the house.

MRS LIU: You think I'm still eighteen? You run the house.

LIU: You run the house.

MRS LIU: Old man, why are we arguing? There's the very person right before your eyes. Old man, what do you say if I give these thirteen keys to Yinsun and let him run the house?

LIU: Wife, isn't it a bit too soon?

MRS LIU: It'll be too late if you wait till we close our eyes.

LIU: Wife, you're right.

MRS LIU: Yinsun, come over here. Here are the thirteen keys. I'm placing them in your charge.

YINSUN: Thank you, aunt. Brother-in-law, stand aside. I can't stand the wafts of pauper stink.

ZHANG: Why can't you forget that?

[The Baldhead]

LIU:

Why should we want a half-son in the house?
As daughter you should know the reason well.
We placed the entire estate in your hands,
and you were to preserve the family line
and keep alive memorial rites.

[The Medicine God]

An episode
of curious turns.

At first you were exultant, we were sad.
 You were mean;
 we were kind.
 Liu's estate should remain in hands of Liu;
 a daughter can have no grounds to complain.

MRS LIU: All household affairs are now in Yinsun's charge. We can go home now.

LIU: Wife, let us go.

[Coda]

It's purposeless to blame or censure her.
 A daughter belongs to another house,
 and I don't want to see her coming back.
 When she sweeps the tomb she will understand.

(Exeunt Liu and Mrs Liu)

YINSUN: Brother-in-law, you couldn't have imagined I'd become the master of this big house. Look, all the thirteen keys are now in my hands. I won't bear you a grudge. Make a bow and I'll give you one of the keys. Then you'll have enough to eat for a lifetime. (Hands Zhang a key) Like it?

ZHANG: Sure do.

YINSUN: You asshole. That's the key to the outhouse!

(Exeunt all)

ACT IV

(Enter Liu, Mrs Liu and Yinsun)

LIU: I'm Liu Congshan. Today is my birthday. This banquet is not only to celebrate my birthday but also to congratulate Yinsun on becoming the young master of the house. Yinsun, could you have imagined this day?

[Minitune from River Xin]

Longevity is cheered with cups of wine,
 but words cannot express my rueful thoughts.
 My life was tangled and virtually choked

by the tough string that ties the copper coins.
The incredible hardships I endured
brought me only a bad name and remorse.

(Enter Zhang and Yinzhang)

ZHANG: I'm Zhang. Today is my father-in-law's birthday. We're going over to pay our respects. Here we are at the gate. Brother-in-law.

YINSUN: Where's that waft of pauper stink coming from? Brother-in-law, what brings you here?

ZHANG: See? I had a hunch you weren't going to live in poverty all your life. We've come to pay respects to father.

YINSUN: Let me announce your arrival. (To Liu) Father, sister and brother-in-law are at the gate.

LIU: Who are at the gate?

YINSUN: Sister and brother-in-law are at the gate.

[River Qing Interlude]

LIU:

So here come my daughter and son-in-law.
But I'm unwilling to invite them in.
Ask them whose money they were living on?
Whose ancestors' tombs did they go to sweep?
They've come to my gate again.
It's as good as an insult to my name.

YINSUN: Uncle and aunt, they should be beneath your resentment.

[The Jade Flute]

LIU:

He is a faithless man.
What he does always nettles me.
Despite our kinship ties,
he never cares about my thoughts.

Yinsun,

– I only want to see Yinsun,
step closer to hear what I say.
If you ever allow these two

散家財天賜老生兒



飯鏡與華華

to set foot in my house,
I swear
I'll condemn you to thirty heavy strokes.

MRS LIU: Old man, since they've come to wish you happy birthday, that means they're still filial. Don't be so harsh on them.

[The Plum-ripening Wind]

LIU:

So you think they are good,
and filial too,
while I'm an old fool to let anger fill my heart.
But how could their conjugal love destroy their filial love?
Yinsun, go and tell them it's not that I'm heartless,
it's what they've done that's driven them from home.

Yinsun, go and tell them they may come in if they're as filial as you are.

YINSUN (to Zhang and Yinzhang): Father said you may enter the house if you're as filial as I am.

[YINZHANG] (calls out): Aunt Little Plum, bring your child to see father.

(Enter Little Plum with a child)

PLUM: I'm Little Plum. Yinzhang is calling me. I'm taking the child to meet his father. (She greets Liu) Daddy, Little Plum and her child have come to see you.

LIU: Can it be Little Plum? Where have you been all this time?

PLUM: Daddy, has our three years' separation erased the many years we spent together?

[The River Goddess]

LIU:

You think three years can erase those many years?
Little Plum, we were so intimate. How could you have run off with someone else? What an ungrateful girl you are! Don't you know
one night's love will last through a hundred more.

PLUM: Daddy, you have a son now.

LIU: Where is he?

PLUM: This is your son.

LIU: Really? Can he really be my son?

Let's no more quarrel over rights and wrongs.

Wife, we now have a son to mourn our death.

Child, call me daddy.

CHILD: Daddy.

LIU:

The sound of "daddy" so enraptures me!

Ah, the jealousy hidden in the heart
and the voracious greed for copper coins
nearly cut the roots of my family tree.

Yinsun, ask your sister and brother-in-law to come in. Daughter, where has Little Plum been these past three years?

YINZHANG: Father, it's a long story. Let me tell you from the very beginning. At the time when Little Plum was six months pregnant, Zhang became jealous and wanted to get rid of her. I thought at your age, if something should happen to Little Plum, that would be the end of our family line. So I sent her away to live at my aunt's place in East Village. There she safely gave birth to this child. During those three years, it was me who took care of their livelihood. A poem says:

*It was because father was credulous
That I took family matters in my hand.
The gray-haired daddy shouldn't blame his girl;
A filial nephew is no match for a son!*

LIU: Child, how would I know if you hadn't told me?

[A Wild Goose Alights]

So blood is always thicker than water.
I regret I did you an injustice.
The son-in-law may be an outsider,
but the daughter's loyal to her maiden home.

MRS LIU: Old man, Squire Liu has a son of his own now!

[Minitune of Victory]

LIU: Wife,
we won't be entombed at a barren site,
for now we have a son to keep the line.

It's like a chronic illness being cured!

YINZHANG: Father, now that you have a son, don't forget your daughter.

LIU:

Daughter, I'm not such an ungrateful man.

YINSUN: Now you have a son, I should return these thirteen keys to you. I'm happy enough to have been a rich man once, even if it had only been one day.

LIU:

You've borne up like a man through hard-luck years,
so decades of wealth are in store for you.

The three of you are all my next of kin.

My daughter, nephew and this boy,

I'll divide into three my huge estate.

All of you listen:

*In sixty years I gathered massive wealth,
Yet I was haunted by my heirless fate.
My brother died unfortunately young;
His only son was driven out of home.
When Zhang schemed to usurp the whole estate,
Daughter protected the endangered line.
At Qingming when we went to sweep the tombs,
The forlornness perturbed the jealous wife.
I made her see the barren burial site;
The alms I gave reward me with a son!*

BANNER TITLE:

***The heirless man gives alms to change his fate;
Providence thus grants him a late-born son.***

¹ If translated literally, "yin" in Yinzhang means "to bring in/about." Zhang is the family name of her husband. Accordingly, Yinsun literally means "to bring in a grandson." Another point of note is that traditionally one word of the given name, or the radical of a word especially if it is a one-word given name, is often used as a generation indication, as

“yin” in Yinzhang and Yinsun, or “cong” in Congshan and Congdao.

- ² The paternal concept of family was very strong in feudal times, as is expressed in the emphasis on the family name.
- ³ Paper currency was in popular use in the Yuan Dynasty.
- ⁴ An old saying that “The mother always takes a shine to the son-in-law” may be a good footnote to the understanding of Mrs Liu’s attitude.
- ⁵ The norm of a marriage in feudal times was for the man to take a wife, and the wife would come to live with the man and his family, but under certain situations, especially when the woman’s family was better off and did not have a son, a man might marry *into* the woman’s family and become a “half-son.”
- ⁶ The three obediences are: obedience to father before marriage, to husband after marriage, and to eldest son should the husband die first. The four virtues are: proper speech, diligent work, modest manner, and high morality. Those are the Confucianist requests of a woman.
- ⁷ Su refers to Suzhou City and Hang refers to Hangzhou City, both large commercial centers.
- ⁸ It was believed that if frightened, the fontanel of a child may crack open to let the soul out.
- ⁹ Flowers here refer to pleasure girls.
- ¹⁰ The Qingming Festival: one of the major festivals in memory of the dead. It usually falls in early April, about the time of Easter.
- ¹¹ Cold Food Festival: a festival in memory of Jie Zhitui, a courtier of the principedom of Jin in the Spring and Autumn Period. The festival falls on the day before Qingming and lasts three days, when no fire is allowed and people eat only cold food. Because of their overlapping period, Cold Food Festival and Qingming can be used interchangeably.
- ¹² This refers to the stone figures lining the paved path leading to the tomb of an emperor or a high official. The sentence means that the family hasn’t been able to produce a person of high social status.

Love at River Bend

by
Shi Junbao

INTRODUCTION

The playwright Shi Junbao was a native of Pingyang in the southern part of present-day Shanxi Province. There are altogether 10 plays under his name; *Love at River Bend* and *Qiu Hu Attempts to Seduce his Wife* are two among the three extant.

Love at River Bend is typical of the young-scholar-and-beauty category. It is based on an earlier story – *Life of Mistress Li* by the Tang Dynasty writer Bai Xingjian (776-826), which goes as follows:

The son of the Prefect of Changzhou was an outstanding student. When he reached the age of twenty, his father gave him a large allowance and sent him to the capital to sit for the imperial examination.

One day, passing through the capital's Jade Chimes Lane, the young man saw a marvelous beauty standing at the gate of a house. He deliberately dropped his horsewhip so that he could linger a few extra moments to stare at the woman, who returned his gaze with warmth.

From informed friends he learned that the woman was a celebrated singer whose family name was Li, and that her patrons were mostly dignitaries. With all the pomp he could muster he paid her a courtesy call, and was allowed to stay. In a year, his money was gone and one after another he had to sell his fine horses, carriage, and even his attendants. The madam of the house started to treat him coldly.

One day the singer suggested that they go to pray for a child at a famous temple out of town. On their way back she said that she would like to drop in on her aunt. While tea was being served, a messenger came rushing on horseback to inform Li that her mother, brought down by a sudden illness, was dying. Li hurried home, leaving the man to discuss funeral arrangements with her aunt. The man returned in the evening only to find the gate sealed up. Neighbors said that the Lis were tenants and that their lease had just expired. He went back to question her aunt and found that the house too had been abandoned.

Anger and shame at being cheated laid him low and he became seriously ill. He was sent to the funeral house to await death, but he gradually recovered. The undertakers gave him a job as part of the procession so that

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he could earn his food. Before long he realized that he could find solace in singing the dirges. As a cultured man, he soon became the best dirge singer in town.

It so happened that funeral houses in the eastern and western parts of the city were in competition. The eastern house had better equipment but no good singer, so the boss offered him twenty thousand to join them. His singing helped the house win the contest. By chance, his father was in the capital for his annual job report. An attendant within his retinue recognized the young man and brought him before his father, who was so enraged by the disgrace he had brought upon the family that he took him to Apricot Garden and whipped him to death.

As they went to bury him, the undertakers found him still alive. They brought him back and fed him, but as his wounds began to fester and reek, they decided to leave him in the street.

His begging led him to Miss Li's new residence. She recognized his voice and took him in despite the madam's protest and offered her twenty years of living expenses to buy her freedom, and they rented a house nearby. As the man gradually recuperated, Li encouraged him to resume his studies though he had by then forgotten most of his learning. Three years later, the man won the first place in the imperial examination and was appointed lieutenant of Chengdu Prefecture.

He was about to assume his new office when Li announced that it was time to end their relations, since her humble status would only blemish his name. The man refused the idea and they came to a compromise whereby she would accompany him to Sword Gate Pass and then return.

At the same time, his father was transferred to Chengdu Prefecture. He was surprised to find that the newly appointed lieutenant was none other than his abandoned son. Impressed by Li's womanly virtues, he endorsed their marriage.

The play, while retaining the main line of the story, nonetheless makes significant changes. The heroine is presented in a more positive way and her character is fuller, while the hero recedes into a secondary position.

The term "singer" might require a brief note. The Chinese word from which it is translated is *ji*, which carries two different but related senses: prostitute and actress-entertainer. It can refer to a wide spectrum of women of the profession, from prostitutes at the bottom to actress-entertainers at

INTRODUCTION

the top end of its scale. The singers in this play belong to the upper class of *ji*. For that reason it is translated into "singer" rather than "prostitute."

Most of the singers were licensed by the government, and in return they were required to provide entertainment on official occasions. Besides singing and dancing, the more celebrated ones were even well-versed in music, painting and poetry. Unlike streetwalkers and brothel whores, the singer usually had a house of her own. The head of the house was known as Mother and had a dual manager-actress, mother-daughter relationship with the singer. Their customer was more like a rich patron and might live in the house. If such a patron should exhaust his resources, he would be driven out, as happens to Zheng Yuanhe in this play.

But life for most singers was not as rosy as this play portrays. One can easily imagine what would happen to them once their youth and health were gone. The dialogue between Li and Peach Blossom Liu offers a hint about the darker side of their life. The very best thing they could hope for was to find a lover who would buy their freedom and marry them.

Love at River Bend

CHARACTERS

ZHENG (*wai*), Zheng Gongbi, Prefect of Luoyang Prefecture

YUANHE (*mo*), Zheng Yuanhe, son of Prefect Zheng

QIAN, Zhang Qian, a male servant to the Zheng family

ZHAO (*jing*), a rich man nicknamed Beefy Zhao

LIU (*wai dan*), a singer pet-named Peach Blossom

YAXIAN (*zheng dan*), Li Yaxian, the number one singer in town

MEIXIANG, maid to Yaxian

MOTHER, the madam of the house of Li Yaxian

ATTENDANTS

THE WEDGE

(Enter Prefect Zheng, followed by Zheng Yuanhe and Zhang Qian)

ZHENG:

*My reputation has spread far and wide,
And is borne by folk lyrics to the throne.
The peasants hoe the green fields after rain;
The dogs lie peacefully throughout the night.*

My name is Zheng Gongbi, a native of Xingyang County.¹ After I passed the imperial examinations and entered officialdom, my career has been on a steady rise, and now I hold the office of Prefect of Luoyang Prefecture. I have a son, named Zheng Yuanhe. He's twenty-one this year. He started school very young and is well read. As the supreme imperial examination² is to be held in this coming spring, it's time to send him to the capital. If he's successful and wins an official position, it'll be glory to my face and family. Zhang Qian, prepare the bookcase and baggage for the young master and go with him to the capital.

QIAN: Yes, sir.

ZHENG: Son, it's summertime now. Take that as a theme and compose a poem to show me your ambition.

YUANHE: Father, please listen:

*One leap and I'll be over Dragon Gate,³
 And reach heaven as if the road were paved.
 The lotus leaves are now the size of coins;
 I'll be home by the time their flowers fade.*

ZHENG: The first two lines do sound ambitious, but the other two are rather unimaginative. Son, one's future depends on one's efforts, and there's no future for a person who grows complacent and gets lazy. I hope you'll be a diligent student, not one who idly watches "one spring succeed the previous spring."⁴

YUANHE: Father, don't worry about me. I'll take my leave right now and set out for the capital.

[Watching Flowers]⁵

I take my learning to the royal seat.
 It's time for a young man to show his worth.
 No doubt I'll top the list of candidates,
 as word after word flow out from my pen.
 My name will resound through the capital.

(Exeunt Yuanhe and Zhang Qian)

ZHENG: My child has left. All I need to do is

*Look forward to the royal flag
 And listen for the victory songs.*

(Exit Zheng)

ACT I

(Enter Zhao and Peach Blossom Liu)

ZHAO: I'm Squire Zhao. My bullheaded way of squandering money won me a nickname: Beefy Zhao. This is Peach Blossom Liu,⁶ a singer and my mistress. It's a fine spring day today, and I've arranged for a picnic in River Bend Park.⁷ I'd like to invite Auntie Li Yaxian⁸ to come and enjoy the spring with us. Miss, why don't you go in person to invite her?

LIU: All right. (She calls out) Sister Yaxian, Squire Zhao would like to invite you to a spring excursion to River Bend Park.

(Enter Li Yaxian, followed by Meixiang)

YAXIAN: My name is Li Yaxian, a singer on the imperial service list. I have a sworn sister called Peach Blossom Liu. Her man has arranged for a picnic in River Bend Park and is inviting me to join them. Spring is really splendid on this third day of the third lunar month.

[Painting Cherry Lips]

A morning shower has washed the verdant fields;
the sunlight gleams warm on the tender leaves.
The soft touch of the eastern breeze
has burst open a pot of riotous hues
against the turquoise blue of distant hills.

[A Roiling Dragon]

Rich is the Lord of the East,⁹
who pays for springtime with a spread of elm seed coins.
Look, young men are engaged in football games;
maidens are playing on the swing
– their fine embroidered shoes show petal stains,
their long red skirts disturb the willow green.
On the carpet I sing and dance;
at the table I drink with guests.
Today I'm out of town,
fresh in the open air.
The beauty of the scene enchants me so
that I sincerely wish
the flowers would never fade,
the moon stay full and bright.

(She greets Zhao) Sir, thank you for inviting me. You do me honor.

ZHAO: Auntie, it's not much to speak of. I had a lamb cooked, so I got the idea of inviting you to a hearty drink in River Bend Park.

YAXIAN: Sir, would you please get some fresh fruit for us?

ZHAO: No problem. I'll get some very fresh fruit right away.

(Exit Zhao)

YAXIAN: Sister, you're one of the best singers in town, perhaps only second to myself. Why are you lowering yourself by associating with such a rustic

boor as this Squire Zhao? What can you find to say to him?
 LIU: Sister, I'm like a blind man leaping over a ditch – I cannot see crash but cash.

YAXIAN: If only it's just a matter of cash!

[The Glib Cricket]

Consumption has seriously wrecked your health,
 and now asthma has caught you up.
 Your powdered skeleton no longer charms
 – your forehead is creased like a wrinkled boot,
 your chest is bony like a palm-leaf fan.

