

Chapter 61

HAN TAO-KUO PREPARES AN ENTERTAINMENT FOR HSI-MEN CH'ING; LI P'ING-ERH PAINFULLY OBSERVES THE DOUBLE YANG FESTIVAL

Last year on the Double Yang Festival
my sorrow knew no limit;
When the memory arises in my mind I am
ever more brokenhearted.
The autumn colors and the setting sun
are both pallid and wan;
My tear-traces and my lonely thoughts
are equally desolating.
The migrating geese fly in formation
but bear me no letter;
The yellow chrysanthemums lack feeling
but are still fragrant.
I am all too aware that recently I have
become quite emaciated;
And often gaze into the phoenix mirror
to examine my features.¹

THE STORY GOES that one day in the evening, when Han Tao-kuo's job in the silk goods store was over, he went home and slept until the middle of the night, when his wife, Wang Liu-erh, opened a discussion with him.

"You and I have been patronized by him," she said. "And, on this occasion, we have made so much money out of it. Don't you think we should throw a party and invite him over for a visit? Not to mention the fact that he has just lost a child, and we ought to help him recover from his depression; it will hardly cost us a great deal to entertain him for half a day. Not only will it put us on a better footing with him, but our young employee, who will probably be headed south any day now, will observe that we are on more intimate terms with our employer than anyone else."

"I've been thinking along the same lines," said Han Tao-kuo. "Tomorrow is the fifth, which is an unlucky day.² But on the sixth we can hire a cook to

2 THE PLUM IN THE GOLDEN VASE

prepare a feast, and engage the services of two singing girls. If we write out a formal invitation, I can go to his residence to deliver it in person, and invite His Honor to come for a visit and let us help him dispel his melancholy. In the evening I'll go to spend the night in the shop."

"What's the point of engaging any singing girls for no good reason?" said Wang Liu-erh. I'm afraid, after he's had something to drink, he may want to come into this room here for a visit, and they'll be in the way. There's a girl named Second Sister Shen who frequents the house of Yüeh the Third next door. She's a young woman, dresses stylishly, and can sing the songs that are popular these days. We ought to arrange for her to come sing for us. Then, in the evening, when the drinking is over, if His Honor comes back into this room, I can simply send her next door."

"That's a good suggestion," said Han Tao-kuo.

Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day, Han Tao-kuo went to the shop, where he asked Licentiate Wen Pi-ku to write out an invitation for him, and then went across the street to see Hsi-men Ch'ing.

After greeting him with a bow, he said, "If Your Honor doesn't have any other engagements tomorrow, we've prepared a cup of watery wine at our place and would like to invite Your Honor, if you have nothing else to do, to deign to visit with us for a while in the hope of dissipating your melancholy."

He then handed the invitation to him.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had read it, he said, "Why should you have put yourself to so much trouble? It happens that I have no other engagements tomorrow, so, after I come back from the yamen, I'll come to your place."

Han Tao-kuo took leave of him and went out the gate and over to the shop, where he carried on his business as usual.

The next morning, he took out some silver, gave it to his young employee, Hu Hsiu, and told him to take a basket and go out onto the street to buy some chicken feet, goose and duck, fresh fish, and other comestibles appropriate for a drinking party; and engaged a cook to take care of preparing the food in his home. He also sent a page boy ahead of time to hire a sedan chair and go to fetch Second Sister Shen. Wang Liu-erh, for her part, along with her maid-servants, prepared a supply of:

Fine tea and fine water,

swept out the parlor, dusted the chairs and tables, and awaited Hsi-men Ch'ing's arrival.

She waited until the afternoon, when Ch'in-t'ung came to deliver a jug of grape wine. Only after that did Hsi-men Ch'ing show up, riding in an open sedan chair, accompanied by Tai-an and Wang Ching. When he arrived at the door and alighted from his sedan chair, he was wearing a "loyal and tranquil hat"⁷³ on his head, a long gown of jet moiré, and white-soled boots.

Han Tao-kuo ushered him into the parlor and, after exchanging the customary amenities, said, "We are most grateful to Your Honor for the wine you have bestowed upon us."

At the upper end of the room there was placed a single folding chair, upon which Hsi-men Ch'ing took his seat.

Before long, Wang Liu-erh came out, dressed in formal attire. On her head she wore a fret of silver filigree and a kingfisher blue crepe headband with puffed gold-spangled edging, held in place all around with gold-encrusted cricket-shaped stickpins. She was wearing a white blouse of Hang-chou chiffon that opened down the middle, with a vest of jade-colored moiré, over a gosling-yellow drawnwork skirt. On her feet she wore shoes of raven-black iridescent silk with high heels and gold-spangled toes. From her ears dangled a pair of clove-shaped pendant earrings. It was evident that she had taken pains to adorn herself as elegantly as possible.

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder, she kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing four times and then went back to the rear of the house to see to the tea.

Before long, Wang Ching came out carrying two teacups in raised saucers of red lacquer with gold tracery, containing tea steeped with osmanthus and cured green soybeans, further enhanced with eight precious ingredients. Han Tao-kuo first took one of the cups and, raising it up respectfully, presented it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, after which he took the other cup for himself and sat down to one side in order to keep him company. When they had finished drinking it, Wang Ching came in and took away the teacups.

Han Tao-kuo then initiated the conversation by saying, "Thanks to Your Honor's patronage:

My obligations to you are so great, they cannot be described. I have been away from home for some time, during which you have favored my insignificant wife with your attentions and promoted Wang Ching to the position of a servant in your household.

My gratitude for your kindness is not shallow.⁴ Today, in consultation with my wife, although we have nothing adequate to express our filial respect, we have prepared a cup of watery wine and invited Your Honor for a visit. The other day, when our little brother passed away, although I was able to be there, my wife, because she was suffering from a cold, was unable to come to your residence to offer her condolences and feared that you might be annoyed with us. Today we have invited you over in the hope that we may be able to help dispel your grief, on the one hand, and that you may forgive our negligence, on the other."

"It doesn't amount to anything," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I fear I've put the two of you to a lot of trouble."

As he spoke, what should he see but Wang Liu-erh, who sat down on a low stool by his side and, turning to Han Tao-kuo, said, "Have you mentioned it to His Honor, or not?"

"No, I haven't mentioned it to him yet," said Han Tao-kuo.

"What is it?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"He thought that today we should engage the services of two girls from the licensed quarter to entertain Your Honor," she explained. "But we were afraid that Your Honor might not find them satisfactory, so we didn't venture to do so. However, there is a girl surnamed Shen, who goes by the name Second Sister Shen, who frequents the house of Yüeh the Third next door. Her repertory includes every kind of currently popular song, both long and short, and she can even perform *shu-lo*, or recitatives.⁵ When I visited your residence on a former occasion, I had a chance to hear that performer named Big Sister Yü, but her singing was only mediocre, not as good as that of Second Sister Shen. For that reason, I've invited her to come sing for Your Honor today, but I don't know what you may think of the idea. If she meets with your approval, you can engage her to come to your residence and entertain your womenfolk. She is constantly busy performing at various houses, so if you wish to engage her services, you should do so several days in advance, and she will not presume to let you down."

"Since you've engaged the girl, that's fine," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Ask her to come out, so I can have a look at her."

At this juncture, Han Tao-kuo said to Tai-an, "Why don't you go over and help His Honor off with his formal clothes."

Meanwhile, a table was set up for their repast, and Hu Hsiu brought in the appetizers to go with their wine, which consisted of preserved duck, dried shrimp, seafood, spareribs, and the like.

Thereupon, Wang Liu-erh, who had opened the wine and heated it, stood to one side with flagon in hand, while Han Tao-kuo first proffered a cup to Hsi-men Ch'ing and then sat down to preside over the feast. Only after this was Second Sister Shen summoned into their presence.

Hsi-men Ch'ing opened his eyes wide and took a good look at her.

Her cloudy locks were enclosed in a lofty chignon,⁶
 Held in place with a modest selection of ornaments,
 And an inconspicuous display of combs and hairpins.
 Underneath her green blouse and crimson skirt,
 Appeared the upturned points
 of her golden lotuses;
 Atop her peach-colored cheeks and painted face,
 There were depicted a pair of
 delicate spring peaks.
 A pair of lapis lazuli pendant earrings
 dangled beneath her ears;

Silver teeth, as white as glutinous rice,
gleamed between her lips.

Facing in his direction:

Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze,
she kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing four times.

"Please stand up," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "May I ask how old you are at present?"

"I'm twenty years old," said Second Sister Shen.

"And how many songs are there in your repertory?" he went on to ask.

"I have committed to memory any number of songs and song suites," replied Second Sister Shen.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then directed Han Tao-kuo to provide her with a seat at their side. Second Sister Shen came forward and bowed once again before venturing to sit down.

She started out by taking up her psaltery and performing the song suite that begins with the tune "Decorous and Pretty," the first line of which is:

Just now I was enjoying myself in the
Autumn Fragrance Pavilion.⁷

When she had finished, a course of soup and rice was consumed and was replaced with another course, whereupon she went on to perform the song suite that begins with the tune "Powdery Butterflies," the first line of which is:

Five thousand rebel troops.⁸

By the time she finished, the wine had run out, and Hsi-men Ch'ing directed a servant to take away her psaltery and hand her the *p'i-p'a*, saying, "Have her sing a few current popular songs for me."

Second Sister Shen, who was only too happy to show off the fact that she was:

A practiced performer and an accomplished singer,
thereupon:

Lightly flaunted her silken sleeves,
Gently strummed the silken strings,

and:

Commencing to sing in full voice,
with her instrument tuned to a low pitch, performed a song to a medley version of the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope":

For some time now,
I have not met my lover face-to-face.
My innermost feelings,
Are hard to deliver, hard to transmit.
But, in my heart, I sincerely yearn for you.

6 THE PLUM IN THE GOLDEN VASE

On my account, you are totally preoccupied.
 In our relations with each other,
 We make no distinctions between us.⁹
 Our promises to be as faithful as the hills and seas,
 Are fixed firmly in our minds.
 You are just like a reincarnation
 of Ts'ui Ying-ying,¹⁰
 But, unfortunately, I am not in that
 temple in P'u-tung.¹¹
 I could not help myself after once having caught sight
 of your amorous glance.
 Come!
 Your jade features evoke an air of spring.
 Your flowery countenance is beyond compare.
 Once having heard the sound of your seductive voice,
 I try to penetrate the eastern wall with my gaze,
 And tire of loitering in the western bower.

To the same tune:

As for my loved one,
 The two of us are totally preoccupied.
 What obsesses me is that we are unable,
 To exchange looks with eyes and eyebrows.
 Once you departed, I have only my lonely pillow.
 The pillow is cold, the coverlet remains;
 Alone I confront my jasper-inlaid zither.
 My sick body is like a stick of kindling;¹²
 My waist has become emaciated.
 I realize that it is difficult for you
 to leave your mother's side,
 But this waiting only makes my heart
 feel the more inebriated.
 I am all on tenterhooks as I keep company
 with this unfeeling lamp.
 Come!
 On hearing the sound of the wind rustling the bamboo,
 I assume that my loved one has come,
 And hastily step out of my study.
 But it is only the gentle swaying of the flower shadows,¹³
 In the moonlight that is as limpid as water.¹⁴

When she had finished singing these two songs to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope," there was a call for something to drink, and Han Tao-kuo asked his wife to prepare some more wine.

After filling a cup to the brim and offering it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, he then went on to say, "Second Sister Shen, you know some more good songs to the tune 'Shrouding the Southern Branch.' Why don't you sing a couple of them for His Honor?"

Second Sister Shen then switched modes and sang a song to the tune "Shrouding the Southern Branch":

When we first met,
 That girl of my dreams,
 Was in the springtime of her youth,
 no more than twenty.
 Her raven locks took shape as two black clouds;
 Fragrant red defined a single daub of ruby lips.¹⁵
 Her cheeks were like glowing peaches
 or tender bamboo shoots.
 If she had been born into painted bowers
 or orchid-scented halls,¹⁶
 She would surely have been fated
 to be a lady.
 Alas, she has ended up in the licensed quarter,
 Serving in a low-grade occupation.
 If she were only able to marry
 out of her profession,
 It would certainly be better than abandoning
 the old to welcome the new.¹⁷

To the same tune:

When we first met,
 That captivating wench,
 With her moonlike face and flowerlike countenance,¹⁸
 was a rare commodity in the demimonde.
 The handful of her slender waist deserved a painting;
 Her clever disposition was altogether inimitable.
 My only regret is that I did not
 meet her sooner.
 My only wish is that at the festive board,
 before the flowing cup,
 We might sip wine and croon softly,¹⁹
 locked in each others' arms;
 Each glance conveying true devotion,
 Every look satisfying our hunger.
 Though it should provide but half a moment
 of gratification,
 It would suffice to dissipate melancholy
 and dispel sorrow.

As Hsi-men Ch'ing listened to these two songs to the tune "Shrouding the Southern Branch," he was reminded of his first visit to Cheng Ai-yüeh, and his heart was filled with delight. He was also impressed by the fact that his hosts had engaged a performer who understood music so well.

Wang Liu-erh, standing at his side, filled another cup of wine to the brim and offered it to him with an ingratiating smile, saying, "Father, enjoy the wine at your leisure. This sample of what Second Sister Shen can do is just a drop in the bucket. She knows a great many more songs than this. In the future, when you have the time, you can send a sedan chair for her, and let her entertain your womenfolk."

She then went on to say, "As for that singer that I've run into at your residence?"

"That would be Big Sister Yü," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She has been performing at my place for quite some years now."

"I guarantee," pronounced Wang Liu-erh, "that if Second Sister Shen were to sing at your place, she would be certain to outperform her. Father, if you wish to engage her services at some future date, let me know beforehand, and I can send a servant to pick her up with a sedan chair and deliver her to your residence."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then said, "Second Sister Shen, if I were to send someone for you on the Double Yang Festival, would you be able to come or not?"

"Your Honor," said Second Sister Shen, "how can you talk that way? You have but to call for me, and I would hardly dare to turn you down."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that she had a way with words, he was utterly delighted.

Not long afterwards, while they were:

Exchanging cups as they drank,

Wang Liu-erh began to feel that they were not able to express themselves freely in her presence, so, after having her perform several more song suites, she quietly said to Han Tao-kuo, "Get our servant Chao-ti to escort her over to Yüeh the Third's place for the night."

As she was about to go, and respectfully took her leave of Hsi-men Ch'ing, he groped a packet containing three mace of silver out of his sleeve and gave it to her with which to buy replacement strings for her instruments. Second Sister Shen hastily responded:

Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze,
by kowtowing to him in order to express her gratitude.

Hsi-men Ch'ing reminded her of their agreement, saying, "On the eighth, I'll send someone to fetch you."

"Father," said Wang Liu-erh, "just send Wang Ching to speak to me about it, and I'll send my servant after her."

Second Sister Shen then bade farewell to Han Tao-kuo and his wife and, with Chao-ti escorting her, went next door. When Han Tao-kuo had seen

Second Sister Shen on her way, and informed his wife of the fact, he went off himself to spend the night at the shop, leaving his wife to keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company.

When they had played dice and continued drinking for a while, they began to hunger after each other. Hsi-men Ch'ing, on the pretext of the need to relieve himself, went into the woman's bedroom, where the two of them proceeded to lock the door and enjoy themselves. Wang Ching, thereupon, took the lamps and candles out to the side room in the front courtyard, where he fell to drinking with Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung.

Meanwhile, at some point in the evening, the young man, Hu Hsiu, had gone back to the kitchen and stolen a few cups too many of wine. After the hired cook had been dismissed, he went into the anteroom for the display of Buddhist effigies and ancestral tablets that was adjacent to Wang Liu-erh's bedroom, put a mat down on the floor, and went to sleep. After sleeping there for a while, he got back to his feet.

It so happened that there was only a board partition between the room where he was and the bedroom next door. All of a sudden, he heard the woman in the other room making a commotion. Hu Hsiu noticed that there was lamplight visible through a crack in the partition and assumed that Hsi-men Ch'ing had left, and that Han Tao-kuo was in the bedroom sleeping with his wife. Surreptitiously extracting a hairpin from his head, he used it to poke a hole in the paper that had been pasted over the crack and proceeded to peek through it. He saw that the other room was brightly lit with lamps and candles, and that, unexpectedly, it was Hsi-men Ch'ing who was there with the woman, and that they were just in the thick of things.

Clearly and distinctly,²⁰

he could see that the woman's two legs were suspended by her foot bindings from the top of the bed, and that Hsi-men Ch'ing was wearing only a satin jacket on the upper part of his body, while the lower part was completely exposed. The two of them were busy on the edge of the bed, where:

One comes, the other goes;

One moves, the other rests.²¹

As he slammed away at her:

The reiterated sounds reverberated loudly.

Everything conceivable in the way of:

Obscene noises and lascivious words,²²

issued from her mouth as the two of them struggled to make themselves one.

After a while, he heard the woman say, "My own daddy! If you want to burn moxa on this whore of yours, you can burn me wherever you like. This whore of yours would not presume to stop you. After all, the body of this whore of yours is yours to command. What is there to worry about?"

"My only fear is that your husband might object," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"That cuckold!" the woman said. "How could he muster the:

Seven heads and eight galls,
to object to anything you did? Who does he depend on for his livelihood, after all?"

"Since you're so irrevocably committed to me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "after I've made enough silver off the existing consignment of goods, I'll send him, along with Lai-pao, for a long sojourn in the south, where he can set up an office and act as my purchasing agent. I've got Manager Kan Jun here at home to take care of sales, so all I lack is a buyer to take charge of acquiring the merchandise at that end."