Sister, you know full well

your present patron is a vulgar man,
 wasting his money on your Mother's greed,
 while the ideal young swain you're waiting for
 is slow to present himself at your door.

Sister, let's go over there to watch the flowers. (They walk) Look, sister.
 The peasants are also out observing the Cold Food Festival.

[Universal Happiness]

It's such a balmy spring day for Qingming!¹⁰

Sister,

let's take a leisured walk around the park.
 Here and there lie the ancient tombs;
 horses and coaches fill the paths.
 We walk and savor the appealing scenes;
 we walk and savor the melodic tunes.

Sister, look.

We've wandered away from our picnic spot.

(Enter Yuanhe, riding, followed by Zhang Qian)

YUANHE: I'm Zheng Yuanhe. I said goodbye to my father and have reached the capital with Zhang Qian. The imperial examination is still way ahead. On such a nice spring day, why don't I make an excursion to the famous River Bend Park? So here I am. What a splendid sight! A poem says:

At Cold Food the peach blossoms burn like fire;

Green is the hazy smoke of willow trees.

Gold-bridled steeds neigh in the vernal breeze;

The apricot flushes the maidens' cheeks.

Zhang Qian, do you see those two women over there? One is especially charming and lovely. She has a perfect figure, and her colors are natural and healthy. Even painters couldn't draw a portrait like that. What a beauty she is! (He drops his horsewhip)

QIAN (picks up the whip): Master, you've dropped your whip.

YUANHE: She's really charming and lovely! (He drops the whip again)

QIAN (picks up the whip): Master, you've dropped your whip again.

YUANHE: I see. What a beauty! What a beauty she is! (He drops the whip again)

QIAN (picks up the whip): Master, you've dropped your whip again.

YUANHE: I see.

YAXIAN: That man over there in hat and silks looks quite handsome.

[Nalakuvara Minitune]

Who is that handsome man?

A casual glance,

a casual glance,

has locked the eyes of both,

has locked the eyes of both,

and thrice he dropped his whip.

Sister, I guess he's still innocent about love.

This must be the first time he comes upon

a roadside willow stem or ivy bloom,¹¹

and he is caught by the entangling vines.

[Magpie on a Branch]

Be it ivy, it can bloom bright and fresh;

not all willows let catkins advertise.

The bees busy themselves around the blooms;

the cuckoos cry amidst the twigs.

Spring's hustle and bustle dazzles me,

and induces unconscious drool.

李亞仙花酒曲江池



YUANHE: Zhang Qian, let's go over to the other side of the park.

[Parasitic Grass]

YAXIAN:

Briskly he strolls among the flowerbeds;
dreamily I drift through the willow groves.
It's the swain's first glance at a vernal face;
the face is half-hidden behind a fan.
The fan bestirs the slender willow twigs;
the twigs, can they join the mandarin ducks?
The well-matched ducks deserve a golden nest.

Meixiang, please ask Squire Zhao to come over here.

(Enter Zhao)

ZHAO: Auntie, anything I can do for you?

YAXIAN: Sir, there's a "game bird"¹² over there. Why don't you ask him to join our party?

ZHAO: Which one? (He greets Yuanhe) Hi, Master Zheng! What a surprise to see you here!

YUANHE: Beefy Zhao, please tell me who those two women are.

ZHAO: The better-looking one is Li Yaxian, the number one singer in the capital. The other one is her friend Peach Blossom Liu. She's my mistress. Miss Li asks me to invite you over to join us for a drink.

YUANHE: I'm much honored.

ZHAO: Auntie, I've got him here.

(Yuanhe greets Yaxian)

YAXIAN: May I beg to ask Your Excellency of your name and native place?

YUANHE: My family name is Zheng, and my school name is Yuanhe. I'm a native of Xinyang County, and I've come to the capital to attend the imperial examination. May I ask you of your name?

YAXIAN: I'm a fallen woman from the Pingkang District.¹³ If you've heard of a Li Yaxian, that's me.

YUANHE: I've long heard of your sweet name. What great luck for me to meet you face to face!

YAXIAN: Meixiang, pour us some wine. (She hands Yuanhe a cup) Mr Scholar, bottoms up.

ZHAO: Auntie, I paid for the wine. What about giving me a cup as well?

YAXIAN: Sorry, I forgot to toast you.

YUANHE: Mr Zhao and I are sworn brothers.

YAXIAN: Who's the elder one?

YUANHE: I'm older.

YAXIAN: So you're the elder brother.

[Drunk Midday]

Then you must be Linchuan's new magistrate.¹⁴

ZHAO: I'm the younger brother.

YAXIAN: So you're the younger brother.

It's you who bought the House of Spring's Delight.¹⁵

ZHAO: Auntie, don't you think Miss Liu and I are like the legendary Vega and Altair?¹⁶

YAXIAN:

Indeed, you're an ox led up to the sky,
who lacks the refinement for paradise.
Although Mount Tiantai is beyond my reach,
at River Bend today I meet Liu Chen.

Sister, I must thank you.

LIU: Thank me? For what?

YAXIAN:

If it weren't for your name of Peach Blossom,
how could he trespass in this Peach Spring Cave?¹⁷

YUANHE: Beefy, tell Miss Yaxian that I'd like to spend some money at her place. Would she accept it?

ZHAO: Auntie, just now Yuanhe said that he'd like to spend some money at your place. What do you say?

YAXIAN: Sir, you know what to say, but please warn him that my Mother can be very mean. He must be mindful of the lurking danger.

[Golden Cups]

She sees a hare and lets the falcon fly;
she finishes the lamb and gnaws the bones.
She would drop her eyelids like blinds to shame
whenever money comes within her grasp.
Before long, stabbing pains will grip your head

as you helplessly spread your empty hands.
Recalling the ferry on the full-moon night,
you'll regret you stepped aboard the pleasure boat.

YUANHE: She can't be that wicked. She only wants to earn a little bit more.

[A Verdant Song]

YAXIAN:

Mother appears to be polite and kind,
but inwardly she's shrewd and merciless.
Even if you could stack gold to the stars,
she'd seize all either by a noose of silk
or by the honeyed glue of her words.
She'd put on a smile to relax your guard,
or pretend to be caught in burning need.
She'd slowly grind you like a miller's stone,
or bore into you like an iron drill.
The purchased pleasures won't last many years
before you find yourself a down-and-out.

YUANHE: I'm sure I won't end up like that. If only you let me be your
companion, I wouldn't mind giving her everything I have.

[Coda]

YAXIAN:

I used to dance the most seductive whirls,
and sing songs that arrested passing clouds.
From now on I'll be prudent and discreet.

YUANHE: Please mount my horse. I'll see you home. (He hands her the
whip)

YAXIAN:

It seems that our positions are reversed.
Why do I, a woman, receive the whip?¹⁸

YUANHE: I'll give your Mother a handsome present so that she can't turn me
down.

YAXIAN:

Since we both agreed to a married life,

there's no need to prepare a feast and wine.
You can't expect Mother to set me free,
but I believe perpetual dripping wears down stone
since I'm determined to be a devoted wife.
You need to pay no more than a betrothal gift.

(Exeunt Yaxian, Yuanhe, Meixiang and Zhang Qian)

ZHAO: Master Zheng has gone home with auntie. We should prepare a present and go over to congratulate them tomorrow.

(Exeunt Zhao and Liu)

ACT II

(Enter Prefect Zheng)

ZHENG: I'm Zheng Gongbi. Two years have slipped by since I sent my son Yuanhe to the capital to take the imperial examination. Whether he succeeds or not doesn't really matter, for that more or less depends on one's fortune. What worries me is that he's been away for such a long time without so much as a word from him. It's said:

*Two hearts are tied despite the miles,
Though there is no string in between.*

(Enter Zhang Qian)

QIAN: I've finally reached home. My lord, Zhang Qian kowtows.

ZHENG: I was just thinking about you two. How's my son Yuanhe?

QIAN: My lord, I saw young master to the capital, but instead of taking the imperial exam, he engaged himself to a celebrated singer called Li Yaxian. After he'd spent all the money he had with him, the madam drove him out. And he's now making a living by attending funerals: accompanying the hearse and singing dirges for others. His circumstances are very embarrassing. In order to get back to report to you, I had to beg from town to town. Please give me some money so that I can go and bring young master home.

ZHENG (angrily): What! My son has sunk so low as to accompany the hearse and sing dirges! What disgrace for me! Zhang Qian, saddle my horse. I'll go in person to the capital to see what he's doing.

(Exeunt Zheng and Zhang Qian)

(Enter Yaxian, followed by Meixiang)

YAXIAN: The old hag is really heartless! When she found out Yuanhe was broke, she simply drove him out into the street. No other Mother could have been so cruel!

[A Spray of Flowers]

My Mother has a pair of piercing eyes
with brutality lurking in her heart.
A clump of militant bristles decks her chin;
knife-handle lines¹³ are visible on her palms.
Her heart is venomous beyond compare;
she shows no mercy when it's time to act.
Her eyes are sharp, her hands are swift;
it takes her but one punch to knock you flat.
If you aren't bruised you bleed internally.

[Seventh Tune from Liangzhou]

My Mother outdoes the brain-sucking ghoul,
and takes delight in peeling human skins.
Behind the sweet smiles on her made-up face
lurks a scalpel that cuts you to the bone
and cottoned pins to prick your marrow out.
With false hospitality on her part,
and affected laughs and vows from her girl,
however smart a man may think he is,
he'll find himself a loser in no time.
Then Mother will reveal her fiendish self,
and my patron becomes a walking corpse
— a lover is just one more wretched soul.
Money is dearest to her heart,
but that's the last thing I admire.
Men she prefers are hardly to my taste,
because they are a bunch of rustic rich,
but those I favored can't afford to come.

(Enter Mother)

MOTHER: Ever since I drove that Zheng Yuanhe out, my daughter has

abstained from tea and food, and refused to make money. A bankrupt now, that Zheng Yuanhe scrapes a living by accompanying the hearse and singing dirges. I hear there's a family holding a funeral today. I'm sure he'll be in the procession. Let me coax Yaxian onto the balcony. When she sees Yuanhe so humbled, she'll change her mind and start to make money again. Yaxian, where are you? (Yaxian greets Mother) Child, let's get some fresh air on the balcony. Today a big family is going to hold a funeral. There's bound to be a full array of funeral objects, even paper horses, carriages and houses. Let's go and watch the procession.

YAXIAN: I'm not at all interested in that sort of thing, but I can't stand the old hag's nagging. I'm afraid I have to humor her. Okay, let's go. (They walk)

(Enter Yuanhe and Zhao singing a dirge)

[Mounting a Shy Horse]²⁰

YUANHE, ZHAO:

All of a sudden we were so obsessed
 that we poured money down the whorehouse drain.
 Those guys before us must have learned the truth
 that gold is better spent on storing grain
 than buying oneself into beggary!

YAXIAN: This old hag thinks when I see Yuanhe living in such humiliation, I'll no doubt put him out of my mind. She'd better give up that idea, or I'll give her a tongue-lashing as soon as she opens her mouth.

MOTHER: Child, look at those poor guys. They beg a living by squirting out tears in a funeral procession.

[Quasi-coda]

YAXIAN:

So you think they do that because they're poor.
 Don't sound that innocent.

That's the consequence of a greedy mom.

MOTHER: I wonder whether the dead person is a man or a woman.

YAXIAN:

Does that have anything to do with you?

MOTHER: I wonder how old he was.

YAXIAN:



He probably lived less than fifty years.

MOTHER: Why does he have so few relatives?

YAXIAN:

You should know why few came to honor him.

MOTHER: What kind of disease did he die of?

YAXIAN:

He must have died of dishonestly getting rich.

MOTHER: Isn't that one Zheng Yuanhe? Who is the deceased that he should be crying among the group?

[The Shepherd Pass]

YAXIAN:

It's said a neighbor dies and the whole street mourns.

MOTHER: Look at the mourning garb he's wearing!

YAXIAN:

It proves that plain clothes cannot break his back.

MOTHER: See how he clings to the coffin.

YAXIAN: Who doesn't know he's the son of Prefect Zheng?

The solidity lends him firm support.

MOTHER: He's tolling a bell.

YAXIAN:

The metal sound avows an iron will.

MOTHER: He's singing a dirge.

YAXIAN:

The rhythm means a rise succeeds a fall.

MOTHER: He's carrying the portrait shrine of the deceased.

YAXIAN:

He stands tall in front of a weeping crowd;

soon he will have a mansion of his own.

A coroner may wear a coronet;

to sing a dirge is like composing poems.

(Yaxian and Mother move toward the exit)

(Enter Prefect Zheng, followed by Zhang Qian)

ZHENG: Zhang Qian, where did you say that scoundrel is?

QIAN: He's in this Apricot Garden.

(They see Zhao)

ZHENG: Who's that guy?

QIAN: He's Beefy Zhao, the one who helped young master squander money.

ZHENG: Zhang Qian, beat him. (He sees Yuanhe) Zhang Qian, beat that scoundrel too.

QIAN: I'm but a servant in black cloth-shoes and short socks, and he's the young master. How could I dare beat him?

ZHENG (angrily): Give me the rod. If you don't dare beat him, I'll do it myself. (He beats Yuanhe) What distress!

QIAN: Did I hear you say mattress? He doesn't even have a straw mat! (Yuanhe drops dead)

ZHENG: Yuanhe!

QIAN (puts his hand to Yuanhe's nose): Alas! Yuanhe is no more. He's dead!

ZHENG: Zhang Qian, if he's dead, throw his body into the mass grave. I'm going home. A poem says:

*To the capital to establish fame,
He tumbled headlong into infamy.
Rather than let him live to shame my face,
I might as well accept an heirless fate.*

(Exit Zheng and Zhang Qian)

ZHAO (enters to report): Auntie Li, Master Zheng was beaten to death in Apricot Garden by his father, the Prefect.

YAXIAN (hurriedly runs over): Oh, dear! Are you really gone?

[Scolding the Jade Boy]

YAXIAN:

You were beaten into a bloody mess.
A close look seems to say your spirit's gone.
From the little pools in the nearby ruts
I scoop up the rainwater with my hands
and gently blow it with my mouth
to wash and clean your handsome face.

[The Emperor's Favors]

Now here you lie outside your family grave,
leaving me alone to a dubious end.

(She cries) Yuanhe, wake up. Wake up, please!

Why did you fall for flowers
and make light of your life?
So now in dust you lie.

YUANHE (coming to his senses): Ouch! What makes waking up so painful?

YAXIAN:

Finally you are waking up
– a lucky return of the soul.
(Dazed, Yuanhe faints again)

YAXIAN: Yuanhe, it's me!

YUANHE (sitting up): Miss, aren't you afraid of being the object of others' derision, your Mother's anger and my father's wrath?

YAXIAN:

I do not mind the others' scorn,
nor my Mother's anger
or your father's wrath.

[Picking Tea-leaves]

What I fear is that you may die
and lie abandoned in the wastes,
or that you be ensnared by someone else.

YUANHE: Your Mother is ruthless.

YAXIAN: However ruthless she is,

I'm willing to endure it for your sake.

YUANHE: My father gave me such a beating!

YAXIAN:

It was because you sang, "one spring succeeds the previous spring."

(Mother dashes forward)

MOTHER: You cheap slut, come home with me immediately! You made me look high and low for you.

YAXIAN: You see that stick she's leaning on? Don't mistake that for an ordinary walking stick.

[Coda]

It's a rod that can break the richest man.

And that apron she wears is no ordinary kitchen apron.

It's wet cloth pasted on a captive's nose.²¹
 She's especially pleasant with new clients;
 she's extremely impatient with the spent.
 A kind mother raises a filial child;
 a brutal one bears a rebellious kid.
 Once home I'll show you my resolve.
 I will not hesitate to hang myself
 or cut my throat.
 Then you'll have to appear at court.
 You'll be questioned;
 you'll be tortured.
 The magistrate
 is not benign.
 The officers
 are merciless.
 You'll find yourself in chains and tears,
 and locked in stocks.
 After that
 you'll be pushed out of the gate of the courthouse, and they'll let you
 collapse there. A passerby may ask, "Mother, how can someone at your
 venerable age come to such an end?" And you'll reply, "I'm accused of
 murdering my daughter."

You'll lose every tinkling coin you've ever reaped.

(Mother drags Yaxian offstage)

YUANHE: The old hag has a heart of stone, Li Yaxian has a heart of gold,
 and I Zheng Yuanhe have nothing to look forward to. Just now Yaxian
 seemed to be truly concerned about me, but she was dragged away by her
 Mother. Forlorn and wounded as I am, even begging would be difficult. (He
 sighs) A poem says:

*The old procuress is a heartless hag,
 Leaving me penniless and nearly dead.
 As I've lost any other means of life,
 All I can manage is the beggar's song.*

(Exit Yuanhe)

ACT III

(Enter Yaxian, followed by Meixiang)

YAXIAN: The old hag is really heartless. She coaxed Yuanhe out of his last coin and then drove him out into the streets. It's deep winter now and snow is falling thick and fast. I wonder where Yuanhe is and how he's faring in this freezing weather.

[The Powdered Butterfly]

In the house of the moon and wind²²
 the singing orioles have quieted down,
 because of the viciousness of the bawd.
 The wind has lulled,
 the drizzle stopped,
 gossip and small talk petered out.
 I wonder what will be my destiny
 and what future awaits my dear Yuanhe.

Meixiang, go out to look for Mr Zheng

MEIXIANG: It's all snow and ice. Where could I find him?

YAXIAN: Don't you see

[Drunk in the Vernal Wind]

the ice crust forming in the flower vase
 despite the warm water we'd set it in?
 When the howling wind whips and hurls the snow,
 he must be very, very cold.
 Go and look for him at the funerals,
 at houses of the recent dead,
 or at the graveside of the buried corpse.

MEIXIANG: Okay, I'll go to look for him.

(Enter Yuanhe and Zhao)

MEIXIANG (greets Yuanhe): My mistress has sent me to look for you. Come with me.

YUANHE (greets Yaxian): Miss, what heavy snow! I'm frozen to death.

YAXIAN: Meixiang, warm up some wine for them. (Shivering, Yuanhe and

Zhao drink) Beefy Zhao, would you sit here and look out for the old hag?

Make a cough if she comes.

ZHAO: No problem.