"After he's come back from this second trip of his," said the woman, "send him off again by all means. What's the point of keeping him idle at home? He says himself that he's habituated to being away from home and would be happy to go on the road. He's been acquainted with life on the rivers and lakes since his childhood, and there's little he doesn't know about business and merchandising. If you choose to patronize him, that would be just fine. And when he returns, I'll find another bedmate for him. I don't need him anymore now that I've committed myself completely to you. You can stick him anywhere you want as far as I'm concerned. If anything I say is false, may the worthless body of this whore of yours rot completely away!"

"My child," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "there's no need for you to swear oaths like that."

Who would have thought that every last thing that occurred between the two of them was so clearly overheard by Hu Hsiu that he might well have ejaculated:

"Is it not delightful?"

Earlier that evening, while Han Tao-kuo was still at home, he had been unable to find Hu Hsiu and assumed that he had gone to the shop to sleep. When he arrived at the silk goods store and asked about it, the young employees, Wang Hsien and Jung Hai, said that he had not come there. Han Tao-kuo, thereupon, returned home, called for someone to open the door, and looked everywhere for Hu Hsiu, without finding him, though he noticed that Wang Ching was drinking with Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung in the front courtyard. When Hu Hsiu, recognizing his voice, realized that he had come home, he hastily lay down again on the mat and pretended to be asleep. In due course, Han Tao-kuo, having lit a lamp and made his way into the Buddhist chapel, found Hu Hsiu lying on the floor, where he was snoring loudly through his nostrils.

Kicking him awake with his foot, he cursed him, saying, "You lousy wild dog of a condemned jailbird! Why aren't you up and about? I assumed that you had already gone to the shop to sleep, but it turns out that you were here all the time, happily sacked out. Get up, and come along with me."

Hu Hsiu, thereupon, got to his feet, made a show of rubbing his eyes, and pretended to be stupefied with drink as he followed Han Tao-kuo back to the shop.

Meanwhile, Hsi-men Ch'ing's bout with the woman continued for nearly two hours before coming to a conclusion. In the process, he burnt moxa on the middle of Wang Liu-erh's chest, the top of her mons veneris, and her tail-bone, three places in all.²³ The woman finally got up, put on her clothes, called for a maidservant to dish up some water, and washed her hands. Thereupon:

More warmed wine was served, and
Further dainties were provided,

as they continued to engage each other in flirtatious conversation.

Only after drinking a few more cups of wine did Hsi-men Ch'ing mount his horse and set off for home, attended by Tai-an, Wang Ching, and Ch'in-t'ung. By the time they arrived, it was already the second watch of the night, and Hsi-men Ch'ing went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters.

Li P'ing-erh was lying in her bed, and when she saw how drunk he was when he came in, she asked him, "Whose place have you been drinking at today?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing explained at length how, "Han Tao-kuo and his wife invited me to their place out of a desire to help dispel my depression over the loss of our child. With this end in view, they engaged the services of a professional female singer named Second Sister Shen, who's still a young woman, and really knows how to sing. In fact, she's better than Big Sister Yü. Tomorrow, on the eve of the Double Yang Festival, I'm going to send a servant with a sedan chair to bring her here so she can sing for all of you for a day or two, and help relieve your depression. Even though you may remain heartsick about it, you oughtn't to let it preoccupy your attention to such an extent."

When he had finished speaking, he wanted to call for Ying-ch'un to help him off with his clothes so he could sleep with Li P'ing-erh, but she said, "Don't you suggest any such thing. I am hemorrhaging all the time down below, and my maidservant is engaged in preparing my medicine over the fire. You go and spend the night in someone else's room. Haven't you noticed what a fine state I'm in all day long? I've hardly got a breath of life left in me, and you still want to pester me this way."

"My darling," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I can't do without you. What would you have me do?"

Li P'ing-erh gave him a sidelong glance and laughed, saying, "Who would believe that:

Specious mouth and throwaway tongue,
of yours? Do you expect me to believe that when I die in the near future, you won't be able to do without me?"

"In any case," she went on to say, "you can wait until I'm feeling better before coming to spend the night with me. It won't be any too late then."

After sitting with her a while longer, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "That's enough of that! Since you don't want me to stay here, I'll go over and spend the night with P'an the Sixth."



Hsi-men Ch'ing While Drunk Burns Moxa on a Mons Veneris

“That’s right,” said Li P’ing-erh, “you go ahead and do that! It will spare you the need to sacrifice your desires. After all, she’s burning up waiting for you over there, like:

A fire within a fire.²⁴

Why should you neglect her by insisting upon barging into my place to pester me?”

“If that’s the way you’re going to talk about it,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “I won’t go.”

“I was only kidding,” said Li P’ing-erh with a smile. “You go ahead and go.”

With that, she succeeded in sending Hsi-men Ch’ing on his way.

Li P’ing-erh then got up and sat on the edge of the bed, while Ying-ch’un helped her to take her medicine. As she took up the medicine, she couldn’t prevent a cascade of tears from pouring, with a gush, over her fragrant cheeks, and she gave vent to a long sigh before downing the cup of medicine. Truly:

The unlimited tribulations that produced
the sorrow in her heart,²⁵

Were all turned over to the yellow oriole
to express in its cries.

We will say no more, at present, about how Li P’ing-erh took her medicine and lay down to sleep, but return to the story of Hsi-men Ch’ing. When he arrived at the quarters of P’an Chin-lien, she had just told Ch’un-mei to cover the lamp and had gotten into bed to go to sleep.

Unexpectedly, Hsi-men Ch’ing pushed open the door and came in, saying, “My child, I see you’ve already gone to bed.”

“Well, what a surprise!” exclaimed Chin-lien. “What wind has blown you into this room of mine?”

“And whose place have you been drinking at today?” she went on to ask.

“Manager Han Tao-kuo,” Hsi-men Ch’ing said, “upon coming back from his trip to the South, and seeing that I had lost my child, on the one hand, in order to help relieve my depression, and, on the other hand, to express his gratitude for my patronage in sending him on this expedition, invited me over to his place for a visit.”

“While he was abroad,” remarked Chin-lien, “you certainly took advantage of the opportunity to patronize his wife.”

“You’re talking about the household of my own manager,” protested Hsi-men Ch’ing. “How could there be any such thing?”

“Where the household of an employee is concerned,” pronounced Chin-lien, “there could well be just such a thing. I suppose you’ve kept a cord wrapped around your waist, lest you might be tempted to violate that boundary! You think you can be up to your tricks, while keeping me in the dark, do you? I know all about it, and I’m fed up with you, to boot. During the celebration

of your birthday, that lousy whore showed up here, didn't she? You had surreptitiously slipped her one of Li P'ing-erh's pins in the shape of the character for long life.

You may be a brown cat, but you've got a black tail.

By so doing, you enabled her to wear it here in order to show off where she stood. The First Lady, Meng the Third, and the whole household all noticed it. And when I interrogated her about it, her face turned crimson. Didn't she tell you about it? So today you found your way over there again, did you? Lousy, shameless, good-for-nothing that you are! The painted faces available to you in your own household aren't enough for you, are they? Instead, who knows why, you're taken by that overgrown pumpkin head of a long-faced whore. What with her:

Phony eyebrows and bogus airs,²⁶

her temples adorned with long spit curls, the garish red color with which she daubs her lips, so her mouth looks like nothing so much as a bloody cunt, she's a fine woman indeed, nothing but a lanky, rosewood-complexioned, swarthy whore! I can't imagine what you see in her. No wonder you've taken that cuckold's brother-in-law, Wang Ching, under your wing, so you can use him to carry messages back and forth between you, early or late."

Hsi-men Ch'ing adamantly refused to acknowledge anything, but simply laughed, saying, "You crazy little slave! All you do is talk nonsense. How could any such thing have occurred? Today it was her husband who entertained me. She didn't even put in an appearance."

"You think you can fool me with that sort of talk, do you?" the woman said. "Who doesn't know that her husband is an open cuckold:

Grazing sheep on the one hand, while
Gathering kindling on the other?

He's simply turning his wife over to you as a means of getting a hand on your business and making money for himself out of it. You simpleminded good-for-nothing! You might just as well be:

Listening for the report of a blunderbuss
being fired forty li away."

Upon noticing that Hsi-men Ch'ing had taken off his outer clothes and was sitting on the edge of the bed, the woman stuck her hand out, pulled open his trousers, and groped out his organ, which was limp and flaccid, and still had a clasp fastened around it.

"There you go again," she said. "You're just like:

A preserved duck that's been put into
the pot to stew:
Its body has turned soft, but its beak
is as hard as ever.

The mute testimony is there for all to see.²⁷

You ruffian! You've been fooling around with that whore all day before coming home, so that your organ is:

As soft as driveling snot and thick as gravy,
yet you remain as hard-mouthed as ever. You can swear all you like. I'll get Ch'un-mei to bring a bottle of cold water, and if you dare drink it, I'll acknowledge that you've got guts. If you stop to consider it:

This salt is just as salty;

This vinegar just as sour.