YAXIAN: Yuanhe, you look cold.

[The Twelve Months]

Winter has encompassed the frozen earth;
the sky is sifting crystal flakes of ice.

A piercing wind howls through the empty streets;
one's warm breath freezes right above his head.

What dismal weather!

Though you have the same name as killer Zheng,²³
you didn't do a thing to hurt your wife.

[People of Yao]

And yet you're also in a blizzard caught.
You are a paper pot upon my Mother's flames.
She plucks the feathers of mandarin ducks,
and braises faithful flounders²⁴ scaled and sliced.
To money she has an affinity.

YUANHE: It seems other house madams are not as mean as yours.

YAXIAN:

Those damned procuresses are all the same.

(Enter Mother)

MOTHER: Meixiang, open the door.

MEIXIANG: Mistress, Madam has come. What shall we do?

(Zhao coughs repeatedly)

[Sweet Garden]

YAXIAN:

Ah! My dear Yuanhe can't help being scared,
not because of the coming of the hag,
but that she's a jinx on the lover boys.

There'll surely be an endless clash and row.

It is the death knell for a gentleman!

MOTHER (sees Yuanhe): You beggar chief! What brought you to my place

again? (Zhao makes another cough) Aren't you Beefy Zhao? My house is not a charity institution! Why are we having such a gathering of beggars?

YAXIAN:

Wow! In brothels you catch adultery!
 Now you can judge us by the *Book of Songs*,
 and put us in the pillory.
 Bring us before the Linchuan court,
 and see with whom he'll sympathize.²⁵

MOTHER: Don't you see his circumstances? What makes you keep this penniless wretch at our place?

YAXIAN: Mother, haven't you had enough from him?

[Playing with Children]

Although his gold stack didn't fill the Dipper's mouth,
 your wealth has more than doubled since he came.
 With your affected smiles and sugared tongue,
 you made him empty both his pouch and trunks.

When he had money,
 he was treasured like a piece from your heart.

When he no longer had money,
 he then became a needle in the eye,
 and schemes were concocted to clear him out.

For gains as diminutive as a fly,
 you wrecked my prospect of a happy life.

MOTHER: Look at these brocade coverings and jade screens. Is this any place for beggars to sleep in?

[Pre-coda, three]

YAXIAN:

What of brocade bed coverings and screens of jade?
 Didn't he break his clay jar at your perfume well?²⁶
 Could he fly, he couldn't escape your nets and traps;
 could he jump, he couldn't leap out from this abyss.
 Zheng Yuanhe is a proof of this!

MOTHER: You cheap slut, send him away immediately! Are you waiting for a

good beating?

YAXIAN:

Though you may drive him out beyond our gate,
I'll flood the Great Wall with incessant tears.²⁷

(Zhao coughs again)

MOTHER: Beefy Zhao, when you had money you spent it all on Peach Blossom Liu. You've never spent a coin at my place. Why don't you go and beg from her instead of coming to my place? Don't you have any sense of shame?

ZHAO: Don't forget it was I who introduced Master Zheng to your place. And I've treated Auntie Yaxian to many feasts. If she offers me a cup of wine in return, that's not too much, is it? Madam, how can you be so ungrateful?

(Mother beats Zhao offstage. She turns around to beat Yuanhe. Yaxian shields him)

[Pre-coda, two]

YAXIAN:

May he and I within the same grave lie,
and be reborn together afterward!
No matter how you scold or plead with me,
I would no longer sing and dance for guests,
but rather give up life and luxury.
Despite my humble state I'm proud to say
that we have taken solemn marriage vows,
a moment witnessed by the moon and stars.

MOTHER: Wow! Who do you think you are, Xie Tianxiang?²⁸

[Coda]

YAXIAN:

I'm no less determined than Xie Tianxiang.

MOTHER: But can he compare to the great poet Liu Yong?

YAXIAN: Don't belittle him.

Put beside Liu Yong he is no light-weight.

MOTHER: I know exactly how much he weighs, for I've weighed every bit of him with a steelyard.

YAXIAN:

You evidently tampered with the scales.

MOTHER: To manage a house of our repute, what you wear and what you eat, what doesn't cost money? If you aren't going to make money for me, how shall we live?

YAXIAN: I think Yuanhe has spent quite a lot at our establishment – and that's why he's reduced to such a piteous plight. I'm sure the gods above won't bless those who try to deceive heaven and cheat others, nor those with a guilty conscience. You're now in your sixties. Let's make a deal. I'll give you, out of my share, enough to last you twenty years just to buy myself free. Then Yuanhe and I will leave and rent a house of our own so that he can prepare for next year's imperial examination. I'm sure he'll obtain an official position.

MOTHER: What nonsense! You're in the bloom of youth. How can I let that irredeemable beggar ruin your life! You should do what you're best at – to sing and smile for money.

YAXIAN: Mother, listen. If you don't consent to that,
you'll have to wait eons for me to sing and smile.

(Exeunt Yaxian and Yuanhe arm in arm)

MOTHER: Look at that cheap slut! She goes arm in arm with Zheng Yuanhe! Oh, heavens! How can she put up with such a dirty, smelly beggar? A poem says:

*She refuses to bring in copper coins,
And devotes her love to a handsome rogue.
Perhaps she is drawn by his sweetened voice;
They go arm in arm to the beggars' home.*

(Exit Mother)

ACT IV

(Enter Prefect Zheng, followed by Zhang Qian)

ZHENG: I haven't heard anything about my son since the day I gave him a beating in Apricot Garden. It was reported this morning that the newly appointed county magistrate is coming to pay his call of introduction on me, and his family name happens to be the same as mine. Zhang Qian, go and wait at the gate. Report to me as soon as the new magistrate arrives.

QIAN: Yes, sir.

(Enter Yuanhe in official robe and hat, attended)

YUANHE:

*I finished the essay test in a flash,
And thus won an appointment to Luoyang.
If it had not been for the beauty's help,
I would be a poor outcast on the streets.*

I'm Zheng Yuanhe. I've now made a name for myself, and I owe all this to Li Yaxian. She managed to keep me at her place and encouraged me to study hard. And thanks to my success in the imperial examination, I was appointed magistrate of Luoyang County. I've just assumed my new office, and it's time to pay a courtesy call on my superior, the prefect.

(Zhang Qian announces Yuanhe's arrival. Yuanhe greets Zheng)

ZHENG: Aren't you my son Yuanhe?

YUANHE: Me, your son? How can a high official of your position be so ready to pull rank in terms of age! Attendants, give me the reins. Let's go.

(Exeunt Yuanhe and attendants)

ZHENG: He looks exactly like Yuanhe, but he refused to acknowledge me as his father. Well, it won't be difficult for me to find out who he really is. Zhang Qian, fetch me the resume he just handed in.

QIAN: Here it is.

ZHENG (reads and smiles): So I was right. He's none other than Zheng Yuanhe.

QIAN: I also thought that new magistrate looks like the young master.

ZHENG: I believe it was all because I flogged him in Apricot Garden that he refused to acknowledge me. He thinks that beating was the end of our relations. His resume says he has a wife, and her maiden name is Li. That must be the singer.

QIAN: That's right. Her name was Li Yaxian.

ZHENG: I guess when Yuanhe regained consciousness, it was that singer Li Yaxian who provided for him and encouraged him to study for the imperial examination. And that must be how he gained this position. Judging by that, she must be a good woman. Well, let me pay my daughter-in-law a visit and ask her to talk Yuanhe into acknowledging me. That would make things work. Zhang Qian, saddle my horse and follow me to the new magistrate's residence.

(Exeunt Zheng and Qian)

(Enter Yuanhe and Yaxian, followed by attendants and Meixiang)

YUANHE: Dear wife, at the time I collapsed into a heap of dead ashes, if it weren't for your blowing and caring for me, how could I have regained the fire of life?

YAXIAN: Yuanhe, back then we couldn't have dreamed of a day like this!

[Minitune from River Xin]

The spring breeze fills the bells with mellow tunes;
the swallows chirp and tweet beside the ear.

I used to sing before the feasting men,
and on a carpet dance and swirl.

No more of those voluptuous days,
for I've already seen the worst of life.

YUANHE: Dear wife, though we now bask in luxury, we shouldn't forget how we suffered in the past. Let's give out alms to the poor – a thousand coins to an adult beggar, and five hundred to a child.

YAXIAN: Darling, I've no objection.

[Dead Drunk in the East Wind]

I too have often pondered on this change,
and wondered whether this is not a dream.

In the past, to get one coin was a task,
and now a thousand bushels isn't much.

A more glorious future may lie ahead.
To propagate Buddha's benevolence,
let's scatter the seed for auspicious fruit.

(Enter Zhao)

ZHAO: I hear the new county magistrate is giving out alms. I must hurry there to beg for money, and a free meal perhaps. (He greets Yaxian)

YAXIAN: Why! Aren't you Beefy Zhao?

[A Wild Goose Alights]

Now I'm living a decent life,
but you still live on scraps of food.
You are a poorhouse veteran!

Do you recognize me?

ZHAO: I don't, madam. Who are you?

YAXIAN:

I was a pleasure girl at Jade Chimes Lane.²⁹

ZHAO: So you are Auntie Li!

[Minitune of Victory]

YAXIAN:

Do you remember your pal Zheng Yuanhe?

YUANHE (sees Zhao): Dear wife, who's this man?

YAXIAN:

He was your comrade at the funerals,
who jangled bells to help you learn the trade
of how to sing the dirge and mourn the dead.
That rustic boor,
he thought I would remain a whorehouse slave,
but now,
see how many attendants we command!

YUANHE: Since he and I once suffered together, attendants, give him five thousand coins.

ZHAO (kneels): Your Excellency and Ladyship, I'm most grateful to you.

(Exit Zhao)

(Enter Mother)

MOTHER: Pity me! Pity me!

YAXIAN: Let me see who's crying at the gate. (She sees Mother)

[Paddling on the River]

Below the steps a woman cries aloud.
What's that commotion all about?
Her hair is tangled like a ball of wool,
her eyes are gummed up like saucers of glue,
and her mouth blabbers like a foaming brook.

I think I recognize her.

She is the old hag with a bowel of worms;
she breaks every clay jar within her reach.

(Attendants beat Mother)

MOTHER: Don't break my clay jar!³⁰

[Seven Brothers]

YAXIAN:

Is it because you hate me so,
or bear a grudge
that you've come to disturb my life?
You threw out one after another man.
How come you yourself end up in the streets,
stretching out your palms to solicit alms?

Not long ago I gave you enough to last you twenty years. How could you have fallen into this condition?

MOTHER: A fire broke out and burned up everything I had. So I'm left with nothing.

[Plum Wine]

YAXIAN:

So it was a destructive fire.
You might have been ingenious;
you might have been eloquent.
The pity of all your resourcefulness!
All of a sudden flames broke out,
leaving you only a warmed patch of ground.
What could you have done but helplessly watch?
For money you hatched many noxious schemes,
so heaven now decides to punish you.

YUANHE: For what she did to me, we have every reason to turn her away, but there's one thing where she did show a trace of motherly love, that is, she allowed you to buy yourself free. For that one thing alone, we should provide her with a cottage and a seasonal allowance for food and clothing through her remaining years.

MOTHER: You once gave me money for twenty years and that couldn't survive a single fire. What if there's another fire? Daughter, in my opinion, the best thing is that you continue to make money for me. You're still in

the prime of life.

(Attendants shout her down. Exit Mother)

(Enter Zheng [and Zhang Qian])

ZHENG: Here we are at their residence. Zhang Qian, go in and tell Her Ladyship that I've arrived in person.

QIAN: Madam, His Excellency the Prefect is at the gate.

YAXIAN (hurries out to receive Zheng, and kneels): Please forgive me for not coming out sooner to welcome Your Excellency. We didn't know you were coming.

[Recovering the South]

Ah! A distinguished guest descends on us.

I hastily come out to welcome him.

ZHENG: Child, you must understand why I beat my son in Apricot Garden, don't you? It was only because I wanted him to be a man. But now, after he obtained an official position, he still refuses to recognize me. Child, go and ask him if he can in any way justify himself.

YAXIAN:

As father and son you have fallen out.

So you want me to be the judge?

I can promise you a harmonious home.

My lord, why do you refuse to recognize your own father?

YUANHE: As the teaching goes, there's a natural bond between the father and son. The son may not turn out to be filial, but that's no reason for the father to withhold his paternal love. On the other hand, the father may be harsh, but neither is that reason for the son to renounce his filial duties. Brutal as the tiger and the wolf are, they wouldn't eat their young. That's the law of nature. I disgraced our name by accompanying the hearse and singing dirges for strangers and he gave me a mortal beating. Well, I should say I deserved that and I don't hate him for beating me. I believe my "death" was accidental. But, had he no sense of remorse? He should have tried to save me. Even if that had been of no avail, he should have provided a coffin and clean clothes for me, and buried me properly. How could he have thrown me into the wilderness and let my body sprawl exposed to the elements without the least bit of pity? (He sighs) How could he be so hardhearted! My life was given by my father. But since he has taken it away,

I live only at the mercy of heaven and earth, and of you, my dear wife. It has nothing to do with him any more. Why should I acknowledge him as my father? Whatever love or duty there might have been between us is finished. Wife, don't bring up this topic again.

YAXIAN: My lord, when you were given a mortal beating in Apricot Garden, I had thought of dying with you. But why did I choose to live on? It was because you hadn't made a name in this world. Today, you've successfully passed the imperial examination and entered officialdom, you've brought honor to your family and ancestors, and even my humble self has become a titled lady. But if it were because of my hesitation to die with you then and there that you go against heaven's way and become known as an unfilial son, I could not but be the cause of blame. Then how could I have the face to live in this world any longer? I'd better cut my throat right now with this stiletto.

[Coda]

I fear the twin blooms can no longer last,
and the ties that link our hearts must be cut.
By the ethical code since ancient times
and the judgment of public voice,
I'll be found guilty of colossal sins.
There'll be no way to wash it off.

(She bows to Yuanhe) My lord, my life would no longer be worth living, for people would either say it was all because of Li Yaxian that Zheng Yuanhe disgraced his family had you died in Apricot Garden, or it is all because of Li Yaxian that Zheng Yuanhe now turns his back on his own father.

My cheap origin as a whorehouse girl
would undoubtedly soil your name.
The only exit is to drown myself.
No honorific title could remove the stain!

YUANHE (struggles to take the stiletto away): Darling, why don't you let me finish what I'm saying? For your sake, I'll make up with my father.

ZHENG: That's my son. (Yuanhe and Yaxian bow to Zheng) I'm so happy that my son and I are reconciled, and I've got an admirable daughter-in-law as well. We must prepare lamb and wine and hold a

grand celebration. A poem says:
*No two are closer than father and son;
 No love surpasses that of man and wife.
 A perfect union is now fused between
 The learned Yuanhe and the sweet Yaxian.
 It's at River Bend that their eyes first meet;
 In Apricot Garden they're more resolved.
 Now he has jumped over the dragon gate,
 Leaving behind the song of Lotus Bloom.*

BANNER TITLE:

***Zheng Yuanhe languishes in wind and snow;
 Love hits Li Yaxian at the River Bend.***

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- ¹ Xinyang County: in present-day Henan Province.
- ² The imperial examination system was divided into three levels. The elementary one was the entrance examination for local public schools. The intermediate one was held every three years at provincial towns, and the advanced was held at the capital in the following spring and often personally presided over by the emperor. The number one scholar of the final examination was called the *zhuangyuan*.
- ³ Dragon Gate: a place name on the upper reaches of the Yellow River and an obstacle to the carp on their annual migration upstream to their spawning place. It is said that the fish have to leap over the gate, and if one can jump high enough so as to have its tail scorched by thunder, it will become a dragon. Leaping over the Dragon Gate thus alludes to success in the imperial examination.
- ⁴ This is the first line of *The Lotus Bloom*, a popular ballad sung by beggars. This and the last two lines of Yuanhe's poem drop a hint about later developments.
- ⁵ Note that this tune is not sung by the main character of the play – a departure from the norm.
- ⁶ Women of the profession often adopt a flower as their professional name.
- ⁷ River Bend Park: a famous park in the suburb of Chang'an, the capital city of the Tang Dynasty.

- ⁸ If translated according to the meaning of the words, *ya* means "second (only) to" and *xian* means "angel." In fact, there is no blood relation or generation gap between Zhao and Yaxian. Using family-relation words to address people is a way to show intimacy, and lowering oneself in seniority is a further statement of respect. For example, one may address a person of similar age as elder brother/sister, or uncle/aunt.
- ⁹ The Lord of the East refers to spring, during which season the east wind prevails.
- ¹⁰ Refer to *A Late-Born Son*, notes 10 and 11.
- ¹¹ As roadside willow stems and ivy blooms are subject to casual picking, they are used euphemistically to stand for women of the streets.
- ¹² A game bird: prostitutes' jargon for a playboy.
- ¹³ The Pingkang District was the red-light district in Chang'an.
- ¹⁴ This line refers to a story in which a scholar married a singer and took her with him to his newly appointed office as magistrate of Linchuan County.
- ¹⁵ The House of Spring's Delight was a common euphemism for the whorehouse.
- ¹⁶ In folklore the two stars Vega and Altair are personified as the weaving girl and the herd boy. They are symbols of faithful lovers.
- ¹⁷ The last four lines of the song refer to the story of Liu Chen and Ruan Zhao, peasants who went to collect medicinal herbs in the Tiantai Mountains, where they met and married two fairy maidens. The fairy's dwelling is called Peach Spring Cave.
- ¹⁸ A silk whip was a token of engagement, which the girl's family gave to the man.
- ¹⁹ Palm lines as explained by palm readers.
- ²⁰ This tune belongs to a different key than the other tunes in this suite, which signals the anomaly of a second singer in the play.
- ²¹ One very cruel ancient torture is to spread layer after layer of wet paper, or thin cloth, over a tied-up person's nose so that he is slowly and gradually suffocated.
- ²² "The moon and wind" often alludes to sexual relationship.
- ²³ This and the following two lines refer to *Snow-Mist Pavilion*, a play in which the hero, an officer whose family name is also Zheng, is caught in a blizzard at a roadside pavilion on his way to his exile destination after he has killed his second wife for adultery.
- ²⁴ Like the mandarin ducks in Chinese literature, flounders are also symbolic of unwavering love.
- ²⁵ See Note 14.
- ²⁶ This is a modification of the proverb "It is a rare jar that does not break at the well." In

ancient times, clay jars were commonly used to fetch and hold water. Any slip of hand might crack the fragile vessel against the stone platform of the water-well. In this line “to break his clay jar” means “to go broke,” “perfume well” refers to the brothel.

²⁷ This line refers to a story during the time the First Emperor was building the Great Wall. The wife of a builder braved mountains and rivers to the construction site only to learn that her husband was dead and buried under the wall. She cried and cried till a stretch of wall collapsed to disclose her husband's remains. The story became an example of how love can move heaven and earth.

²⁸ Xie Tianxiang, the title character of one of Guan Hanqing's plays. She is a singer and later married to a poet, Liu Yong.

²⁹ Jade Chimes Lane: a red-light district.

³⁰ A beggar usually carries a clay jar or a basket. Also refer to Note 26.

The Missing Deed

Anonymous

INTRODUCTION

The Missing Deed is set against the background of a severe crop failure. In line with a government directive, a family of two married brothers must separate and one has to move away. It is then decided that the younger brother take his family away, so a property deed is drawn up and a copy given to each.

Not long after their arrival in a village in the neighboring Shanxi Province, the younger brother and his wife succumb to illness, leaving their only child in the care of a kindhearted local landlord with a wish that their son would take their remains back to their native place and bury them in the family cemetery.

Fifteen years later when the boy attains manhood, his foster father, the landlord, tells him about his birth parents and their last wish. With a heart torn between the love for both pairs of parents, the young man sets out for his native place with his birth parents' remains.

He finally reaches his hometown and finds his uncle and aunt. But his aunt refuses to acknowledge his relationship, and brazenly cheats him out of his copy of the deed, which is the only proof of his identity.

The case is brought before Bao Zheng, a judge of high repute. Trapped by the ingenuity of the judge, the aunt unwittingly surrenders the hidden deed.

Although the play makes no direct mention of the cause of the famine, historical records show that during the Yuan Dynasty, the Yellow River frequently flooded and burst its dykes. In the Kaifeng area alone, serious flooding occurred every few years. Take the year 1344 for example. After twenty days of heavy rain, the dyke burst and the flood waters stood more than twenty feet deep. "Famine raged. Epidemic broke out the following year, wiping out half the population. ... The fields were laid waste and wild grass grew taller than man. The tracks of hares and foxes could be seen on the streets."¹ There could be many ways to relieve the disaster,

¹ Translated from a quote in Qiu Shusen's *Concise History of the Yuan Dynasty*, Fujian People's Publishing House, 1999, p. 234.

such as distributing food to the starving, but in this play we see something unmentioned in the historical records, which appears to be a government policy, a policy of reducing the local population by splitting up extended families and forcing them to move away. The consequences of this policy are vividly presented in the first act of the play – the hardship of travel, which virtually means begging along the way, the difficulty in finding a place that would accept an outsider, and the high mortality rate of those who in this way left.

To a Chinese, attachment to one's place of origin, or native place, is entrenched in the mind. People stick to their roots and are reluctant to move away. That partially explains why a character, besides introducing his name, would also state his native place when he first comes onstage. Even today, in a mixed metropolitan community people from the same place feel close to each other and are often mutually supportive. Among the older generation of overseas Chinese, the saying "*ye luo gui gen* (A leaf falling from the tree shall lie by the root)" still holds sway, meaning that when one dies one should die and be buried at one's native place.

Another important idea that should be mentioned for better comprehension of the play is the Chinese family structure. It used to be an extended family with several generations living together as a single economic unit in a complex of courtyard-compounds. Whether and when such a big family would split up into economically independent nuclear families depended on many factors. Yet, even if they became economically independent, the nuclear families still tended to cling together, next door, in the same village. It is not unusual to find a whole village bearing one family name.

Similar to *A Late-Born Son*, there is always an inheritance problem when the family does not have a son. In *A Late-Born Son* the problem is solved by having a son from a concubine; in this play the family line is carried on by the nephew. Both plays spotlight the sensitive issue of the order of succession. If the couple does not have a son, family property goes to the nearest male descendent on the paternal side. Or, if the couple happens to have a daughter, they may try to get a half-son through her marriage. In light of this, it is easier to see why Liu Tianxiang's wife refuses to acknowledge Anzhu.

Act IV introduces a famous historical figure on the Chinese stage, Bao Zheng (999-1062), Prefect of the capital city, Kaifeng. Though he lived in the Northern Song Dynasty, it does not necessarily mean that the play has

INTRODUCTION

its setting in the Song Dynasty, for his stories were legendized and he had become the personification of incorruptibility and justness. Of the 150 or so extant Yuan plays, there are nearly a dozen about him and his deeds. If anyone should question the legitimacy of the prefect in assuming the function of a judge, it must be understood that in feudal times there was no independent legal system in the modern sense. The chief administrator of the locality was the *de facto* judge.

The Missing Deed

CHARACTERS

TIANXIANG (*chong mo*), Liu Tianxiang, a peasant

TIANXIANG'S WIFE (*cha dan*)

TIANRUI (*zheng mo*), Liu Tianrui, younger brother of Liu Tianxiang

TIANRUI'S WIFE (*er dan*)

ANZHU (*lai'er, zheng mo*), son of Liu Tianrui

LI, a village elder

ZHANG (*swai*), Zhang Bingyi, a landlord

ZHANG'S WIFE (*dan*)

ATTENDANT, an attendant at Zhang Bingyi's inn

BAO (*swai*), Bao Zheng, a high official

QIAN, Zhang Qian, an attendant to Bao Zheng

THE WEDGE

(Enter Liu Tianxiang with his wife, Liu Tianrui with his wife and son)

TIANXIANG:

The white clouds drift past day by day;

Green hills idle from dawn to dusk.

Without the knack of getting rich,

Life has become a painful drag.

I'm Liu Tianxiang. I live outside the west gate of the City of Bianliang.¹ This is my wife. Her maiden name is Yang. This is my younger brother Liu Tianrui and his wife. Her maiden name is Zhang, and they have a three-year-old son called Anzhu. My first wife died without leaving me any children. Ms Yang is in fact my second wife. She has a daughter from her previous marriage, called Homelee.

My brother and our village elder, Mr Li, are very good friends, and they even had their children engaged to each other while they were still in their mothers' wombs. And as it so happened, a daughter was born to the Lis, named Dingnu. Now she's also three years old. Their two families are thus related by this promised marriage.

This year the crops failed and famine rages. The government has ordered a population reduction by splitting up extended families. Brother, you stay here to carry on the family line. My wife and I shall leave home to seek a living where the harvest is better.

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: We're old. We couldn't stand up to the traveling.

TIANRUI: Brother, you two stay home on our ancestral estate. I'll hit the road with my wife and son.

TIANXIANG: Well, in that case, would you ask Mr Li to come over?

TIANRUI: Okay. (Goes to invite) Is Brother Li home?

(Enter Li, a village elder)

LI: Who is it? Let me open the door and take a look. So it's you, Brother Liu. Nice to see you.

TIANRUI: My brother would like to invite you over.

LI (greets Tianxiang): Brother, I guess you asked me to come for the population reduction and splitting up the family, right?

TIANXIANG: You're right. In such a lean year, it's hard to feed so many hungry mouths. Now we've decided that my brother and his family will leave home to seek a living elsewhere. Since the family property has never been divided between we brothers, I've drawn up a deed in duplicate to our houses, land and all other assets to prove they're jointly owned by my brother and me. Things probably won't change much if my brother comes back in a couple of years, but in case he doesn't come back for five or even ten years, this paper will be authentic proof for him to claim his share. I've invited you over to be a witness. Would you please add your signature?

LI: My pleasure.

TIANXIANG (reads out the deed): Liu Tianxiang, his brother Liu Tianrui, and his nephew Liu Anzhu, are residents of Yiding District at the west gate of the East Capital.² In time of severe famine and in line with the government directive to reduce population by splitting up extended families, my brother, Liu Tianrui, has volunteered to take his wife and son away from home to seek a temporary living where the harvest is better. As up to this time the family's fixed and movable assets have not been divided between us, this deed in duplicate is to prove our joint ownership. Each brother is to hold a copy, and both copies are equally valid. Signed by Liu Tianxiang and Liu Tianrui. Witnessed by village elder Mr Li.

LI: Good. Let me sign them. (He signs) Now here's a copy for each of you.

TIANRUI: Now I have this paper, and since it's an auspicious day today, we three will say goodbye to brother and sister-in-law and leave right away. Brother Li, I'll be back by the next harvest. Don't call off the engagement between your daughter and my son. When I'm back, we can have them formally betrothed.

TIANXIANG: Brother, take care. Life can be much more difficult on the road than at home. Whenever convenient, please send us a message so that we may keep track of you.

TIANRUI: Don't worry about us, brother. We're on our way.

[Watching Flowers]

A copy is handed to each of us,
but it is hard to tear ourselves away
from our native land to some place unknown.
It's all because the crops have failed.
Alas! We cannot stay and starve to death!

(Exeunt Tianrui, his wife and son)

TIANXIANG: They're gone. Brother Li, thanks for coming. It's a shame we're too poor to invite you to dinner.

LI: No need to trouble. I'm going home. It's said:

*Generals in their saddles stay,
Each galloping toward his fate.*

(Exeunt)

ACT I

(Enter Zhang Bingyi with his wife)

ZHANG: I'm a resident of Xima Village, Gaoping County, Lu Prefecture.³ My family name is Zhang and my given name is Bingyi. This is my wife. Her maiden name is Guo. There are only the two of us. We don't have children, but have plenty of farmland and houses.

Recently, a man called Liu Tianrui arrived with his family from the East Capital, owing to the crop failure around that area and the government policy of reducing population by splitting up extended families. His wife

has the same family name as mine, and they have a three-year-old son called Anzhu. He's a cute little boy.

As Liu Tianrui is an educated man, I put him up at my inn. But perhaps fortune is against them. The couple were struck down by disease and became bedridden. The inn attendant has reported they are critically ill. Woman, why don't we give them some of our old clothes? Every kind act we do may contribute to a happier afterlife. Let's go and pay them a visit.

(Exeunt Zhang and his wife)

(Enter an inn attendant)

ATTENDANT: I'm an inn attendant. This inn belongs to Zhang Bingyi. A family of three from the famine-stricken area recently came to Gaoping, and are staying at my inn. Unfortunately, the couple were struck by illness, and their condition seems to go from bad to worse. People often say I'm poor, but now I've found someone even poorer. They don't have an extra piece of clothing; they don't have a bowl of rice, let alone the money to see a doctor or buy medicine. How can they recover? Let me help them up and out to get some fresh air and see how they look today. Ah! Poor souls! It looks like their days are numbered.

(Enter Tianrui with his wife and son)

TIANRUI: I'm Liu Tianrui. After we parted with brother and sister-in-law, we wandered along the road and arrived at Xiyama Village, Gaoping County, Lu Prefecture. Now we're staying at the inn of a local squire named Zhang Bingyi. He's a very kind man and doesn't treat us like tramps. However, we don't seem to be in a position to enjoy this piece of luck. Both my wife and I fell ill and became bedridden. Woman, what do you think is in store for us?

TIANRUI'S WIFE: I'm afraid heaven is forsaking us while mother earth is beckoning. Death can't be far off.

[Painting Cherry Lips]

TIANRUI:

We were caught in a sorry plight
 when we happened upon a kindly host,
 who let us stay
 till harvest season in the coming year.

But perhaps heaven doesn't favor that.

[A Roiling Dragon]

One can't but feel helpless away from home;
our illness is because we fought the odds.
My wife busied herself with needlework;
to agriculture I applied myself.
My wife span cotton by the neighbor's light;
I plowed and tilled the fields at frosty dawn.
We were not daunted by the toiling work,
yet life seems to proceed against our pains.
While there's our toddling son to feed and care,
my dear supportive wife is down in bed.
Looking back, I find hometown far away.
I wonder how brother is faring there.
Oh! When can we two siblings meet again?
Hope seems faint.
I left to start a new life somewhere else
— only to find a pair of empty hands.

TIANRUI'S WIFE (gives Tianrui the deed): Dear, I'm afraid the hour has come to meet my poor fate. Here's the deed. Keep it, and look after yourself. (She dies)

(Enter Zhang Bingyi)

ZHANG: Here I am at the inn. Sir, how're you today? (They greet each other) Oh, my! Your wife has passed away. Do you have money for her burial?

[The Glib Cricket]

TIANRUI:

I don't have money and I don't have friends.
I have a grief the size of sky.
For twenty years I worked to build a home,
but can't afford a mat to wrap her corpse,
nor decent clothing for her journey on.

ZHANG: Sir, you don't need to worry about that. I have these things.

TIANRUI:

I'm much obliged to you
for your help and sympathy.

If it weren't for you,
forlorn and impoverished as I am,
who else would have lent me a room to stay?
(He moans)

[Universal Happiness]

Dear wife, is this karma brought on by you or me?
Recalling the earlier days,
it was fate that joined our hands.
For you I'll don the mourning gown.
For the love between you and me,
for your virtues and early death,
I shall pull your hearse like a faithful horse.

ZHANG: Attendant, get some people to carry her body out of town. Find an elevated place and bury her properly.

(Tianrui's wife carried off)

TIANRUI: Squire, I must accompany her.

ZHANG: You're so sick you can hardly walk. You'd better stay here.

TIANRUI (moans): Dear wife!

[Nalakuvara Minitune]

I can't afford
to invite monks to pray for you;
I can't afford
paper coins for your lonely trip.

ZHANG: I can see her to the grave for you.

TIANRUI: That would be asking too much of you.

I can't dismiss
the haunting thought of your demise.
My mind is blank, my heart is full;
my legs quiver as if I were
a centipede upon a fiery ground.
(He walks)

[Magpie on a Branch]

I just managed to reach the coffin's side,
hoping to see you to your grave.
Suddenly shoots a tremor through my limbs.
My head swims and I nearly fall;
my body wavers on my legs.
(He staggers)
Oho! The earth and heaven reel around.

Squire, I wonder if I can make one request.

ZHANG (supporting Tianrui): Of course. Please tell me what I can do for you.

TIANRUI: I was a resident of Yiding District of the East Capital. I have an elder brother named Liu Tianxiang, and my name is Liu Tianrui. As the crops failed, the government ordered the splitting-up and migration of extended families in order to reduce the local population. So we decided that my brother and his family stay put on our ancestral land, while I take my family away to seek a place with a better harvest. On the day of my departure, we signed a deed in duplicate, and each of us holds a copy. If something should befall me, this paper would prove my share of the family assets. I beg you, squire, in the name of the great Buddha, to look after my son Anzhu. When he grows into manhood, please give him this paper and tell him to take my wife's and my remains back to my native place and bury us in our family cemetery. I'm willing to be your horse or donkey in my next life to repay your kindness. Just don't let my son forget his family origin.

[The Willow Leaf]

Officials forced us to abandon home,
citing crop failures that laid waste a thousand miles.
Harmonious households thus were torn apart.
Family after family with old and young
left their ancient homes on a begging trip
in hope of surviving the famine year.

ZHANG: So all you have hangs on this piece of paper.

[A Verdant Song]

TIANRUI:

Although it merely is a written sheet,
with a list of belongings, house and land,
it is a clear proof of my family links.
So now, before I go down to my grave,
I beg to make this one and last request,
and leave this deed with Your Excellency
to give to my son when he comes of age.
Please don't drive him away and make him beg;
please don't let him forget his family roots.
That will bring credit to your future lives.
Heaven shall witness all!

ZHANG: I promise. When your son comes of age, I'll give him this paper
and send him back to your native place.

TIANRUI: Squire, my son,

[Parasitic Grass]

this year he's just turned three,
so years of rearing lies ahead.
Please teach him with patience and strict demands
to be a kind-hearted and modest man.
Make sure to set him on a proper course.
My debt to you is heavier than the ground!
Pity the child who's lost both dad and mom.

ZHANG: Sir, you don't have to worry about that. Just take care of yourself. I
promise you that I won't let you down.

TIANRUI: Squire, I feel rather weak now. Please help me into the hall. (Zhang
supports him)

[Coda]

TIANRUI:

My poor condition makes me weak and faint,
which is aggravated by doleful thoughts.
The hearse might as well take my corpse along.

Who cares about the death of homeless folks?
Son, if you can reach manhood,
do not forget your parents' deathbed wish:
Carry our bones back to our native land,
and bury us beside our ancestors,
a resting ground enclosed by evergreens.
Squire, imagine the worship you'll receive!
My family is not an extensive one,
yet even two brothers are torn apart.

(Exit Tianrui)

ZHANG: Oh, poor souls! They came as a family of three, and now the two parents are dead, leaving behind just a three-year-old boy. Since he doesn't have any other relatives around, I'll take him home and raise him. Then I'll send him back to his hometown to rejoin his uncle and aunt. That would be the best thing I can do for them. A poem says:

*It's heartbreaking to see a couple die,
Leaving behind a lonely toddling child.
Once he comes of age and becomes a man,
I'll let him and his kinfolk reunite.*

(Exeunt Zhang [with Anzhu])

ACT II

(Enter Zhang Bingyi with his wife)

ZHANG: Fifteen years have passed since the death of Liu Tianrui and his wife. Their son, Anzhu, is now eighteen. People all call him Zhang Anzhu, and he has never suspected that he's not my son. I taught him to read and write at an early age, and now he can earn a living by teaching a few village boys. Today is the Qingming Festival. We're going to burn paper coins at the tombs of our ancestors, and I can take this opportunity to tell him about his parents. It was his father's last wish that he should not forget his family origin. Here we are at the cemetery. Where's Anzhu?

(Enter Anzhu)

ANZHU: I'm Zhang Anzhu. I make a living by teaching a few village pupils.

Today is the Qingming Festival. Dad and mom have gone for the memorial services at our family cemetery. I must hurry there to join them.

[Base Tune Perfect]

I've set up a village school
and gathered a handful of country boys.
By the oil lamp I peruse classic works;
a decade thus passed in obscurity.
When can I make a name?