When a bald man puts a hairnet on his head;

There's no need to brush it any further.

Enough is enough! If one were to believe what you say, you could seduce every woman in the world and get away with it. What a lousy shameless article you are! You're just a big good-for-nothing with too much fire in your eyes. It's a good thing you're a man. If you were a woman, you'd be:

Laid by every man in the street, and

Fucked by every guy in the alley.²⁸

You're in the same class as an itinerant shoemaker;

Wherever two hides meet you'll cobble them together."²⁹

These few lines of invective reduced Hsi-men Ch'ing to staring with wide-open eyes, as he made his way onto the bed. He then told Ch'un-mei to heat some distilled spirits for him, took a pill out of his cylindrical gold pillbox, put it in his mouth, and swallowed it.

Lying face up on the pillow, he then said to the woman, "My child, get down on your knees and suck your daddy off. If you can get it to stand up, it will be your good fortune."

The woman made a show of distaste, saying, "That filthy thing! You've been boring into that whore's hole with it, and now you want me to suck it off for you. That really shows how much you care for me!"

"You crazy little whore!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All you ever do is talk nonsense. I never did any such thing."

"If you never did any such thing," the woman said, "you'll have to swear an oath on that fleshy body of yours before you can get me to believe it."

After bantering back and forth for a while, she tried to get Hsi-men Ch'ing to get out of bed and wash himself off with water, but he refused to get out of bed. The woman then pulled a figured handkerchief out of her sleeve and proceeded to wipe his organ off with it before engulfing it with her ruby lips and sucking it audibly for some time. In no time at all, she had manipulated it until:

Its protuberances swelled and its head sprang up,
as it became engorged with rage.

He then positioned himself astride the woman's body and allowed his jade chowrie handle to penetrate her vagina from the rear, while he lifted up her

thighs with his two hands, assumed a squatting position, and went to work. As he gave himself over to slamming away at her:

The reiterated sounds reverberated loudly;
 In the light cast by the lamp,³⁰
 He savored the sight as it went in and out.

The woman knelt by the pillow side and raised her hips in response to his movements for some time. Hsi-men Ch'ing's ardor was still unslaked, so he had the woman turn over and face upwards, while he applied some of the pink aphrodisiac ointment to his organ, and plunged back into her. Taking her pair of feet in his hands, he arched his back and alternately submerged and exposed the knob of his glans, lifting her body into the air as he rammed away at her two or three hundred times.

The woman, finding his assault difficult to withstand, closed her eyes and cried out inarticulately in a trembling voice, "Daddy! On this occasion you'd better take it easy with me. You had no need to use that aphrodisiac."

"You little whore!" Hsi-men Ch'ing blurted out at her. "Are you afraid of me, or not? Will you ever dare to treat me so disrespectfully again?"

"My own daddy!" the woman cried out. "That's enough. If you'll only be a little easier on me, I'll never dare offend you again. Daddy, slow down a bit. You're musing my hairdo."

The two of them:

Tumbled and tossed like male and female phoenixes,
 for half the night before tiring out and going to sleep.

To make a long story short, it was not long before the time came for the celebration of the Double Yang Festival.

Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Wu Yüeh-niang, "When Manager Han Tao-kuo invited me to his place the other day, we were entertained by a singer named Second Sister Shen. She is attractive and knows how to sing, as well as how to perform on both the *p'i-p'a* and the psaltery. I've sent a page boy to fetch her, and when she arrives, I propose that we keep her here for two days, so she can entertain the lot of you."

Thereupon, he ordered that the kitchen staff should prepare the appropriate wine, fruit, and other delicacies, and that in the great summerhouse in the garden, the Hall of Assembled Vistas, a large Eight Immortals table should be set up, and the bamboo blinds let down, so that the entire family could enjoy a feast there, in celebration of the Double Yang Festival.

It was not long before Wang Ching arrived, escorting Second Sister Shen in a sedan chair, and she was ushered into the rear compound, where she kowtowed to Yüeh-niang and the other ladies. Yüeh-niang saw that she was young, and good-looking, and, upon inquiry, was told that she was not able to perform too many song suites, but that when it came to the various kinds of independent songs, such as those to the tunes "Sheep on the Mountain Slope" and "Shrouding the Southern Branch," or recitatives, she could perform a fair

number. After she had been provided with tea and something to eat, she sang two song suites for them in the rear compound, after which they adjourned to the garden, where the feast had been prepared.

That day, Hsi-men Ch'ing did not go to the yamen but stayed at home in order to supervise the planting of chrysanthemums. Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Sun Hsüeh-o, as well as Hsi-men Ta-chieh, were all invited to take their places at the table, while Ch'un-mei, Yü-hsiao, Ying-ch'un, and Lan-hsiang stood in attendance at their side to serve the wine. Second Sister Shen also stood by with her *p'i-p'a* to entertain them. Li P'ing-erh was in her quarters, feeling poorly in her present condition, and had to be asked repeatedly before she made a belated appearance, looking for all the world like a tree that had been felled by the wind. It cost her a considerable effort to pull herself together sufficiently to come out and sit down by Hsi-men Ch'ing. Everyone urged her to drink, but she hardly drank anything at all.

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang, noticing that:

Her face exhibited a worried hue, and

Her eyebrows remained contracted,³¹

said to her, "Sister Li, see if you can't relax. We'll have Second Sister Shen sing a song for you."

"Tell her what song you'd like to hear," said Meng Yü-lou, "so she can sing it for you."

But Li P'ing-erh remained adamantly silent.

As they were drinking, Wang Ching suddenly came in, and said, "Master Ying the Second and Uncle Ch'ang the Second have come."

"Invite Ying the Second and Ch'ang the Second to have a seat in the small summerhouse," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll be there directly."

"Uncle Ch'ang the Second has had a porter deliver two gift boxes, which are sitting outside," reported Wang Ching.

Hsi-men Ch'ing turned to Yüeh-niang and said, "These presents must be intended to express his gratitude for my help in closing the deal on that new house of his."

"We'll have to prepare something for their entertainment," said Yüeh-niang. "We can't let them go without an appropriate response. You go keep them company, while I arrange here to have some refreshments prepared for them."

Before leaving, Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Second Sister Shen, "Whatever you do, see that you sing a good song for the benefit of the Sixth Lady."

He then went straight out toward the front compound.

"I've never seen anything like it," Chin-lien said to Li P'ing-erh. "Why don't you simply mention any song you like so Second Sister Shen can sing it for you? You're disregarding Father's intentions. He invited her here on your account, and you won't even say what you'd like to hear."

18 THE PLUM IN THE GOLDEN VASE

At this point, Li P'ing-erh felt pressured to such an extent that she was compelled to comply and, after considering for some time, finally said, "Why don't you sing that song suite that begins with the words:

The purple roads and red lanes,

for us."

"That's no problem," responded Second Sister Shen, "I know it."

Thereupon, picking up her psaltery, she:

Adjusted the bridges ranged like wild geese,

Retuned the icy strings,

and:

Commencing to sing in full voice,

performed the song suite that begins with the tune "A Variation on A Sprig of Flowers":

The purple roads and red lanes,

Would be hard for even an expert painter³²

to successfully depict.

Eye-catching luxuriance is spread before me

like a brocade carpet.

It is as though spring is out of tune with me;

It is not I that am out of tune with spring.

Simply on account of that one I've set my heart on,

When I survey the scene it only augments my sorrow.

To the tune "Wen-chou Song":

The blossoms lie scattered,

The willows are umbrageous,

The butterflies are jaded, the bees bemused,

and the orioles tired of singing.

On first waking up,

I had forgotten my longing,

But the relentless twittering

of the swallows,

Has stirred up my old resentment,

And only served to reawaken it.

In an endless pitter-patter,³³

My teardrops silently cascade.