[Rolling the Embroidered Ball]

Why despite privation
have I studied doggedly,
as if sweating to whet the dullest blade?
Because I want to be a learned man,
and one day make a mighty jump
over the Dragon Gate.
That's what a young man should aspire to do.
If I can join the circles of great men,
that would reward my parents' raising me.
It's said books and learning can make a man
and re-invent the status of his clan.
(He greets Zhang and wife)

ZHANG: Son, we waited for you, but since you didn't show up we went ahead and paid homage first. Now it's your turn. (Anzhu makes kowtows)
Son, don't forget the tomb beyond the cemetery wall.

ANZHU (kowtows): Father, every year you ask me to kowtow to this tomb beyond the cemetery wall. Whose tomb is it? A relative? Why don't you tell me?

ZHANG: Son, don't be upset by what I'm going to tell you. Your family name is not Zhang. It's Liu. Your native place is Yiding District at the west gate of the East Capital. There you have an uncle called Liu Tianxiang. Your real father was his younger brother Liu Tianrui. One year, there was a disastrous crop failure. The government then ordered the splitting-up of extended families to reduce the local population. So your parents brought you here to escape the famine. Unfortunately, both your parents died and were buried right here. Upon his death, your father gave me a property

deed and asked me to keep it for you. Your share of the family property is listed on the paper. That was fifteen years ago. Son, although we didn't give birth to you, we've raised you for fifteen long years. Now that I've told you who you are, I hope you won't turn your back on us. A poem says:

*Strong was the bond before the word is said;
But once it is let out the bond is cut.
When time arrives for me to quit the world,
Who's there to mourn and see me to my grave?*

ANZHU: Oh! I'm heartbroken! (He faints)

ZHANG (supporting Anzhu): Wake up, Anzhu! Please wake up!

[The Stupefied Scholar]

ANZHU:

Father spoke unreservedly of my past.
The story brought to my eyes poignant tears.
It torments me to think of dad and mom
dying in hunger and in cold.
They were torn away from their kin
and left the place where they belonged,
encumbered with a son.
(He kneels and cries in front of the tomb)

[The Inert Baton]

Without parents without home, why am I left alone?
My flooding tears enshroud the sky and earth.
Mourning over the death of dad and mom,
I must not hurt those who have fostered me,
for I can't only think of family blood
and brush aside the years of nurturing!

ZHANG (sighs): Blood is indeed thicker than water!

ANZHU:

Although it's said blood is the thicker bond,
I owe you unwavering gratitude.

Father and mother, I'll exhume the remains of my parents this very day and carry them back to my hometown. After I see my uncle and aunt and have my parents reburied in the family cemetery, I'll come back to attend

on you. Father, can I have your permission to go?
 ZHANG (sadly): Son, you may leave today.

[The Stupefied Scholar]

ANZHU:

Though I must carry out my parents' wish,
 I won't neglect and turn my back on you.
 Both sets of parents are esteemed and loved,
 and no discrimination shall be made
 between the two.
 If I do so heaven will punish me!

[Rolling the Embroidered Ball]

The time my parents left me in your care,
 they were without a cent,
 and my future looked dark and dim.
 Thanks to you both I have become a man.
 From Xiana Village now I go
 to my native place in Yiding
 to rebury my parents' bones.
 I'll return as soon as I've got that done.
 Before I repay your fostering care,
 first let me rest my parents' homeless souls.
 From no hardship will I shrink!

ZHANG: Son, we won't keep you from going, but we hope you'll come back.
 We're old and childless, and we'll miss you badly. This is the deed. I'm
 placing it in your hand. (Anzhu accepts the paper and bows farewell) Son,
 come back as soon as possible. A poem says:

*There's no way to suppress the streaming tears;
 A knife is cutting a piece from my heart.
 When you have laid your parents in their grave,
 Please don't forget those who have fostered you.*

(Exeunt Zhang and his wife)

[The Stupefied Scholar]

ANZHU:

Unbroken mountain ranges stretch ahead;
the roaring Yellow River flows unchecked;
patches of verdant fields surround the huts.
On reaching home,
I'll build their tomb.
That is the duty of a son.

If I walk at this pace, when can I reach home? I must speed up.

[Rolling the Embroidered Ball]

If I carry the shoulder pole like this,
my mother would be in the rear;
but if I switch the ends around,
my father would be in the rear.
What a dilemma for a filial son!
Guo Ju and Tian Zhen were beyond compare,⁴
yet they are examples for us to learn,
for filial piety can impress the gods.
A son once bore his mother on a widthwise pole
and the forest parted to let him pass.³
I feel my feet are lifted by the clouds.

I'm returning to my birthplace!

[Coda]

Racing homeward under the sun and moon,
I scale the peaks and wade across the streams.
The darkness of the night can't slow my steps;
the roughness of the road can't change my mind.
Tears fall like rain into the kicked-up dust;
a wind springs up beneath my urgent feet.
I shoot past many lovely scenes and inns;
my gaze is fixed beyond the distance hills.
Only when I reach home and find my kin
will the severed branch rejoin with family roots.

(Exit)

劉安位師認祖尋親



做劉松年筆

ACT III

(Enter Tianxiang's wife)

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: I'm Liu Tianxiang's wife. Fifteen years have passed since the time my husband's brother and his family went away under the directive to reduce population. Since then our family fortune has shot up like a boom of flames, and we've even opened a pawnshop. My daughter by my first husband is married. Her husband agreed to marry into our family and they now live with us. However, there's one thing that worries me. It's Anzhu. If he should come back, all the family property would be his, and my poor son-in-law could only step aside empty-handed and watch helplessly.

This moment I don't have much to do. Let me go to the gate and see if there's anyone coming this way.

(Enter Anzhu)

ANZHU: I'm Liu Anzhu. My hometown is in sight. Gee! I'm home.

[The Powdered Butterfly]

Toward the capital

I set off at daylight and trekked till night,
having encountered neither gods nor ghosts.

I eat what I can find

and drink from brooks and springs

— paper coins are all I have.

I have covered more than a thousand miles,

without giving my sore feet one day's rest.

[Drunk in the Vernal Wind]

I worry about my foster parents,

yet I must first inter my dad and mom;

my brows are knitted tight in tugging thoughts.

Oh, Anzhu, life has not been sweet to you!

With my shadow the only company,

I've long been stranded in an alien land.

What surprise it was to learn I have kin of blood!

I've asked around and people say this is my uncle Liu Tianxiang's house. Now I can rest my shoulders. (He greets Tianxiang's wife) Excuse me,

ma'am, is this Uncle Liu Tianxiang's home?

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: Yes, but who are you?

ANZHU (bows): So you must be my aunt.

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: Me, your aunt? Don't try to flatter your way around me.

[Red Embroidered Shoes]

ANZHU:

She, she shows no sign of delight at seeing me,
and there is no trace of emotion in her voice.

Is it because she and my mom had fallen out?

Aunt, is uncle home?

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: Uncle? Who's your uncle?

ANZHU:

My aunt is being evasive,
and my uncle does not appear.

Ah, me! Where can I lay my parents' bones?

Aunt, I'm your nephew Anzhu.

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: Are you the boy who left home fifteen years ago during the famine? Your father had with him a signed deed the time he left. If you have that deed, you're my nephew. Otherwise, you're an imposter!

ANZHU: Aunt, I do have the deed with me.

[Everyone Happy]

I'm eager to comply
and yet I hesitate.

Without sufficient proof,
how can she tell if I'm Anzhu?

(He hands her the deed)

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: I can't read.

ANZHU:

If auntie is unversed in words,
why not let uncle come to read?

It seems I've wronged her. She was just being cautious.

So she's a faithful and obedient wife.

Long married, she still lets her man decide.

(Tianxiang's wife steps indoors)

Ah, she went into the house. But what keeps her so long? I think I can guess why.

She must have gone out to prepare
sacrificial objects and mourning gowns,
and impart the news to my other kin.

(Enter Liu Tianxiang)

TIANXIANG: Ever since my brother Tianrui and his family left home, fifteen years have passed without a word from them. The hope of the family line depends on his son Anzhu, but I don't even know whether he's dead or alive. Now I've accumulated considerable property, but there's no one to inherit it! This plaguing thought has dimmed my vision and impaired my hearing. (He sees Anzhu) Young man, who are you? Why are you hanging around my gate?

ANZHU: I'm visiting relatives. What has that to do with you? This isn't your house, is it?

TIANXIANG: If this isn't my house, whose house do you think it is?

ANZHU: Pardon me. Am I speaking to my uncle Liu Tianxiang?

TIANXIANG: That's me.

ANZHU: Uncle, please accept my respects. (He bows)

[Welcome the Fairy]

Because there was a failure of the crops,
we left to seek a living somewhere else.
But fortune seems against us everywhere.
My dear father and mother passed away,
and I was raised up as a foster child.
Fifteen years thus passed without kith and kin.

TIANXIANG: What do you say your name is?

ANZHU:

I am your long-lost nephew Liu Anzhu.

TIANXIANG: Where did you see my nephew Liu Anzhu?

ANZHU: I am Liu Anzhu.

TIANXIANG (excitedly): Wife, great news! My nephew Anzhu has come home!

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: Who's Liu Anzhu? The streets nowadays are swarming with swindlers. When they see we have loads of money but not one son,

they would pretend to be Liu Anzhu and come to lay claim to our family estate. We signed a deed when Anzhu's parents left home, and they took a copy with them. If this man has the deed, well, he is Liu Anzhu. If he doesn't, he is an imposter!

TIANXIANG: You're right. Let me go out and ask him. Liu Anzhu, when your parents left home, they had with them a signed property deed. Do you have that deed with you?

ANZHU: I do, and just now I gave it to auntie.

TIANXIANG: Wife, don't kid around. I asked Anzhu and he said he'd given it to you.

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: No, he didn't give me a thing!

TIANXIANG: Liu Anzhu, my wife says you didn't give her anything. Son, why did you give the paper to her rather than wait for me?

[The Pomegranate Blossoms]

ANZHU:

All my life I have been a cautious man,
but this time I made an impetuous move.
Her mouth was sweeter than a honey pot,
so when she asked I didn't hesitate.
I presumed family ties are most secure,
and we could only be awash with joy
to reunite after so many years.
Thoughtlessly I placed the deed in her hand.
Wares on the shoulder pole will fall in pairs!⁶

[Fighting Quails]

I mistook that foxy shrew of an aunt
for Mencius' mom who moved thrice for her son.⁷
I didn't come to grab your gems or gold,
nor did I come to share or seize your land.
I came to lay my parents in the family graves,
for you are siblings from the selfsame roots.
With or without that piece of written deed,
can that change the fact that I am a Liu?

(He looks sadly at the load on his shoulder pole) Oh, dear parents, my

heart is bleeding!

[Going Upstairs]

Just think of my parents who toiled through life,
and were haplessly caught in famished times.
Waving goodbye to their kin,
they hit the road with their son
to find a place where crops were good.
But fate was hard;
their lives were cut.
As strangers in an alien place,
their bones were left outside the family graves!

[Ditto]

What a malicious aunt you are!
And cunning too!
Behind your husband's back,
you laid a trap
and fooled your nephew into it.
You want to give the whole estate
to your daughter
and her man,
and terminate the family line of Liu.

TIANXIANG: Anzhu my boy, be honest with me. Where on earth is your copy of the deed?

ANZHU: I gave it to my aunt just now, and she took it inside.

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: That son of a bitch is lying. When did I take your deed?

ANZHU: Aunt, don't kid me. Just now you had it in your own hands and took it into the room. How can you say you didn't?

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: If I'd ever seen your deed, let an abscess grow -- on my neighbor.

TIANXIANG: Wife, if you've taken it, give it to me.

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: Old man, you're getting muddleheaded. What use could I have for that piece of paper? To paste it over the window? This guy is making up a story to cheat us out of our money.

ANZHU: Uncle, I didn't come for money or property. I only want to bury my

parents' remains in the family cemetery. And then I'll leave.

TIANXIANG'S WIFE (hits Anzhu on the head and he bleeds): Old man, why waste time arguing with him? Let's go in. (She closes the door behind her)

(Exeunt Tianxiang and his wife)

ANZHU: She may not acknowledge my relationship, but how could she have wounded me and drawn blood?! Oh, heavens! Is there any justice? (He sobs)
(Enter Li, the village elder)

LI: My old self is the village elder. As I happen by Liu Tianxiang's house, I see a young man crying at the gate. I wonder what the matter is. Let me ask him. Son, who are you?

ANZHU: I'm Liu Anzhu, the son of Liu Tianrui, who left during the famine fifteen years ago.

LI (scrutinizes Anzhu's face): How did you get that bleeding wound on your head?

ANZHU: That wasn't my uncle's doing but my aunt's, because she doesn't want to acknowledge my relationship. She cheated me of my copy of the deed and now flatly denies she ever had it. As if that wasn't enough, she beat me and drew blood from my head!

LI: Anzhu, don't be so dejected. You're my intended son-in-law. I'll help you.

[Sweet Garden]

ANZHU:

Father-in-law, thank you for trusting me.
I am not the son of a family slave;
in both his and my veins the same blood flows.
Shouldering home my parents' lonely bones,
I've covered countless miles.
Why d'you think my uncle was mad at me?
Because I let my step-aunt cozen me.

LI: Are you going to give up?

ANZHU:

I don't mind whether they acknowledge me,
as long as I can rest my parents' bones.
Otherwise, I can't leave and go.

LI: How could his wife be so brutal! I'll talk to him. Liu Tianxiang, open the gate! Open up!

(Enter Tianxiang with his wife)

TIANXIANG: Who's there at the gate? (He opens the gate)

LI: Liu Tianxiang, you should be happy to have your nephew back. Even if you don't want to acknowledge his relationship, tell me, why did you allow your wife to beat him and inflict a head wound on him?

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: Mr Li, you don't realize he's an imposter trying his luck at our place. If he really is my husband's nephew, he should have the deed with him. It should bear your signature too, right? Only the man with that piece of paper can be Liu Anzhu.

LI: You've got a point there. Young man, you say you're Liu Anzhu. Didn't your parents give you the deed?

ANZHU: They did, and just now I handed it to my aunt.

LI: Mrs Liu, so he has the deed, and he's given it to you already.

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: If I've taken his deed, I'll eat the poop of bees.

TIANXIANG: Forget the deed. Let's ask him where his father's native place is, what his name is, and why he left home. If his answers are correct, he must be Liu Anzhu.

LI: Young man, since you said you're Liu Anzhu, tell us about your father's native place, his name and the reason he left home. If your answers are correct, you're Liu Anzhu. Otherwise, you're not.

ANZHU: Please listen. My family's native place is in Yiding District at the west gate of Bianliang City. The family consists of Liu Tianxiang, his younger brother Liu Tianrui and nephew Liu Anzhu, who was three years old at the time of the famine. The government issued a directive that extended families split up and move away to reduce the local population. So the younger brother Tianrui agreed to take his family away and move to other places where the harvest was better. As the family property hadn't been divided between the two brothers, a deed was drawn up with a copy for each brother. It was signed by Liu Tianxiang and Liu Tianrui, with Mr Li, the village elder, as witness. I followed my parents to a place called Xiama Village in Gaoping County, Lu Prefecture in Shanxi Province. A Mr Zhang Bingyi put us up in his inn. Both my parents fell ill and died soon after. I was raised up by Mr Zhang. When I turned eighteen, he thought it was time for me to take my parents' remains back and re-inter them in the family cemetery. I also hoped to find my uncle, but who would have thought that my aunt could cheat me of my copy of the deed so that my uncle refused to acknowledge my relationship. She even beat me and drew blood from my head! Who can I turn to to seek justice?

LI: You don't need to say another word. I believe you're my son-in-law Liu Anzhu.

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: Mr Li, you're muddling things up. It's none of your business. Old man, let's go in and shut the gate.

(Exeunt Tianxiang and his wife)

LI: That old hag! She's resorted to such dirty tricks to drive him off! Follow me to the government office. We can sue her.

(Enter Bao Zheng, followed by Zhang Qian)

BAO: My old self is Bao Zheng. I've just returned from an inspection tour to the western military outposts. Now as I approach the west gate of Bianliang City, I see a brawling crowd ahead. Zhang Qian, go over and see what's going on.

LI (crying out loud): Justice!

BAO: Bring them here.

QIAN (leads over Li and Anzhu): Pay your respects.

LI:

*Your Honor, please lend us a patient ear,
And hear out our story of many years.
My humble self is an elder of the town;
The name of this young man is Liu Anzhu.
His father Liu Tianrui, uncle Tianxiang,
Are brothers who have the same dad and mom.
A strict directive in a famine year
Ordered the splitting of harmonious homes.
His parents led him to Lu Prefecture,
And stayed at an inn owned by Zhang Bingyi.
Before they parted they had signed a deed,
On which their joint assets are clearly named.
My old self has a daughter called Dingnu,
Who was engaged to Anzhu in babyhood.
As I am thus related to the Lius,
I was asked to witness the signing act.
Two copies were made to the same effect,
And each brother was given one to keep.
Alas! Tianrui and his wife passed away,
And were buried in unfamiliar land.
They left behind an orphan three years old*

*With no kith or kin to look after him.
 He was saved by the kindness of the Zhangs,
 Who fed and nurtured him for fifteen years.
 The Zhangs preserved for him his parents' deed,
 And sent him homeward to re-tie his roots.
 So he has carried home his parents' bones
 To be reburied in the family tombs.
 But he came first upon his heartless aunt,
 Who cheated him out of his document.
 She cheekily lies and denies their ties,
 Despite the fact they're branches of one tree.
 She even beat and drew blood from his head,
 Making him homeless at the gate of home.
 Fortunately we meet Your Honor here;
 You're known as the fairest and wisest judge.
 May justice be given to Liu Anzhu.
 It's not me setting him against his aunt.*

BAO: Liu Anzhu, just answer one question: Where have you been living in the last fifteen years?

ANZHU: I lived with Zhang Bingyi at Xiyama Village, Gaoping County in Lu Prefecture.

[The Twelve Months]

As parents and fortune abandoned me,
 I had no choice but to stay with the Zhangs.
 Yearning to return to my native place,
 I braved the weather and the vast expanse.
 I'd imagined a happy reunion
 the moment my uncle and aunt were found.

[People of Yao]

But it turns out my aunt's a rogue in woman's clothes!
 She pouted at the mere mention of Liu Anzhu.
 She took my copy but denied the fact.
 Mouth I have, but it's clogged up like a gourd.
 Oh, heavens!
 Where can I have a chance to speak?

I can only swallow my bitter tears!

BAO: Zhang Qian, bring all of them to the prefectural office.

(Exeunt Bao and Qian)

LI: Son, you may leave your parents' remains at my place, and then I'll go with you to the prefectural office.

ANZHU: I've heard a lot about the famed Judge Bao at Kaifeng.

[Coda]

Incorruptible like the flowing stream,
he has eyes brighter than mirrors.
Now that he has summoned us to the court,
I'll take this chance to speak and plead,
even if I should kowtow till my forehead bleeds.

(Exeunt)

ACT IV

(Enter Zhang Qian with attendants ready for a court session)

QIAN: All are present; files are ready.

(Enter Bao Zheng)

BAO:

*The booming drums announce the time;
The office runners stand in lines.
It's here we decide death and life,
A scarier place than hell alive.*

I'm Bao Zheng. Ten days ago coming back from an inspection tour to the western military outposts, I ran into a man called Liu Anzhu crying for justice at the west city gate. I had both the plaintiff and the accused locked up in the prefectural jail. Why did I just keep them locked up without bringing them to trial? It's because Liu Anzhu said that for the past fifteen years he had been living with a man named Zhang Bingyi at Xiama Village, Gaoping County in Lu Prefecture. I took the ten days to send for Zhang Bingyi and bring him here. Zhang Qian, now bring Liu Anzhu and the others to the court.

(Enter Anzhu and others)

[Minitune from River Xin]

ANZHU:

My simple head can't guess the judge's mind.
Why did he jail the victim for ten days?
Although the accused are in custody,
he hasn't even deigned to question them.
Hard as I rack my brains,
his intention baffles me.

QIAN: Pay your respects.

(Anzhu, Li, Tianxiang and his wife kneel)

BAO: Are all those concerned present?

QIAN: Your Honor, they're all here.

BAO: Liu Anzhu, are these two related to you?

ANZHU: They're my uncle and aunt.

BAO: Who made that cut on your head?

ANZHU: My aunt did it.

BAO: Who took your copy of the deed?

ANZHU: My aunt.

BAO: Is she really your aunt?

ANZHU: Yes.

BAO: Woman, is this one your nephew?

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: No, he isn't my nephew. He's an imposter trying to
usurp my family property.

BAO: Where did you put his deed?

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: I never saw his deed. If I did, I'll suffer sore eyes.

BAO: Liu Tianxiang, is this man your nephew?

TIANXIANG: My nephew left home at the age of three. After so many years,
how can I tell? My wife said he isn't.

BAO: What a muddlehead! How can you say no because your wife says no?
Elder Li, are they really uncle and nephew?

LI: There's no question about it, and this woman who wounded him on the
head is his aunt. I'm his future father-in-law. How can they deny that?

BAO: Liu Tianxiang, what do you have to say?

TIANXIANG: If my wife says he isn't my nephew, he probably isn't.

BAO: Since he's not your uncle, go to the racks, Liu Anzhu, pick out the

heaviest club and give this man a good flogging.

[The False Card]

ANZHU:

His head is addled by his hoary age.
Your Honor surely is aware of that.
To beat even a stranger is a crime,
let alone people who have family ties.

BAO: Never mind that. Just go ahead and flog him till he confesses, so we can wind up the case.

[The Jade Hooks]

ANZHU:

Does that mean flogging can tell right from wrong?

BAO (angrily): Liu Anzhu, what keeps you from flogging him?

ANZHU:

He and my father are brothers by blood.
How can I take the stick to punish him?
One can't go against his conscience or heaven's way
– he is the uncle, I nephew.
I didn't come to seize or share his wealth,
but to fulfill the calling of a son.
How can I act in an unfilial way?

BAO:

*It takes no acumen to solve this case,
For who's right and who's wrong is clear as day.
Why does the young refuse to beat the old?
Because the same blood courses in their veins.*

Young man, I told you to beat that old fellow, but you shilly-shallied and just wouldn't do it. Zhang Qian, put him in the cangue.

(Qian puts the cangue around Anzhu's neck)

[A Wild Goose Alights]

ANZHU:

Uncle didn't receive a single stroke,

while I became the one to bear the cangue.
 The shrew there wears a face of innocence;
 Elder Li writhes and fidgets helplessly.

[Minitune of Victory]

So, I'm the only one to reap the blame!
 For a while I was stunned with disbelief.
 Once I thought he was a sagacious judge,
 but his fame turned out to be undeserved.
 Alas!
 Where on earth can I have my wrong redressed?!
 Who could have guessed
 Judge Bao is just another addlehead!

BAO: Zhang Qian, throw Liu Anzhu into the death cell. Come over here. (He whispers into Qian's ear)

QIAN: I see.

(Exeunt Qian and Anzhu)

BAO: It's all clear now. He's an imposter with his eyes on your family property.

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: Your Honor is perfectly right. He can't be my nephew Liu Anzhu!

QIAN [reenters]: Your Honor, that Liu Anzhu has been taken ill in the cell. It looks quite serious.

BAO: Hm, that seems to bear out the proverb: Dark clouds appear from nowhere in the sky, like fickle fortune changing by the hour. He was all right just now. How could he fall ill as soon as getting locked up? Zhang Qian, go and check on him again.

QIAN [goes off and reenters]: He's critically ill now.

BAO: Go and check again.

QIAN [goes off and reenters]: He's dead! It must be tetanus, for there's an obvious wound at his temple. He must have been struck by a blunt object.

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: Thank heaven he's dead!

BAO: Well, this case is getting complicated. A quarrel has become a murder! You woman, are you and Liu Anzhu in any way related?

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: No, definitely not.

BAO: If you were related, you'd be his elder generation and he'd be your

younger generation, and then you wouldn't have to pay with your life even if you had killed ten of him. It could only be judged as an accident. And the punishment would be no more than a fine. But if you were not related, you certainly know that "Those who owe debts must pay back the money; those who kill must pay with their own lives." Since you and he are total strangers, denying kinship is one thing, but taking a weapon and inflicting a head injury is another matter entirely. And now he's died of tetanus from that cut! The law says: "Those who beat an innocent person to death must pay with their own lives." Zhang Qian, put this old woman in the cangue. She should be executed to avenge Liu Anzhu.

TIANXIANG'S WIFE (frightened): Your Honor, what if he and I are related? Can I be spared?

BAO: If you were of one family, then you wouldn't have to pay with your life.

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: If that is so, he certainly was my nephew.

BAO: Woman, just now when Liu Anzhu was alive, you said he wasn't your nephew. Now he's dead, and you claim he was. How can you go back on your word before a judge! If you say he was your nephew, can you prove it?

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: Your Honor, I have a deed to prove it.

BAO:

*The young man honestly said two is two;
The old shrew tried to let three pass for four.
Now I have her caught in a clever trap;
She has to surrender the hidden deed.*

Woman, it takes two signed copies to make a deed legal, but now there's only one.

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: Your Honor, here's the other copy.

BAO: Now you've produced sufficient proof, you only need to buy him a coffin and have him buried.

TIANXIANG'S WIFE (kowlows): I'm most grateful to Your Honor for your leniency.

BAO: Zhang Qian, have Liu Anzhu's corpse carried here for this old woman to establish his identity.

(Qian exits and returns with Anzhu)

TIANXIANG'S WIFE: Why! He's still alive! He's an imposter! He's not the real Liu Anzhu!

BAO: Liu Anzhu, I've recovered your copy of the deed.

ANZHU: If it weren't for Your Honor's infallible judgment, my humble self



would never be able to rehabilitate my name!

BAO: Liu Anzhu, are you happy with this outcome?

ANZHU: I most certainly am!

BAO: I'll make you even happier. Zhang Qian, go to the waiting room and bring Zhang Bingyi here.

(Enter Zhang, very emotional to see Anzhu)

[Sweet Water Minitune]

ANZHU:

To reconnect with family roots,
I rose early and traveled late,
climbing mountains and wading streams.
When I finally reached hometown,
I found I was unwelcome.
My aunt suspected me,
and tried to drive me off.
My fortune then was at an all-time low!

[Laurel Crown Minitune]

When I parted with my foster parents,
I feared that we might never meet again.
Luckily I chanced on an upright judge,
whose keen insight
and ingenuity
conned out the deed defrauded by my aunt
so that I can inter my parents' bones.
This reunion today enables me
to fulfill filial duties to both homes.
Not only can I to my roots return,
but repay decades of upbringing too.

BAO: The case is closed. All of you kneel and listen to my verdict.

*His Majesty espouses a harmonious world,
And approves particularly of filial sons.
I appoint Zhang Bingyi this county's Magistrate,
And confer the title of "Virtue" on his wife.
A hundred silver pieces is for Elder Li*

*To bring about his daughter's wedding with Anzhu.
 As Liu Anzhu has proved himself a filial son,
 He's entitled to wear a jinshi's¹ gown and hat.
 His parents shall be buried in the family graves
 With an inscribed stele erected by their tomb.
 Liu Tianxiang is found guilty of disowning kin,
 But he is granted a pardon because of age.
 His wife deserves the sentence of a long jail term,
 But she may atone for her misdeed with a fine.
 Her live-in son-in-law belongs not to the Lius,
 And must be expelled immediately from the house.
 Posters are to be put up in and out of town
 To manifest the fairness of imperial law.
 (The assembly kowtow in gratitude)*

[The River Goddess]

ANZHU:

A silk robe has replaced my drab plain gown,
 for a filial act can gain high repute.
 His Majesty is, to the weak and poor,
 the life-sustaining drizzle from on high.
 To him we owe our life and loyalty.
 Though we praise the kindness of Zhang Bingyi,
 as well as the good faith of Elder Li,
 the best thing is to have a virtuous wife.

BANNER TITLE:

*Liu Anzhu reconnects with family roots;
 Wise Old Bao recovers the missing deed.*

¹ Bianliang: the capital city of the Northern Song Dynasty, also known as Kaifeng City, in present-day Henan Province.

² The East Capital here refers to Bianliang.

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- ³ Gaoping County, Lu Prefecture: in the southeastern part of present-day Shanxi Province, about 120 miles northwest of Bianliang by straight line.
- ⁴ Guo Ju and Tian Zhen are both lauded examples of filiality in the old times.
- ⁵ This refers to another story of filiality. A monk was carrying his aged mother and Buddhist scriptures on a shoulder pole. If he placed the scriptures in the front basket with his mother in the rear, it would show disrespect to his mother. If he changes the position, it would show disrespect to the scriptures. To overcome the dilemma, he carried the shoulder pole widthwise, which would be difficult on narrow footpaths. Moved by his filiality, the forest, as the legend goes, parted to let him through.
- ⁶ One carries weight by placing the middle of the pole on his shoulder with the load balanced at each end of the pole. If the load at one end slips off, the pole will lose balance, causing the load at the other end to drop too. The proverb is similar in meaning to "Misfortunes never come singly."
- ⁷ In search for a better surrounding for her young son, Mencius' mother moved their home three times, and at last settled near a school. Mencius thus grew up to be a learned man and one of the most renowned philosophers in China's history.
- ⁸ Cangue: an instrument of torture used in former times. It is a heavy two-piece wooden frame put around the neck and wrists, analogous to the pillory but not fixed to a post.
- ⁹ Jinshi: the title given to successful candidates in the highest imperial examination.

**Qiu Hu Attempts
to Seduce His Wife**

by
Shi Junbao

INTRODUCTION

Qiu Hu Attempts to Seduce His Wife is based on an ancient story, which has appeared in many literary versions through the centuries. The first to pass down in written form is recorded in Liu Xiang's (79-8 BC) book, *Laudable Women in History*. In that story Qiu Hu is not drafted away on military service but leaves home to take up an office position. Five years later, on his way home, he sees a woman picking mulberry leaves by the roadside. He gets down from his carriage and tries first to flirt with her, and then to seduce her with gold, but is flatly turned down.

He goes on home and gives the gold to his mother. When his wife appears, he is ashamed to find she is none other than the woman he has tried to seduce by the roadside.

His wife scolds him for being unfilial toward his mother and disloyal toward his wife. She says she can no longer live with such a man. The story ends with her leaving home and drowning herself in a river.

Compared to Liu Xiang's version, the plot of this play is adapted to reflect the reality of the Yuan Dynasty, which was a turbulent age and people, especially the Han nationality, were savagely oppressed. Besides heavy taxes and forced labor, every two or three peasant families as a unit had to provide a soldier for the army. The family designated to provide the soldier was called the soldier family, while the other family, or families, in the group was called the supportive family. Qiu Hu's family is the soldier family, and as the drafting sergeant puts it, his name is on the reserve list.

So instead of leaving home of his own accord, Qiu Hu in this play is drafted into the army while his wedding ceremony is actually in progress.

The episode in Act II is added to the original story to show how Meiying bears the hardship of life in a household without a male laborer, and how she withstands the pressure from her parents.

The play reaches its climax in Act III. As Qiu Hu's position has changed from that of an ordinary peasant to a high official, he takes it for granted that a woman will fall for either his higher social respectability or his money. We can see how a change of social status may change a person. In fact, Qiu Hu's attitude toward women, and toward life perhaps, has become rather

INTRODUCTION

similar to that of Squire Li, the rich landlord.

One may ask how it is possible that man and wife could fail to recognize each other after a separation of ten years. In feudal times, the desired age for a woman to marry was sixteen, and a sixteen-year-old woman could look quite different from the same person at the age of twenty-six. More importantly, the bride and bridegroom might have never seen each other until the day of their wedding. Even if they had a chance to meet at the time of engagement, they were not supposed to look directly at the other, let alone speak to each other.

The last act deviates most from the original story in that Meiying does not commit suicide but, out of consideration of filial piety, agrees to make up with Qiu Hu, a change to meet the tacit requirement of a happy reunion ending which is most typical of traditional Chinese plays. But we can still find traces of her reluctance in her final song:

But for the sake of my mother-in-law,
this marriage would no doubt have been dissolved.

Her change of attitude is abrupt, for right after that she sings:

Gone are the days of wearing rags;
now I've changed into decent clothes.

Despite this sudden twist in the ending, Meiying's character is superbly borne out by a range of tests and temptations – hardship, pressure, power and wealth.

Qiu Hu Attempts to Seduce His Wife

CHARACTERS

MRS QIU (*lao dan*), Qiu Hu's mother

QIU (*zheng mo*), Qiu Hu, a young peasant

LUO (*jing*), a country gentleman and father of Meiying

LUO'S WIFE (*cha dan*)

MEIYING (*zheng dan*), daughter of Luo and wife of Qiu Hu

MATCHMAKER

SERGEANT (*wazi*)

LI (*jing*), a rich landlord

ATTENDANTS

ACT I

(Enter Mrs Qiu and Qiu Hu)

MRS QIU:

*A plant may bloom again,
But youth comes only once.
Precious as gold may be,
Can it buy life and peace?*

My maiden name is Liu. My husband has passed away, and now I'm living with my only son, Qiu Hu. He was married yesterday to Meiying, the daughter of Squire Luo. Today I've prepared a dinner in honor of her parents. Son, go and invite your parents-in-law over.

QIU: They should be here any minute.

(Enter Luo and his wife)

LUO:

*Why can other families have seven sons,
While my poor self has only half an heir?*

LUO'S WIFE:

*Though we did not provide a large trousseau,
We can enjoy three days of free repasts.*

LUO: My old self is Squire Luo, and this is my wife. We have an only

daughter called Meiyong. She and Qiu Hu were married yesterday, and today our new relatives are inviting us to dinner. So here we are at their gate. Good day, Qiu Hu. We've come.

QIU: Mother, Meiyong's parents have arrived.

MRS QIU: Please ask them to come in.

QIU: Do come in, please.

(They greet each other)

MRS QIU: Please take a seat. Dinner is ready. Son, pour wine for your parents-in-law.

QIU (handing wine): Father- and mother-in-law, bottoms up.

LUO & WIFE: Wedding wine is the best wine. Bottoms up. (They drink)

MRS QIU: Son, ask your wife to come.

(Qiu calls out. Enter Meiyong and the matchmaker)

MEIYONG: Granny, what do you think my mother-in-law is calling me for?

MATCHMAKER: Miss, it's time for you to pay respects to parents.

MEIYONG: Isn't that embarrassing?

MATCHMAKER: Miss, what's there to be embarrassed about? It's most natural for young man and woman to get married.

[Painting Cherry Lips]

MEIYONG:

Parents bring up
 their boys and girls.
 When children come of age,
 they ought to find a mate.
 Mutual respect makes a harmonious home.

MATCHMAKER: Miss, people say you learned to read and write when young. Just tell me something. I'm ignorant of books.

[A Roiling Dragon]

MEIYONG:

I've learned Mao's annotated *Book of Poems*.²
 The first song sings of proper etiquette.
 Accordingly the young man courts a girl,
 and the young woman gets engaged.
 Like lute and zither tuning up,

a pair of phoenixes mate in their nest.
My face blushes at the thought,
my fingers twisting the hem of my blouse.
I'd rather shun a public place;
I dare not meet my parents' gaze.
A woman's fate hangs on her husband's belt!
Although every woman would have this day,
it's still so embarrassing after all!

MATCHMAKER: Miss, you should have picked a rich man to marry. Then you could enjoy a comfortable life, and wouldn't have to worry about food and clothing. Why did you choose the Qius? They're so poor!

MEIYING: Granny, how can you say that!

[The Glib Cricket]

Even if dust and cobweb seal his pots,
I will accept it as my fate.
At present we may live from hand to mouth,
but like many great men from humble homes,
he is a dormant dragon in the pond.
You say he was born in a barren hut;
I think he is destined for palace halls.
I fell for him the first time he appeared.
Affluence does not come of its own accord.

MATCHMAKER: Miss, this Qiu Hu has neither money nor status. It's not too late for you to remarry a wealthier man.

[Universal Happiness]

MEIYING:

I myself have been poor throughout this life.
I'd rather die than bear the shame
of being a remarried dame!
There are millions of women in the world;
there is no lack of judgment on their lives.
Who's a lady the moment she is born?
Who can win a title in swaddling clothes?

MATCHMAKER: Miss, go over and pay your respects to your parents.

MEIYING (bows): Mother-in-law, is there anything I can do for you?