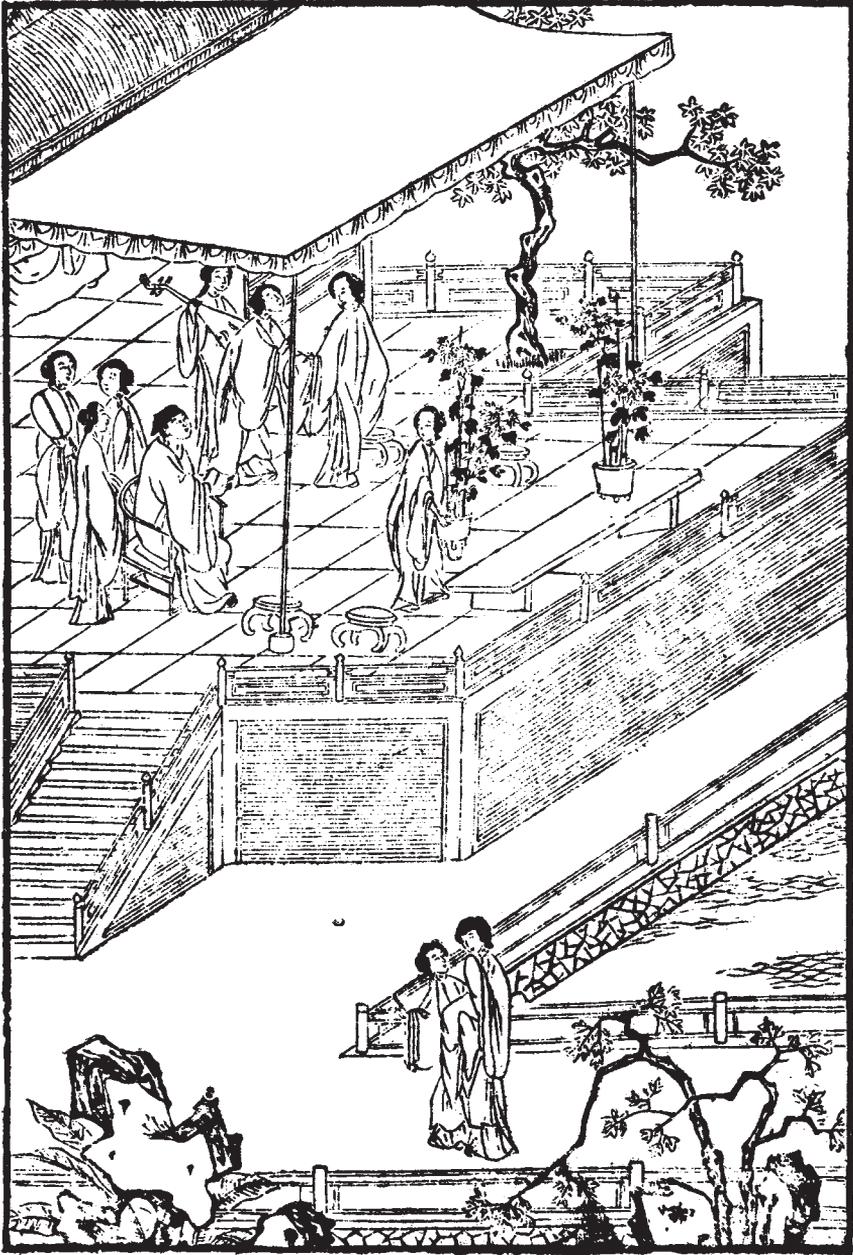
To the tune "Spring Fills the Garden":

The tranquil courtyard is secluded;

Unspoken feelings entangle my heart.

The cool pavilions and waterside retreats,³⁴

Are really suitable for feasting and drinking;



Li P'ing-erh While Ill Observes the Double Yang Festival

20 THE PLUM IN THE GOLDEN VASE

But I do not see my lover.
 With whom is he sharing a flagon?
 I could resume strumming the silken strings,
 Or choose to pluck the *p'i-p'a*,
 In order to dispel my melancholy;
 But it seems I am tired of hearing them.³⁵

To the tune "Wen-chou Song":

The pomegranate blossoms are ablaze,
 Like clusters of scarlet brocade.
 Their smokeless flames only succeed in
 incinerating my heart.
 Bashfully, I move forward,
 Thinking to pluck a blossom,
 But I shilly-shally about
 wearing it,
 Fearing that my flowery countenance,
 Is no longer what it used to be.
 When I am so lonesome and emaciated,³⁶
 It would not do to stick it in my hair.

To the tune "The Phoenix Tree":

The leaves of the phoenix tree are flying;
 The metallic autumn wind has begun to blow.
 As I gradually fall prey to lovesickness,
 I feel as though I have fallen into a deep well.
 Day after day, the nights grow longer,
 But I find it hard to endure my lonely pillow.
 Reluctantly I mount the lofty tower,³⁷
 In order to watch out for my lover.
 It may be that the fickle fellow's heart
 is out of tune with mine.
 Who knows where he may be, where he may be,
 Pursuing pleasure and indulging in drink?³⁸

To the tune "Wen-chou Song":

The chrysanthemums have blossomed,
 The cassia flowers lie scattered.
 Right now, the dew is chilly, and the wind cold,³⁹
 as the autumnal feeling deepens.
 Suddenly, outside the window, I hear,
 The reiterated cries of a solitary wild goose,
 As sorrowful and distressing⁴⁰
 as a human lament.

I am most disturbed by the chirping of the crickets,
 Under the flowers, beside the steps.
 Their constant crick-crick chirp-chirp,⁴¹
 Has utterly destroyed my peace of mind.

To the tune “Sands of Silk-washing Creek”:

The wind has grown stronger,
 The cold has become frigid.
 When lovesick, what one dreads
 the most is dusk.
 Listless and indifferent,⁴² I confront
 my lonely lamp;
 Repeatedly scanning the apertures
 in the window.
 The sound of the bugle is prolonged,
 penetrating my ears;
 Note after note is like a sob,
 difficult to hear.
 In my depression, I force myself to pour
 another cup of wine,
 But when it affects my melancholy bosom,
 the pearly tears cascade.

To the tune “Wen-chou Song”:

Giving forth long sighs,
 Two or three of them,
 I lean against the standing screen,
 longing for that man.
 Single-mindedly, I hope that in my dreams,
 We may see each other once again.
 In an endless pitter-patter, the snowflakes
 begin to fall.
 The windblown chimes under the eaves,
 Intrude upon my dreaming soul;
 Their ding-ding dong-dong,
 Shatter my peace of mind.

Coda:

On account of my loved one,
 My heart is on tenterhooks.
 I think of him by day and yearn for him at night,
 as my teardrops cascade.
 How hateful it is that my talented lover won't
 even let me see his shadow.⁴³

When the performance was finished, Wu Yüeh-ning said, "Sister Li, why don't you have a cup of this nice sweet wine?"

Li P'ing-erh, who was reluctant to refuse a request from Yüeh-ning, picked up her cup and swallowed a mouthful, before putting it back down again. She made an effort to continue sitting with the rest of the company, but, before long, she felt a surge of hot blood hemorrhaging from her lower body and had to return to her quarters. We will say no more, for the moment, about how the womenfolk entertained themselves, but return to the story of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When he arrived at the small summerhouse, the Kingfisher Pavilion, he found that Ying Po-chüeh and Ch'ang Shih-chieh were standing beneath the Juniper Hedge admiring the chrysanthemums. It so happens that, on either side of the Juniper Hedge, there were arranged a total of twenty pots containing famous varieties of chrysanthemums, each of which was more than seven feet high. These included specimens of Great Crimson Robes, Principal Graduate Reds, Purple Robes with Gold Girdles, White Powdered Hsi-shihs,⁴⁴ Yellow Powdered Hsi-shihs, Skies Full of Stars, Drunken Yang Kuei-feis,⁴⁵ Jade Peonies, Goose Feather Chrysanthemums, Mandarin Duck Chrysanthemums, and the like.⁴⁶

When Hsi-men Ch'ing came out, the two men stepped forward and bowed to him, after which Ch'ang Shih-chieh told the porter to bring in the two gift boxes.

Upon seeing them, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked, "What's all this?"

"Brother Ch'ang the Second," explained Ying Po-chüeh, "out of gratitude for your generosity in enabling him to close the deal on his new house, and having no other way to repay you, has asked his wife to prepare these fresh stuffed crabs, and these two smoked roast ducks, and invited me to join him in paying you a visit."

"Brother Ch'ang the Second," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what need was there for you to go to all this trouble? Your wife is still recuperating from her illness, and you have placed this additional burden upon her."

"That's exactly what I told him," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but he said that if he presented you with anything else, he feared you might not appreciate it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing told one of his attendants to open the boxes so they could have a look. There were forty large crabs, the shells of which had been scoured out and stuffed with crab meat, coated with a mixture of pepper, ginger, minced garlic, and starch, deep-fried in sesame oil, and flavored with soy sauce and vinegar, which rendered them fragrant and delectable. In addition, there were two oven-smoked ducks from the licensed quarter that had been roasted until they were succulent.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had examined them, he told Ch'un-hung and Wang Ching to take them inside, and to reward the porter with fifty cash. He then expressed his thanks to Ch'ang Shih-chieh, at which point, Ch'in-t'ung lifted

aside the portiere and invited them to come into the Kingfisher Pavilion and sit down.

Ying Po-chüeh could not stop lavishing praise upon the chrysanthemums and inquired, "Brother, where did you get them?"

"It was Eunuch Director Liu," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the manager of the Imperial Brickyard, that sent me these twenty pots of chrysanthemums."

"Including the pots?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"Yes, he sent everything to me, including the pots," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"The flowers are nothing out of the ordinary," opined Ying Po-chüeh, "but these pots are double-banded wide-mouthed flowerpots, manufactured from the finest clay in the imperial kilns, and are both long-lasting and water-repellent. They are made from clay that has been strained through silken sieves and kneaded under foot until it becomes a thick paste, just like that used in the firing of the finest quality of bricks in Su-chou.⁴⁷ Where could one go to find articles of this quality these days?"