MRS QIU: Pour a cup of wine for your father and mother.

MEIYING: My pleasure. Granny, would you pass me the wine flask please? (She pours and hands over wine) Father and Mother, bottoms up.

LUO & WIFE: Bottoms up. Nuptial wine is real sweet.

MRS QIU: Child, wait on your parents and make sure they enjoy the wine.

(Enter a recruiting sergeant)

SERGEANT:

*Taking orders from above,
Soldiers do what they are told.*

I'm a recruiting sergeant. My boss has ordered me to come and draft Qiu Hu into the army. So here I'm at Lu Village. Is Qiu Hu home? (Qiu greets Sergeant) Qiu Hu, you're on the reserve list. At the order of my superior, you're called up now. (He takes out a rope to tie up Qiu)

QIU: Brother, please give me a moment. I must tell my mother. (He goes in) Mother, a recruiting sergeant is at the gate. He says he has orders from above to draft me into the army.

MRS QIU: Oh, my! What can we do?

MEIYING: Granny, what's up?

MATCHMAKER: Qiu Hu is drafted!

MEIYING: Qiu Hu, what about our marriage?

[The Village Masque Dancers]

The intense delight of the wedding night
only brought me a bosom full of woe.

If he leaves for the front,
who is to provide for us womenfolk?

I must avoid my parents' eyes.

What's in my heart
is not to pass my mouth.

They're not to see my choice of man
has led to poverty
and endless weeping nights.

I won't let people say I'm teary weak.

MATCHMAKER: This is only the third day into the marriage. The wedding ceremony isn't over and here's the sergeant! Mrs Qiu, I'm not paid yet for my matchmaking service.

[Yuanhe Minitune]

MEIYING:

He works by day and lives on meager food,
 but studies at night by a feeble lamp.
 He aims at winning an official post,
 but now the scholar must serve in the ranks.
 A man misplaced is a man defaced.
 Who said copious learning can make a name!

SERGEANT: Hurry up, Qiu Hu. Look at these papers. Your reporting deadline is in black and white. You'll be punished if you're even one day late.

QIU: Brother, allow me a minute please.

[Mounted Arrogance]

MEIYING:

Wang Liu has fiery traits;
 Ban Ge is most uncouth.
 Like Beefy and Rawhide,³
 the man is swinging a ferocious club.
 A callous rough,
 he may beat to death my treasured love.

MRS QIU: This is only the third day of their marriage! If you take him away, who'll provide for me? Oh, heavens! You're killing me!

[Touring Four Gates]

MEIYING:

Just now we were raising our love-filled cups,
 and now he has to bear arms to the front.
 We married only yesterday
 – the quilt's mandarin ducks are not yet warmed;⁴
 today I have to send him far away.

[Better Than Gourds]

While you should pillow your head on my arm,
your armor is to print scales on the ground.
In times of chaos swords outshine the pen.
Heads roll off necks;
blood like fountains spurt.
That's how a soldier comes to fame.

QIU: Meiying, I'm going to join the army. You take care of mother and perform the filial duties.

MRS QIU: Son, send us a letter from time to time to let us know how you're doing.

[Backyard Flowers]

MEIYING:

To heaven and earth we've just bowed and prayed
to shun the bad turns of the sun and moon.
We'd hoped your diligence of ten long years
could one day win us favor from on high.
I frown and ask myself:
Did I in any way offend Jupiter⁵
when I stepped down from the wedding cart?
Or did I unwittingly turn my back
to the ancestors' portraits when I bowed?
Could I be the cause of this evil luck
that sends him away from home to the front?

[The Willow Leaf]

A new home is wrecked soon as it was built,
turning my marriage into a one-night stand.
Am I destined to lead a widow's life?
Darling, did you not consult
a fortune-teller
when you decided on our wedding date?

MRS QIU: Son, take care of yourself on the way, and send us a message now and then. Don't make me worry about you.

QIU: Don't worry, mom. You take care of yourself.

[Coda]

MEIYING:

Off you go to the northern wastes,
 where even wild geese do not reach.
 Reflected in this cup of farewell wine
 are the turbid currents and surging waves,
 the distant mountains and the vast expanse.

Qiu Hu,

QIU: Yes?

MEIYING:

Willing or not,
 we're tied by fate.

Just imagine! We married yesterday and today you're called up! It's said:
 One night's love lasts through their remaining years.
 From now on I'll attend your dreams,
 and you'll be haunting mine.
 Tears will accompany me through the nights.

(Exeunt Meiying and Matchmaker)

QIU: Dear parents-in-law, I'm going to join the army. Please look after my
 mother and wife.

LUO & WIFE: To join the army is your duty. We can only say our daughter is
 unlucky. Go!

QIU (bows farewell): Brother sergeant, let us go.

*Don't blame the books you learned for adverse luck
 That tears apart in three days newweds.
 If learning can be useful at the front,
 One day I may in glory come back home!*

(Exeunt Qiu and Sergeant)

LUO & WIFE: Mrs Qiu, since Qiu Hu has gone, we shall leave too.

MRS QIU: Sister, my son is taken away. Sorry that the ceremony is cut short.

*I would have liked to keep your company,
 But Qiu Hu is drafted into the army.*

LUO & WIFE:

*If your son doesn't come home in a year,
 You cannot keep my daughter widowly!*

(Exeunt all)

ACT II

(Enter Li, a rich landlord)

LI:

*My farmland stretches far beyond my sight;
My days are spent in watching monkeys dance.
Farm laborers live on their body strength;
I live on buckets of sweet, ice-cold wine.^b*

I'm Squire Li. I have money, silver, gold, land, houses, stockpiles of grain, and all the rest! – but not a wife. That alone robs me of all the pleasures of life. As the richest man in the village, who in this village and those around doesn't owe me either money or grain? Yet my debtors laugh at me. They say I'm no richer than they are since I can't even afford a wife. Their ridicule gnaws my heart!

There's an old guy in this village, called Squire Luo. Once he was a rich man too, but now his fortune has declined so much that he had to borrow grain from me, and is unable to pay back. He has a daughter called Meiyang. She's quite a beauty, but is married to a man called Qiu Hu. Qiu Hu has been away in the army for ten years without any news of him. I'll tell that Squire Luo Qiu Hu is dead, and ask him to remarry his daughter to me. If he agrees, I'll not only write off the one hundred twenty bushels of grain he owes me but may also give him a handsome betrothal gift. Since he's in such need, I'm sure he'll be more than happy to comply. I've sent for him and he should be arriving any moment now.

(Enter Luo)

LUO:

*An invitation from the rich
Is just like fortune beckoning.
Once I was there among the rich.
How come I do their bidding now?*

My old self is Squire Luo. It's ten years already since Qiu Hu went to join the army. I owe Squire Li one hundred and twenty bushels of grain and it's long overdue. Now that he summons me, it must be about that debt. Let's see what he has to say.

No one is at the gate. I'll go straight in. (He greets Li) Squire, you summoned me?

LI: Old man, I sent for you because there's something I must tell you. Qiu

Hu, your son-in-law, died of diarrhea after eating *tofu*.

LUO: How do you know?

LI: That's what I heard.

LUO: Oh, my!

LI: Old man, don't feel that bad. Qiu Hu is dead. Think about your daughter.

She's so young. How can she endure widowhood for the rest of her days?

Why don't you remarry her to me?

LUO: Squire, how can you come up with such a cheeky proposal!

LI: Well, if you don't agree, pay back the one hundred and twenty bushels of grain you owe me, or I'll sue you at the magistrate's office and make you pay with your last penny. But if you remarry your daughter to me, I'll not only write off those one hundred and twenty bushels of grain but give you a handsome betrothal gift into the bargain. What do you say to that?

LUO: Squire, please give me some time to see to it. My wife may not agree to the idea even if I do.

LI: No problem. Take this gift of money and red silk with you and go home to talk it over with your wife. If you can make Mrs Qiu accept my gifts, I'll follow up with lambs and wine.

LUO: All right. I'll go first with the gifts and, Squire, you take your time. (He steps out of the gate) If I say yes, how would my wife dare say no? I may take the gifts directly to Mrs Qiu.

(Exit Luo)

LI: Since her father has agreed, she cannot but consent. I'll now send over the lambs and wine and bring her back. Once she steps into my house, I'll lay her down and fuck her. What pleasure that'll be! People say life's best moments are:

The candles on the wedding night;

A dangling pestle in the midst.

(Exit Li)

(Enter Mrs Qiu)

MRS QIU: My old self is Qiu Hu's mother. Ten years have passed since my son joined the army. During all that time we haven't had a single word from him. Without my daughter-in-law, I don't think I could have survived till now. She made a living by doing laundry and mending clothes for others, and by raising silkworms and reeling silk from the cocoons. These days, however, I have a strange feeling. My eyelids keep twitching. I wonder whether that foretells glad news or sad news. Whatever it is, all I can do is

sit and wait.

(Enter Luo)

LUO: I'm Squire Luo. Here I am at Lu Village. I've already thought out what to say to my daughter's mother-in-law. No need for anyone to announce my arrival. I'll go straight in. (He greets Mrs Qiu) Sister Qiu, how do you do?

MRS QIU: Brother Luo, please take a seat. What wind brings you here today?

LUO: Sister Qiu, your son has been away many years and I guess you feel rather lonely. So I came to chat with you. I've brought some wine with me. Please have three cups.

MRS QIU: Thank you very much for your concern, but the wine ...

LUO (pours out and offers three cups of wine): Please drink. And here's a length of red silk for my daughter to make a new blouse.

MRS QIU: Brother Luo, it's so very nice of you. When Qiu Hu comes home, I'll tell him to go over and thank you in person. (She receives the silk)

LUO (claps his hands): It's done. It's done. It's done.

MRS QIU: Brother Luo, what is done?

LUO: Sister Qiu, to level with you, neither the wine nor the silk is mine. They are gifts from Squire Li in my village. The three cups of wine have sealed the agreement, and that you accepted the red silk means you've accepted his proposal. Qiu Hu died long ago. Squire Li wants to marry Meiyang, and he'll bring you a betrothal gift of lambs and wine himself. Goodbye to you.

The rich Squire Li hatched an ingenious plot,

And you accepted both his wine and silk.

To save yourself the shame of standing trial,

Better remarry Meiyang to this man.

(Exit Luo)

MRS QIU: That old scoundrel has duped me! Now that he's left, how should I break this to my daughter-in-law? Child, where are you?

(Enter Meiyang)

MEIYANG: I'm Meiyang. Ten years have slipped by since Qiu Hu joined the army. To provide for my mother-in-law, every day I carry fresh water for others and collect their used water. Just now I was working in the silkworm shed. These days my mother-in-law doesn't feel good. I must check on her from time to time. Oh, Qiu Hu, when will you be able to come home?

[Base Tune Perfect]

There was only one night as man and wife;
 ten thousand more were spent in tears and sighs.
 Is this what people call a married life?
 He left me with the care of his white-haired mom,
 who lies bedridden through the days and nights.

People would come up and say, "Meiying, why don't you get a doctor to see *your mother-in-law*?" Isn't that what I should do?

[Rolling the Embroidered Ball]

I know I should fetch
 a doctor to feel her pulse,
 but how can I afford the herbs?
 And only quack docs roam the neighborhood.
 I've been praying
 to heaven and earth
 for the reunion of mother and son.
 It's said a daughter-in-law is plaster on the wall.
 I wish I could plaster her pains and sores.

Oh, heavens!

When will my far-off lover come back home?
 There hasn't been a word from him!

(She greets Mrs Qiu) Mother, would you like to have some porridge?

MRS QIU: Child, listen. Although Qiu Hu is not home, a young woman like you shouldn't dress so slovenly. Why don't you comb your hair, and when the hawker comes by, buy some powder and rouge to make up? Don't let people laugh at your unkempt looks.

[The Inert Baton]

MEIYING:

Mother says a young woman should dress decently.
 I have no lack of polished taste.

Oh, Qiu Hu!

Into a decade dragged the passing years,
 and we're separated by hills and rills.

You do not have supportive kith and kin,
neither are you a man of means.

MRS QIU: Child, do you smash ladles and bowls in your distress?

MEIYING:

How dare I smash a ladle or a bowl!

Mother told me to buy some powder and rouge when the hawker comes by. I answered that in the past ten years with Qiu Hu in the army, we don't even have enough to eat or wear.

Mother, how could we spend money on mending sieves?

(Enter Li, Luo and his wife with a band of musicians)

LI: I'm going to get a wife!

The candles on the wedding night;

A dangling pestle in the midst.

MEIYING: Mother, you hear the horns and drums outside? It must be the celebration parade for the Bull God. Can I go out and have a look?

MRS QIU: Go and have a look.

MEIYING (steps out and comes face to face with her parents): So it's father and mother. What brings you here?

LUO: A wedding ceremony.

MEIYING: Whose wedding ceremony?

LUO: Yours.

MEIYING: Mine? Are you joking?

[The Stupefied Scholar]

You came with a band and a flock of lambs,
but I'm already married to Qiu Hu.

Don't let people call you a rustic fool.

LUO: Child, Qiu Hu is dead. Squire Li wants you to be his wife.

MEIYING:

Since I am married to a Qiu,

how can I be the wife of Li?

That goes against morality!

LUO'S WIFE: Child, don't you know that the first and foremost filial duty is to obey your parents? Be good and marry him.

[Rolling the Embroidered Ball]

MEIYING:

Married to a rooster,
 I'll fly with it.
 It's you who married me to him.
 Be he rich or poor, I accept my lot.
 From the instant I get up
 till the moment I lie down,
 I often go without a bowl of rice!
 Would you consider that luxurious life?
 The teeth of winter bite me in the bones;
 hunger accompanies me all the year.
 And yet, I didn't breach the ethic code!

LUO: Don't make such a fuss. Your mother-in-law has already accepted his betrothal gifts.

MEIYING: Really? I'll go in and ask her. (She steps in) Mother, during the ten years while Qiu Hu was away, I carried fresh water and collected used water for others just to provide for you. How can you remarry me off to somebody else? If this is my reward, I'd better hang myself!

MRS QIU: Child, it had nothing to do with me. It was your own father. He thrust the red silk into my hands. He sold you! (She sobs)

[Removing the Shirt]

MEIYING:

There mother-in-law groans and moans;
 deep inside, my heart bleeds and weeps.
 (She steps out of the gate)
 Daddy, how can you be devoid of shame?

LUO: Your mother-in-law and I are waiting to divide up the betrothal gifts.

MEIYING:

So you're itching to share the bride-price gifts!

LUO: Child, marry him, so that I can have meat to eat and wine to drink.

[Drink for Peace]

MEIYING:

Daddy, how can you be so gluttonous?

LUO'S WIFE: I want to attend banquets too.

MEIYING:

Mom, a banquet also appeals to you?

LI: Miss, don't say so much. Look at me. I ain't bad looking. (He makes faces)

MEIYING (beats him):

I'll let you feast on my ferocious fists.

Move closer and I'll scratch your brazen face!

In a time when peace and order prevail,

how dare you insult a woman in broad daylight!

Ah! You're taking advantage of

my mother-in-law's age and helpless state!

LUO: You cheap ungrateful wench, don't make such a fuss!

MEIYING:

So you call me a cheap, ungrateful wench!

Daddy, how can your heart be hard as stone?

LI: Come on, miss. If you calm down and think about it, it's in no way degrading to be my wife. Haven't you heard the saying that a phoenix should mate with a phoenix and a mandarin duck with a mandarin duck?

[Tao Tao Minitune]

MEIYING:

You said a phoenix should with phoenix mate;

a duck should only pair off with a duck;

a landlord surpasses a peasant girl!

(Drums and horns flare up. Meiying angrily) What are you waiting for? Get lost!

You take the band home to amuse yourself!

LI: Miss, don't shy away from me. You'll not find another man as rich as I am in the whole village.

MEIYING:

I don't covet your money or your land;

I don't covet your money or your land.

Why don't you go to bed with your copper coins?

LUO: You cheap wench, it's far more sensible to marry Squire Li than suffer





in poverty. You'll be much better off.

[Coda]

MEIYING:

Daddy, why exhort me to switch my course?

LI: I ain't bad looking.

MEIYING:

You're a rogue destined for the headsman's knife.

The like of Rawhide, Beefy are your kin;

you and village elders are drinking pals.

Those are the big shots to your rustic eye.

I wonder what my man is doing now.

Is he now riding in a gilded coach?

Or in the saddle of a splendid steed?

A retinue follows him everywhere;

his jars and jugs are all of silverware.

His office seal is of glittering gold;

his standard dwarfs the largest bamboo screen.

With a seventy-year-old mom at home

he's bound to return to his place of birth.

The family will be reunited then.

Compared to him you're but a country hick.

Then you will know whom you are talking to.

At his bidding his men will pounce on you!

"Who dares take liberties with my wife? Who dares be rude to my mother?" he'll bellow. (She pushes Li, and Li tumbles)

See if you can easily get away!

(Exeunt Meiying and Mrs Qiu)

LI: Am I nuts? I came to get a bride, but got a scoffing and a push instead.

She'll pay for it! A poem says:

I dreamed of candles on the wedding night;

A dangling pestle almost broke my waist.

LUO & WIFE:

It was because it wasn't in your fate,

Not because our daughter was acting chaste.

(Exeunt all)

ACT III

(Enter Qiu Hu in an official robe and hat)

QIU: I'm Qiu Hu. That day when I reported to the marshal, he was very pleased to find I was good at both martial arts and liberal arts. Under his command, I've won many battles, and was promoted to the rank of *zhong-daifu*.⁸

Recently I sent in a petition for home leave, citing that I've been away for ten long years, leaving my white-haired mother at home without means of support. His Royal Highness, the Prince of Lu, pitied me and gave me a cake of gold for my mother's provision. So here I am on my way home in glory and fame, and I look forward to seeing my mother again. A poem says:

*The other day I left home shedding tears;
Now I return in glory and in smiles.
A cake of gold for my elderly mom;
A bosom of love for my waiting wife.*

(Exit Qiu)

(Enter Mrs Qiu)

MRS QIU: My old self is Qiu Hu's mother. Since my son was drafted into the army, I haven't had a single word from him. And the other day, I was humiliated by my daughter-in-law's parents. Thank heaven that my daughter-in-law is a virtuous woman and refused to remarry, or who'd look after me? Early this morning she went out to the mulberry grove to pick leaves for the silkworms. She's toiling day after day for my sake. I wish in my next life I could be her daughter-in-law, and attend on her as she's now doing for me. Only in that way could I repay her kindness! What drowsy weather! I think I should turn in and lie down a while.