After Ying Po-chüeh had fulsomely praised them for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered that tea be served and, while they were drinking it, went on to ask, "When is Brother Ch'ang the Second going to move into his new house?"

"He moved in only three days after the silver was paid over," said Ying Po-chüeh. "The previous occupants had already located another place and moved out within two or three days. Yesterday being an auspicious day for such undertakings, he laid in some miscellaneous merchandise and opened his shop for business. Sister-in-law Ch'ang's younger brother is tending the store for him, and keeping track of the silver."

"We must get together soon, and purchase some congratulatory gifts," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We don't want too many people to be involved. We'll also invite Hsieh Hsi-ta; just the three or four of you. I'll have the refreshments prepared at my place and carried over there, so it won't cost Brother Ch'ang the Second anything at all. I'll engage the services of two singing girls so we can throw a housewarming party for him, and give ourselves over to enjoyment the whole day."

"I thought of inviting you over for a visit," said Ch'ang Shih-chieh, "but, after giving it some thought, did not presume to do so. The place is too cramped, and I feared you might feel imposed upon."

"Don't talk such rot!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We don't intend to put you to any trouble. I'll send a page boy over right now to invite Hsieh Hsi-ta to join us, so we can tell him about it."

Then, turning to Ch'in-t'ung, he said, "Quickly, go and invite Master Hsieh over here."

"Brother," Ying Po-chüeh went on to ask, "which two singing girls do you plan to engage for this occasion?"

"I'll call upon Cheng Ai-yüeh and Hung the Fourth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing with a laugh. "Hung the Fourth can provide a drumbeat of accompaniment, while Cheng Ai-yüeh sings slow-tempoed songs to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "what kind of a man are you, that you should have been patronizing Cheng Ai-yüeh without saying a word to me about it? How was I to know? As far as the breeze and the moonlight are concerned, how does she compare to Li Kuei-chieh?"

"Why:

'She's two under full four words!'"⁴⁸

replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Then why is it," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that, the other day, at your birthday party, she had hardly a word to say and pretended to be so demure? She's just a lousy, stiff-necked, sycophantic little whore!"

"When I go to see her again, sometime soon," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll take you along with me. Your mother, Ai-yüeh, can play a good game of backgammon, and you can play a couple of games with her."

"If I go with you," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I'll give that little whore a hard time. You mustn't spoil her."

"You perverted dog!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You'd better not do anything to antagonize her."

As they were speaking, Hsieh Hsi-ta arrived, bowed to the company, and sat down.

"Brother Ch'ang the Second," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing, "thus and so, has acquired a new house for himself and has already moved in, without letting us know anything about it. Each of us ought to contribute something, whatever we can afford, so that it won't cost him anything, and I'll have some refreshments prepared at my place and carried over to his residence by a page boy, and also engage the services of two singing girls, so we can enjoy ourselves for a day. What do you think?"

"Brother," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "just tell each of us what you think we should come up with, and we'll send it over to your place, that's all there is to it. Who else will be involved?"

"There won't be anyone else," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "just the three or four of us. Two mace of silver apiece ought to suffice."

"If too many people are involved," explained Ying Po-chüeh, "he won't have room for us at his place."

As they were speaking, Ch'in-t'ung came in and reported, "Brother-in-law Wu K'ai has arrived."

"Tell Brother-in-law Wu to come in here and sit down," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Before long Wu K'ai came into the studio, where he first bowed to the other three guests, and then sat down, after exchanging the customary amenities

with Hsi-men Ch'ing. A page boy provided another serving of tea, and they drank it together.

Wu K'ai then stood up and said, "May I ask my brother-in-law to accompany me back to the rear compound so I can have a word with him?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly ushered Wu K'ai back to the rear compound, and into Wu Yüeh-niang's parlor. Yüeh-niang herself was still in the summer-house drinking wine and listening to the singing with the other women of the household. When she heard a page boy say that her elder brother had come, and that her husband was chatting with him in the rear compound, she got up and went back to the master suite. Upon seeing her elder brother, she greeted him with a bow and ordered Hsiao-yü to provide a serving of tea.

Wu K'ai pulled ten taels of silver out of his sleeve and handed it to Yüeh-niang, saying, "Yesterday, I received only three ingots of silver from the prefectural office. If my brother-in-law will accept these ten taels of silver for the time being, I will pay back the remainder of what I owe him on another occasion."

"Brother-in-law," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "there is no need to worry about it. Go ahead and spend it. What's the hurry?"

"I feared I might inconvenience my brother-in-law if I delayed," said Wu K'ai.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then went on to ask, "Is the repair work on the granary nearing completion?"

"It will be another month before it is done," said Wu K'ai.

"When the work is finished," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the office of the provincial regional inspector is sure to offer you a reward of some kind."

"This year's evaluation of military personnel is impending," said Wu K'ai. "I hope that my brother-in-law will continue to support me by speaking up on my behalf to the regional inspector."

"As far as that matter is concerned," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can leave it to me."

When their conversation was over, Yüeh-niang said, "Will my elder brother not go back up front for a visit?"

"I'd better go," said Wu K'ai. "I fear those three gentlemen have some business to discuss."

"Not at all," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Brother Ch'ang the Second recently borrowed several taels of silver from me with which to buy a house of modest dimensions. He has already moved into it, and today he has brought some gifts to thank me for my help. In this festival season, I have asked them to stay for a visit. I didn't know that my brother-in-law would turn up, but you've arrived in the nick of time."

Thereupon, he ushered Wu K'ai back to the front compound in order to join the party, and Yüeh-niang promptly told the staff in the kitchen to send the refreshments up front. Ch'in-t'ung and Wang Ching had already finished

setting up an Eight Immortals table, and they now brought out the appetizers, nuts, and wine. Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered the storehouse to be opened, and a jug of the chrysanthemum wine that had been given to him by Hsia Yen-ling brought out for them. When they opened it, it turned out to be of a clear beryl-green color and exuded a pungent fragrance. Before straining it, they mixed it with a bottle of cold water, in order to reduce the sharpness of its flavor. After doing so, they poured it through a cheesecloth sieve, and when it had been strained, it turned out to be both mellow and delicious, superior to grape wine in these respects.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had Wang Ching fill a small gold goblet with it and offer it first to Wu K'ai to taste. After this, Ying Po-chüeh and the rest all tasted it:

Expressing the most fulsome admiration.

Before long, in:

Large platters and large bowls,

the appetizers and delicacies were brought in, filling the surface of the table. First there were two platters of steamed, rose-flavored, stuffed, glutinous rice cakes, to be dipped in white granulated sugar. The company made short work of them, grabbing them up while they were still hot. Only after that were the stuffed crabs brought out, along with two platters of roast duck.

Ying Po-chüeh offered a crab to Wu K'ai, and Hsieh Hsi-ta remarked, "I don't know how these were ever done to make them so flavorful, crisp, and delicious."

"They were sent over here from Brother Ch'ang the Second's place," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I have led a futile existence for fifty-one years," said Wu K'ai, "without knowing that crabs could be prepared in such a way. They really are delicious."

"Have our sisters-in-law in the rear compound had a chance to taste them?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"They've all had some," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"It's really put Sister-in-law Ch'ang to the test," remarked Ying Po-chüeh, "to demonstrate such culinary skill."

Ch'ang Shih-chieh laughed at this, saying, "My humble wife was only afraid that she had not made things tasty enough, and that you gentlemen would laugh at her."

When all the crabs had been eaten, the attendants came forward to replenish the wine, and Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ch'un-hung and Shu-t'ung to come up beside them and take turns entertaining them with southern-style songs.

At this point, Ying Po-chüeh suddenly noticed the sound of singing, accompanied by a psaltery, emanating from the great summerhouse and inquired, "Brother, is Li Kuei-chieh here today? If not, who is responsible for this music?"

“You keep listening,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “and see if you think it’s her, or not.”

“If it’s not Li Kuei-chieh,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “it must be Wu Yin-erh.”

“You beggar!” exclaimed Hsi-men Ch’ing. “All you ever do is talk blind nonsense. It’s actually a professional female singer.”

“Is it Big Sister Yü, then?” said Ying Po-chüeh.

“No, it’s not her,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “This one is called Second Sister Shen. She’s young, has a good figure, and really knows how to sing.”

“Really,” said Ying Po-chüeh. “If she’s as good as all that, why don’t you drag her out here so we can have a look at her, and get her to sing something for us?”

“Today being a holiday,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “I’ve engaged her to come and help the ladies of the household celebrate the Double Yang Festival. It would take the ears of a dog like you to pick her out.”

“My senses are as sharp as those of Thousand Li Eyes and Wind-borne Ears,”⁴⁹ said Ying Po-chüeh.

“If a bee so much as buzzes forty li away,
I can make it out.”

The two of them continued chaffing each other for a while, after which Ying Po-chüeh said, “Brother, whatever you do, call her out here, so we can have a look at her. The rest of us may not matter, but you really ought to have her sing a song for your senior brother-in-law here. Enough is enough. Don’t be so stubborn about it.”

Unable to resist these importunities any longer, Hsi-men Ch’ing dispatched Wang Ching to bring Second Sister Shen out so she could sing something for Brother-in-law Wu K’ai. Before long, Second Sister Shen duly appeared, kowtowed to the company, and, after standing up again, sat down to one side on a folding chair that had been provided for her.

“Second Sister Shen,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “may I ask how old you are?”

“I was born in the year of the ox,” said Second Sister Shen, “so I’m twenty years old.”

“And how many songs are there in your repertory?” he went on to ask.

“Accompanying myself with the *p’i-p’a* or the psaltery,” said Second Sister Shen, “I can perform any number of songs and song suites.”

“If you know as many as all that,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “it ought to suffice.”

“Second Sister Shen,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “take your *p’i-p’a* and perform a few current popular songs for us. We don’t want to burden you unduly. I hear that you can perform the piece called “The Four Dreams and Eight Nothings.” Why don’t you sing that for Brother-in-law Wu here?”

He then directed Wang Ching and Shu-t’ung to replenish the wine. Whereupon, Second Sister Shen:

Gently strummed the silken strings,
 Lightly parted her sandalwood lips,⁵⁰
 and sang the set of songs to the tune “Lo River Lament”:

Morbidly my indisposition grows worse;
 When will it ever melt away?
 I long for him in spring, yearn for him in summer,
 and do the same in autumn and winter.
 With a breastful of sorrow,⁵¹ I complain
 to the Lord of Heaven.
 If Heaven possesses consciousness,
 Why doesn't it show some kindness?
 No matter how much kindness I show,
 it comes to nothing;
 No matter how much feeling I show,
 it comes to nothing.
 It all amounts to a Dream of the Southern Branch.⁵²

He is in the East, I in the West;
 When will we ever meet again?
 Little by little, I fill the sheets of flowered paper,
 and seal them again and again.
 I entrust these missives to the fish and
 wild geese as messengers,
 But they are not trustworthy,
 And fail to deliver my letters.
 No matter how much I dote on him,
 it comes to nothing;
 No matter how much I resent him,
 it comes to nothing.
 It all amounts to a Dream of Witch's Mountain.⁵³

My kindness evaporates like the morning breeze;
 Leaving me languorous and depressed.
 The way he carries on, he fails to finish
 that which he begins.
 His promises to be as faithful as the hills and seas
 are no more than wind in my ears.
 Does he not remember, in days of old,
 How ardently he expressed his love?
 No matter how much I may repine,
 it comes to nothing;
 No matter how infatuated I may be,
 it comes to nothing.
 It all amounts to only a Dream of a Butterfly.⁵⁴

My brightness resembles stupidity;
 I have fallen into his trap.⁵⁵
 In silence, all I can do is to secretly
 let my pearly tears well up.
 Who would have thought that his mouth and
 heart were not in agreement?
 My heart has been true to him,⁵⁶
 While he has played tricks on me.
 No matter whether I gain the advantage,
 it comes to nothing;
 No matter whether I lose the advantage,
 it comes to nothing.
 It all amounts to a Dream of Radiant Terrace.⁵⁷

We will say no more at present about the singing and drinking in the front compound.

To resume our story, when Li P'ing-erh got back to her room and sat down on the commode, the blood from her lower body flowed out as copiously as urine, and in no time at all, she started to black out. When she tried to get up and pull up her skirts, she suddenly suffered a spell of vertigo and fell face forward onto the ground. Luckily Ying-ch'un was at her side and was able to break her fall, but she had broken the skin on her forehead. Ying-ch'un and the wet nurse helped her onto the k'ang, but for some time she was:

Oblivious to human affairs.

This threw Ying-ch'un into a panic, and she immediately told Hsiu-ch'un, "Quickly, go tell the First Lady what has happened."

Hsiu-ch'un went to the scene of the party and reported to Yüeh-niang and the others, "My mistress has fallen down in a faint in her quarters."

Yüeh-niang abruptly left the party and, accompanied by the other women-folk, hastened on her way to assess the situation. They found Ying-ch'un and the wet nurse holding her up in a sitting position on the k'ang, but she remained:

Oblivious to human affairs.

"She seemed all right when she came back to her quarters," said Yüeh-niang. "What actually happened to bring her to this pass?"

Ying-ch'un took the lid off the commode and showed the contents to Yüeh-niang, which gave her quite a start.

"I fear," she said, "it must be the wine she drank just now that has brought on this copious flow of blood."

"But she hardly drank anything at all," both Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien exclaimed together.

Only some time after they had administered a decoction of bog rush and ginger to her did she gradually come back to her senses and recover her ability to speak.

"Sister Li," asked Yüeh-niang, "what happened to you?"

"It wasn't anything much," said Li P'ing-erh. "I sat down on the commode, but when I got up and started to pull up my skirts, a black patch appeared before my eyes and, before I knew it:

Heaven and Earth began to spin around,⁵⁸
and I couldn't help falling down."

Yüeh-niang said, "I think I'd better send Lai-an to invite Father to come in here so we can explain the situation to him, and get him to send for Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come take a look at you."

Li P'ing-erh objected to sending for Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "What's the need for:

Such a great show of consternation?
It will only disrupt his drinking party."

"Make up her bed then," Yüeh-niang said to Ying-ch'un, "and put your mistress to sleep."

Under the circumstances, Yüeh-niang had no wish to continue drinking, so she ordered that the utensils be cleared away, and they all went back to the rear compound.

Hsi-men Ch'ing continued to entertain Brother-in-law Wu K'ai and the others until evening, before returning to the master suite, where Yüeh-niang told him about Li P'ing-erh's fainting fit. Hsi-men Ch'ing hastily made his way back up front to see how she was and found Li P'ing-erh lying on the k'ang, with her face as sallow as wax.

Tugging at Hsi-men Ch'ing's sleeve, she started to weep, and when he asked her what it was about, Li P'ing-erh said, "When I went back to my room and sat down on the commode, somehow or other, I don't know why, the blood started to flow from my lower body, just as copiously as urine, and, before I knew it, a black patch appeared before my eyes. When I got up and started to pull up my skirts:

Heaven and Earth began to spin around,
and I fell down, no longer conscious of anything."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that a strip of the cuticle on her forehead had been broken open by the fall, he said, "Where were your maidservants? Why weren't they looking after you? How did they let you fall down and wound your face that way?"

"Luckily," said Li P'ing-erh, "my senior maidservant was standing by and tried to break my fall. Together with the wet nurse, they were able to help me up. Otherwise, who knows how much worse a fall I might have taken?"

"Early tomorrow morning," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll send a page boy to ask Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come and have a look at you."

That night he slept in the bed across the room from where Li P'ing-erh was lying.

The next morning, he did not go to the yamen but sent Ch'in-t'ung, riding on a mule, to fetch Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, who did not arrive until noontime. Hsi-men Ch'ing first shared a serving of tea with him in the main reception hall and then sent a page boy inside to announce the doctor's arrival. Li P'ing-erh spruced up her quarters, lit some incense, and then invited Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come in.

After palpating her pulse, he came back out to the reception hall and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Your venerable consort's pulse is significantly more sluggish than it was the last time I examined her.

Her seven feelings have been wounded.⁵⁹

The inflammation created by the element fire in her liver and lungs is excessive, with the result that the element wood is in the ascendant and the element earth is deficient, causing an abnormal circulation of her overheated blood. The resultant flooding is like the collapse of a mountain and cannot be regulated. Send your servant back to inquire. If the blood she has hemorrhaged is purple in color, her condition may be treated successfully. If it is bright red in color, it is fresh blood. In that case, if the medicine I prescribe abates the bleeding somewhat, there is hope. If not, it will be difficult to treat."

"I beseech you, venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "to take care in determining the dosage of the medications you prescribe. Your pupil will see that you are handsomely rewarded."

"What kind of talk is that?" said Dr. Jen. "You and I are on familiar terms with each other, as well as being mutual friends of Han Ming-ch'uan. Your pupil:

Will not fail to do his utmost on your behalf."⁶⁰

After hosting another serving of tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing saw his guest out the door, immediately after which, he prepared a bolt of Hang-chou chiffon and two taels of silver and sent Ch'in-t'ung off with them to fetch the prescribed medication. It turned out to be a decoction for restoring the spleen, but when Li P'ing-erh took a dose of it after it had been heated, her hemorrhaging continued unabated.

Hsi-men Ch'ing became even more flustered than before and also invited Dr. Hu, who resided at the entrance to Main Street, to come and see her.

Dr. Hu said, "Anger has disrupted her blood vessels, causing an inflammation in her uterus."