(Exit Mrs Qiu)

(Enter Meiyang, carrying a basket)

MEIYANG: I'm going to pick mulberry leaves.

[The Powdered Butterfly]

After my marriage to Qiu Hu,
I failed to gain a stable livelihood.
Is it my fate to live a widow's life?

Only hunger and cold
 accompany my days.
 Even my parents loathe and bully me.
 Hard-pressed as our conditions are,
 we are further caught in a famine year.

[Drunk in the Vernal Wind]

Seeing the hazy crowns of distant trees,
 I mistook them for wet clouds bringing rain.
 Who has offended the heavenly lord
 that He punishes us with such a drought?
 People say marriage hatches fertile love
 but after only one sweet night
 we two were cruelly torn apart.

Here's the mulberry grove.

[Everyone Happy]

I put my basket down,
 and look for fresh young leaves.
 The leaves are lush and green
 like glints of bright brocade.
 I push aside the lower limbs;
 dewdrops are shaken off the top.
 (She plucks leaves)
 I should have remained indoors reeling silk,
 but now I'm forced out to pluck flowers and leaves.⁹
 If I delay my silkworms starve.
 In such haste little do I care
 whether I snap the twigs or tear the leaves.

It's getting hot. I'll take off my coat and hang it on the branch. (She hangs up her coat)

(Enter Qiu Hu in plain clothes)

QIU: I'm Qiu Hu. As I'm approaching home, I've changed from my official robe into plain clothes. Ahead, isn't that my mulberry grove? The saplings

I planted have already grown into big trees! I must go over and have a look. Why is the fence gate open? Let me check. (He sees Meiyong) Ah! A young woman there! She has her back toward me. I can't see her face, but her neck is soft and white and her hair is jet black. If only I can make her turn around and show me her face! Well, I'll improvise a poem about her and she'll certainly turn around. (He intones)

*Which family boasts of such a girl
With a basket of fresh young leaves?
Upon a branch she hangs her coat;
Out from its folds a sweetness floats.*

She didn't hear me? I must say it louder. (He intones again)

MEIYONG (turns around to take her coat and sees Qiu): How is it that a man came into the woods while I was busy picking leaves? He caught me unawares and not properly dressed.

QIU (raises his clasped hands in salutation¹⁰): My respects, miss.

[Sweet Garden]

MEIYONG (Surprised, she curtsies):

Taken aback I curtsy in return.

QIU: It's my honor, miss.

MEIYONG:

He doesn't seem to be a loafing rogue.
Is he a young scholar on his way to exams?
See how he bows and politely talks.
He must be a student of Confucius.

QIU: Miss, can you spare me a bowl of water?

MEIYONG:

I am a silkworm raiser picking leaves,
not a young maid taking lunch to the fields.

QIU: Miss, since no one is around, why don't we have a good time? Come over here. No need to be afraid.

MEIYONG (angrily):

He surprised me with such offensive talk.
He does have the looks of a gentleman.
How can he harbor such ungentle thoughts!

QIU: Miss, there are just the two of us here. Say I'm begging you. It's said:

*Nothing could be more precious than one's youth,
So better marry wealth than harvest silk.*

Come on. Be my mistress.

MEIYING: Don't you insult me!

[Going Upstairs]

So you want us to share the bed?

I guess you've heard the cuckoo's songs.

Again and again,

it sings to you:

"Better go."¹¹

QIU: You're nothing but a silkworm raiser. The cuckoo is the spirit of a legendary king.

MEIYING:

You say I'm not its match.

Silkworms are all I have.

You think that's good enough?

What if you find the silkworms are too old?

QIU (aside): It seems fancy words won't work. (He grabs Meiying) Come on. Be my mistress.

MEIYING (pushes him away): Get your hands off me!

[The Twelve Months]

From where came such a cocksure man?

He's bold without a trace of shame.

His lustful eyes are glued on me;

his hands are reaching for a catch.

QIU: You couldn't get away from this grove even if you could fly.

MEIYING:

There he stands blocking my escape.

He's forcing me to cry for help.

(She calls out) Sha Third, Wang Liu, Ban Ge, and all my neighbors! Help!
Help!

QIU: Miss, please don't scream.

[People of Yao]

MEIYING:

In the mulberry woods he seeks amour.
My hands and legs tremble like wind-blown leaves.
He tries to hold me and remove my clothes;
once and again I push and fend him off.
At first
I thought he was a gentleman.
It turns out he's a libertine!

QIU (aside): Well, just let me think. What can I do if she keeps refusing me? Yes, I've got a cake of gold with me. It was given by the prince to provide for my mother, but my mother has no idea of that. It's said money can always change one's mind. If I give her this piece of gold, without question, she'll agree to be my mistress. (He takes out the gold piece and turns toward Meiying) Miss, see this cake of gold. It's yours if you sleep with me.

MEIYING (aside): This son of a bitch is treating me like a whore. Now he's offering a cake of gold. I've got an idea. [To Qiu] Young man, why didn't you tell me you have gold? Come over here and I'll go over there to see if there's anyone around.

QIU: You see, this time she agrees. You go and have a look.

MEIYING (steps out of the gate): You beast, listen! It's said gold can corrupt a man, but it may put a woman on guard. Did you think that when I saw that piece of gold I'd change my mind? Listen:

[Playing with Children]

I hear there's gold and beauty in the books.

QIU: Aha! I'm getting sour cucumber in return! It stings my tongue!

MEIYING:

You offer gold to purchase sensual joy,
but gold ought to be spent on buying books.
Ah! You, a dandy from a wealthy home,
squander pearls away as if they were coins.
Don't you know he is wise who wisely spends?
Your behavior invites contempt.
You are a monkey in man's clothes,
a beast of burden wearing robes.



QIU: Miss, what do you say if I go home with you and ask your parents to marry you to me?

[Pre-coda, two]

MEIYING:

My cowshed home is not a nuptial hall;
 phoenix chicks aren't raised in a raven's nest.
 The egg-sheets¹² are not good for marriage forms;
 the mulberry branches do not entwine.
 Flounders are not found in a washing pond;
 jade bracelets are not ground on spinning wheels.
 What you do is against the moral code.
 For that heaven and earth will punish you.

QIU: Miss, spare me the lecture. If you refuse me, I'll beat you to death.
 Now I've said it, I'll do it.

MEIYING: Who are you going to beat?

QIU: I'll beat you.

[Pre-coda, three]

MEIYING:

Stare at me, and you will be branded on the face;
 tug at my clothes, and you will have your hands chopped off;
 touch my body, and you'll be flogged across the back;
 pinch my leg, and you'll be exiled a thousand miles.
 Grab me in your arms, and you'll be paraded on
 the wooden ass¹³ and led to a protracted death.
 Never did I disturb your family graves;
 never did I kill any of your kin!

QIU: What a shrew you are! You may refuse me, but how can you hurl such a string of insults at me!

[Coda]

MEIYING (picking up her basket):

Though my scolding meets only vacant stares,

my curses fall onto a brazen face,
that's what he deserves for molesting me.
Even his ancestors can't speak for him.

(Exit Meiying)

QIU: So I got nothing but a bag of words for my advances. Better take this cake of gold home to my mother. It's said:

*The sight of a curvy figure
Made me forget all good manners.
I tried sweet talk to flirt with her,
But brought shame on my ancestors.*

(Exit Qiu)

ACT IV

(Enter Mrs Qiu)

MRS QIU:

*One rises with the sun to pick fresh leaves,
But by noon the basket is not yet full.
Thus I believe that people who wear silk
Aren't those who raise the worms and reel the thread.*

My old self is Qiu Hu's mother. My daughter-in-law has gone to pluck mulberry leaves. It's noontime. Why isn't she back yet?

(Enter Qiu Hu in robe and hat, attended)

QIU: I'm Qiu Hu, and here I am at the gate of my house. I'll go straight in.

Mother, your son is back!

MRS QIU (surprised): Who are you looking for, sir?

QIU: I'm your son, Qiu Hu.

MRS QIU: Son, why! You've got an official position! How I missed you!

QIU (hands his mother the gold cake): Mother, I've won an official position and now hold the title of *zhongdaifu*. His Royal Highness has sent me back home with this cake of gold for you.

MRS QIU: Son, you must have gone through a lot during all these years.

QIU: Mother, where's Meiying?

MRS QIU: She went out to pick mulberry leaves for the silkworms. (Sadly)

Son, you've been away for ten years! If it weren't for Meiying, I'd have starved to death long ago.

QIU: Mother, where did you say Meiying is?

MRS QIU: She's in the mulberry grove. She should be coming home now.

QIU: What? Is the woman I met in the mulberry grove my wife? If it's really her, I have to come up with some idea.

(Enter Meiying hastily)

MEIYING: Quick, quick, quick!

[Minitune from River Xin]

If it were not the busy days of spring,
I wouldn't have let go that bestial rogue.
There were my hungry silkworms and thirsty wheat,
and I was afraid it would soon get dark.
All around was a stretch of green
– a dense patch of mulberry trees;
not a soul was in sight to lend me help.
It's a scandal to be seen with a man.

Why is there a horse tethered to my gate? I'm not the village head. Let me first put down my basket in the silkworm shed and then go to have a look. It's that shameless son of a bitch! He failed to seduce me in the mulberry grove so he's followed me home!

[Sweet Water Minitune]

He thinks money gives him superior power,
and that's what makes him bold,
or how dare he invade my home?
Wrath drums up in my chest.
I lift my feet
and stride forward.
Catching him by the sleeve,
I'll take him before the judge.
(She catches hold of Qiu)

MRS QIU: Child, don't drag him like that. He's Qiu Hu. Your husband is back home!

[Laurel Crown Minitune]

MEIYING (releases her hold):

The “filial” son at last returns in silk!

(She steps out of the door) Qiu Hu, come out here.

QIU: Meiyong, what do you want to tell me?

MEIYING: Have you ever taken liberties with other women?

QIU (aside): I guess I’m in trouble. If only I can ... [Turns around] Meiyong, what makes you think so?

MEIYING:

Dare you avow you didn’t flirt with girls,
nor tried to seduce others’ wives?

How can a person so debauched
match the boots and hat he wears,
and the official seal he sports?

So you’ve won a courtier’s luxurious life!

But have you ever thought of your mother and how hard it was for me to
keep a roof over her during these ten long years?

How can you calmly face your toiling wife,
who weathered life’s despairs
with waning hopes of love?

For that one wedding night of love,
my youth was wasted in despair.

MRS QIU: Child, come over here. (Meiyong and Qiu walk over) Child, His
Royal Highness has given Qiu Hu a cake of gold for my provision. In the
past ten years, without you I’d have dropped dead long ago. This is all I
have to thank you. Take it.

MEIYING: Mother, I can’t accept it. You use it to make a pair of hairpins for
yourself. (She steps out of the door) Qiu Hu, come out here!

QIU: What’s up this time?

[The False Card]

MEIYING:

You are a thief caught in the very act,
although you may look like a crystal tower.
So the gold was given you by the prince
for you to take home to your white-haired mom.

If it had been a loose woman just now, what would have happened to your gold?

[Yellowing Bean Leaves]

She may accept your gold cake and oblige.
 What if your mother is thus starved to death?
 You are a man of mark;
 you are a man well-read;
 you must have learned by heart *The Book of Poems*.
 This is what is said in the book:
 Dating in the mulberry woods,
 you see me off on River Qi.

Qiu Hu, have you ever taken liberties with other women?
 QIU: You don't have faith in me?

[Paddling on the River]

MEIYING:

Did she agree to sleep with you?
 (She picks up her basket)
 I'd better go to pick more leaves.
 I can't but blame my dad and mom
 for choosing me a spouse like you,
 who has no more than handsome looks.
 After one night of wedded bliss,
 how could you put our marriage at such risk?

[Happy Children Around]

You think a gold house can trap a mandarin duck,
 and I would let your rich hand pluck the bud.
 How often I went begging in the streets
 just for bits of leftover food and soup!
 You may as well write me a paper of divorce.

QIU: How is it that you're asking for a divorce document?

MEIYING:

I'd like to make matters clear
 so as to let others judge

whether the woman is chaste,
the man respectable.

MRS QIU: Qiu Hu, are you quarrelling over there?

QIU: Mother, Meiying won't accept me as her husband.

MRS QIU: Child, why won't you accept him?

MEIYING: Qiu Hu, listen:

*My heart is pure and clear like crystal ice;
Your cake of gold did not affect my will.
If I had smiled consent to your request,
Who would believe I was chaste in the past?*

Qiu Hu, write me a divorce paper! Write me a divorce paper!

QIU: Meiying, that's most unreasonable. I hold a high position now. You'll be a titled lady and can ride in a coach-and-four! Why do you want a divorce?

[A Wild Goose Alights]

MEIYING:

I wasn't looking forward to silk robes,
nor a coronet made of gold.

Even if I had them,

I wouldn't put them on to sport around,
but rather lock them away in the trunk.

[Minitune of Victory]

A breeze has robbed the fragrance from the flower.

(Enter Squire Li, Luo and his wife, and others)

LI: Her mother-in-law accepted my betrothal gifts. How could she turn me down and scoff at me! This time I've brought with me a pack of houndish servants. We'll grab her and carry her off.

LUO & WIFE: Today is an auspicious day. We'll go with you to get that damned girl. (They see Meiying) Isn't that our daughter Meiying?

MEIYING:

Now black frost follows on the heels of snow.
Since I didn't fall for an angler's gold,
how can I succumb to a cowherd's whip?

QIU (shouts): You, what are you doing in my home?

LI (taken aback): Oh, my! He's not a common soldier but a high official! I heard that you'd returned in glory. So I came to offer my congratulations.

LUO & WIFE: Bah! Didn't you say he's dead?

LI: Well, if he isn't dead I am.

QIU: So you've been spreading rumors and trying to seize another man's wife. Attendants, apprehend him and send him to the magistrate of Juye County.¹⁴ He should receive a heavy sentence. (Attendants bind Li)

LI: It wasn't my idea. It was your parents-in-law's idea. They proposed to sell me their daughter to pay off the one hundred and twenty bushels of grain they owe me.

QIU: And you also practice usury and force people to sell their children! That's an even more heinous crime. Attendants, tell the magistrate to flog him forty strokes, fine him three thousand bushels of grain for poor relief, and then put him in the stocks on public display for three months. He can't be pardoned!

ATTENDANTS: Your wish shall be carried out.

LI:

*I dreamed of candles on the wedding night;
A dangling pestle is to break my back.*

LUO & WIFE: We don't have the face to stay here any longer. Better make an excuse of escorting Squire Li to the magistrate and find an opportunity to slip away. It's said:

*It's best for us to learn the turtle's way,
Who hides its shame in its protective shell.*

(Exeunt Li, Luo and his wife, and attendants)

MRS QIU: Child, if you still reject my son, I'd better give up this life.

MEIYING:

What she said frightens me,
as if a fawn were knocking at my heart.

We certainly can talk things out.

Mother, I'll be reconciled with him.

MRS QIU: Child, if you two are reconciled, I won't commit suicide.

MEIYING: Well,

the woman always is the softer one.

MRS QIU: Child, since you've made up now, you may go in to groom and change. Then you two come together to pay respects to me. (Meiyang exits)

to change clothes. She reenters, pays respects to Mrs Qiu with Qiu Hu, and then she and Qiu bow to each other)

[Coda]

MEIYING:

But for the sake of my mother-in-law,
 this marriage would no doubt have been dissolved.
 Gone are the days of wearing rags;
 now I've changed into decent clothes.
 Husband and wife
 are to enjoy their natural span.
 I didn't mean to put on airs,
 nor did I want to make a show.
 I just did what a good wife should have done;
 Luo Fu¹⁵ no more than made up a story about her man.

QIU: Nothing in this world can be better than the integrity of the family and the harmony of the couple. We should prepare lamb and wine for a grand celebration. Here's a poem for the occasion:

*It was at my wedding ceremony
 That I was dragged away to join the troops.
 Ten years could even cause a change in stars,
 And I abandoned both my mom and wife.
 Luckily I made a name for myself,
 And rose from a soldier to high command.
 His Royal Highness gave me a cake of gold
 For the provision of my aged mom.
 In the thicket I tried to lay a girl,
 And she turned out to be my faithful wife.
 Unwavering is her fidelity,
 And that deserves an entry in history.
 To this day visitors to Juye haunt the site
 To hear locals tell how Qiu Hu tried to seduce his wife.*

BANNER TITLE:

***The virtuous wife defends her chastity;
Lord Qiu Hu attempts to seduce his wife.***

¹ Half an heir: a daughter.

² *The Book of Poems* is one of the Five Classics, and Mao Heng's annotated edition was the most popular reader.

³ Those are common names for rustic young men in Yuan Dynasty plays.

⁴ See *The Quilt with Mandarin Ducks*.

⁵ It was superstitiously believed that the position of Jupiter in the zodiac affects one's luck.

⁶ This is a deliberate distortion of the usual entrance poem of a farmer. "Monkeys" in the second line should be "children," and the fourth line is originally "And pray for Lord of Heaven's good design."

⁷ The couplet should read: "The candles on the wedding night; A name atop the winners' list." The winners' list refers to the announcement of the successful candidates in the highest imperial examination.

⁸ *Daiju* is an official title. *Zhong* means "middle," the middle one of its three ranks.

⁹ To pluck flowers and leaves is a euphemism for womanizing. Meiying is joking about herself, for women were supposed to work at home while men worked outside.

¹⁰ A traditional way of greeting is to raise one's clasped hands in front of the chest and nod them.

¹¹ Better go: an imagined meaning given to the cuckoo cry.

¹² Egg-sheets: sheets of paper on which the silkworms lay their eggs.

¹³ The wooden ass: an ancient instrument of torture.

¹⁴ Juye County: in the southwestern part of present-day Shandong Province.

¹⁵ Luo Fu: an ancient model of womanly virtues. One day she was picking mulberry leaves when a licentious official accosted her and offered to carry her off in his carriage. She discouraged his advances by extolling her husband's enviable position and handsome looks.

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