He also prescribed a medication for her condition, but when she took it, it was no more efficacious than:

A stone sunk in the vast sea.

When Yüeh-ning realized that Hsi-men Ch'ing was preoccupied with consulting physicians in the front compound, she decided to keep Second Sister Shen for one night only, after which, she gave her five mace of silver, a vest of

cloud-patterned damask, and some other trinkets, which she put into a gift box, and then sent her off in a sedan chair.

Hua Tzu-yu, who had been a guest at the party in celebration of the opening of Hsi-men Ch'ing's new silk goods store, upon hearing that Li P'ing-erh was unwell, had his wife purchase two gifts and go to pay her a visit. When she observed how emaciated and sallow she had become, and that her appearance was:

No longer what it used to be,⁶¹

the two of them had a good cry together in her room. After her visit, Yüeh-ning invited her to tea in the rear compound.

Han Tao-kuo, for his part, said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "There is a Dr. Chao living outside the East Gate, who specializes in female disorders. He is adept at palpating the pulse and is an excellent diagnostician. Some years ago, when my wife was suffering from irregular menstruation, it was he who treated her. If Your Honor will send someone to invite him to come and examine the Sixth Lady, I am sure her condition will improve."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, sent Ch'in-t'ung⁶² and Wang Ching, the two of them riding tandem on a mule, to go outside the city gate and extend an invitation to Dr. Chao.

Hsi-men Ch'ing also invited Ying Po-chüeh to join him for a consultation in the anteroom in the front courtyard, saying, "My sixth consort has become seriously ill. What am I to do about it?"

Ying Po-chüeh expressed surprise, saying, "I understood that my sister-in-law's ailment was somewhat better. Why has it taken a turn for the worse?"

"Ever since her young son died," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "she has been suffering from depression, which has resulted in a recurrence of her former ailment. Yesterday, in celebration of the Double Yang Festival, I proposed to invite Second Sister Shen, so that the women of the household could dispel their melancholy and have some fun together. She hardly drank anything at all on that occasion, but who would have expected that, no sooner had she returned to her quarters than she had a relapse, began to feel faint, and fell to the ground, breaking the skin on her face? I invited Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to examine her, and he said that her pulse was more sluggish than before; but when she took the medication he prescribed, the flow of blood became more copious than ever."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "when you invited Dr. Hu to examine her, what did he say?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "Dr. Hu said that anger had disrupted her blood vessels, but when she took the medication he prescribed, it produced no visible effect. Today, Han Tao-kuo recommended a certain Dr. Chao Lung-kang, who resides outside the city gate and is a specialist in female disorders. I have sent two page boys after him, and they have been gone for some time already. I'm as upset as can be about it. Simply because of what happened to the child,

she is so preoccupied by it, day and night, that it has given rise to this ailment. She's just a woman after all and doesn't know how to put it behind her. No matter how much you admonish her, she doesn't pay any attention. I'm:

At a loss for what to do next."

As they were speaking, P'ing-an came in and reported, "Your kinsman Ch'iao Hung has come."

Hsi-men Ch'ing ushered him into the reception hall, where, after exchanging the customary amenities, they sat down together.

"I have heard," said Ch'iao Hung, "that my kinswoman, your Sixth Lady, is unwell. Yesterday, when my nephew, Ts'ui Pen, came home, he suggested that my wife should come pay her a visit."

"It's true," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "For some time now, ever since our young son died, she has been suffering from depression. She had a physical indisposition to begin with, and this only served to exacerbate it. I appreciate your concern."

"Have you had anyone in to examine her?" asked Ch'iao Hung.

"She has been taking the medication prescribed by Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and yesterday I also asked Dr. Hu from Main Street to examine her, but when she took the medication he prescribed, it only made her condition worse. Today, I have also sent for Dr. Chao Lung-kang, a specialist in female disorders who lives outside the city gate."

"The medical practitioner Old Man Ho," said Ch'iao Hung, "who lives outside the gate of the district yamen, is equally proficient at prescriptions, both great and small, and palpation of the pulse. His son, Ho Ch'un-ch'üan, has also recently set up practice as a licensed physician. Why don't you invite him to come and examine my kinswoman?"

"If he's as good as all that," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll wait until my servants have brought Dr. Chao Lung-kang to palpate her pulse, and see what he has to say. It won't be too late to invite Dr. Ho after that."

"Kinsman," said Ch'iao Hung, "in my ignorant view, the best thing to do would be to invite Old Man Ho to examine my kinswoman now and offer his diagnosis, after which you can have him sit in an antechamber. Then, after your servants have brought Dr. Chao Lung-kang here from outside the city gate to take her pulse, you can see what he has to say, and then get the two physicians to discuss it together, in the hope of ascertaining the origin of the ailment. If they can agree upon an appropriate prescription after that, it is unlikely to prove ineffective."

"Kinsman," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what you say makes sense."

He then turned to Tai-an and said, "Take my card and go with Ch'iao T'ung to invite the medical practitioner Old Man Ho who lives outside the gate of the district yamen to come here."

Tai-an and Ch'iao T'ung nodded in assent and departed on this errand. Hsi-men Ch'ing then invited Ying Po-ch'üeh to join them in the reception hall,

where, after greeting Ch'iao Hung, he sat down with them for a cup of tea. It was not long before Old Man Ho arrived, came in the gate, bowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'iao Hung, and was ushered to a seat in the place of honor.

Raising his hand in greeting, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "It is some years since I have seen you, venerable sir, and your appearance is more impressive than ever, with your gray beard and white hair."

"And your distinguished son has been most successful in his career," chimed in Ch'iao Hung.

"The fact is," said Old Man Ho, "that he is so busy with his social responsibilities at the district yamen that he scarcely has time for anything else. It is my aged self who most often has to go out to examine the sick."

"For someone as old as you are, venerable sir," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you seem to be in remarkably good health."

"As of now," said Old Man Ho, "I have led a futile existence for eighty years."

When they had finished running through these amenities, tea was served, after which, a page boy was dispatched to let Li P'ing-erh know that the doctor was coming. Before long, he was invited into her quarters, where he approached her bed in order to palpate her pulse. She had been propped up into a sitting position on the k'ang, with the fragrant clouds of her hair concealing her bosom, and exhibited an extremely emaciated appearance. Behold:

Her face is the hue of gilded paper;⁶³
 Her body is thin as a bar of silver.
 By degrees her good looks have diminished;
 Imperceptibly her radiance has wasted away.
 Her breast is tight with anger;
 For days on end, neither water nor rice
 has moistened her lips.
 Her five viscera are congested;
 All day long, it is difficult for pills
 to get down to her stomach.
 With a constant din, the hollows of her ears
 resound with the sound of chimes;
 Nebulously, as her eyesight becomes darker,
 she seems to see fireflies flying.
 Her six pulses are weak and sluggish;⁶⁴
 The Assessor of the Eastern Peak has
 come to take away her life.
 Her numinous soul is drifting hazily;
 The Buddha of the Western Realm has
 called her to accompany him.
 The baleful stars Death Knell and Condoler⁶⁵
 have already visited her;

Even the famous physician Pien Ch'üeh of Lu⁶⁶ would find himself stumped.⁶⁷

When Old Man Ho had finished palpating her pulse, he came outside to the reception hall and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'iao Hung, "This lady's ailment originated from semen invading her menstrual blood vessels, after which she became afflicted with suppressed anger. When her anger and her blood came into conflict with each other, it resulted in copious hemorrhaging. Think carefully back to the time when her ailment began and see if this diagnosis is correct or not."

"Venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how would you suggest that it be treated?"

As they were discussing the situation, it was suddenly reported that Ch'ing-t'ung and Wang Ching had arrived back from outside the city gate with Dr. Chao.

"Who might that be?" asked Old Man Ho.

"It is another doctor who was recommended to me by my manager," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If you, venerable sir, will pretend to ignorance of the matter until after he comes back out from examining her pulse, the two of you can then discuss it together in the hope of agreeing upon an appropriate prescription."

Before long, he came in from outside, and Hsi-men Ch'ing, after exchanging greetings with him, introduced him to the others. The two venerable gentlemen, Old Man Ho and Ch'iao Hung, were seated in the center in the position of honor, the newcomer was offered a seat on the left, Ying Po-chüeh was seated on the right, while Hsi-men Ch'ing occupied the position of host. Lai-an brought in a serving of tea, and, after they had drunk it, took away the teacups in their raised saucers.

The newcomer then said, "May I ask what are the names of you two venerable gentlemen?"

Ch'iao Hung replied, "One of us is surnamed Ho and the other is surnamed Ch'iao."

"And my surname is Ying," said Ying Po-chüeh. "May I venture to ask, sir, what is your distinguished name; where do you reside; and what is your profession?"

"Unworthy as I am," the newcomer replied, "the dwelling of your humble servant is located outside the East Gate, on the First Alley, beyond the Temple of the Second Scion (Erh-lang Shen), across the Three Bends Bridge, in the Quarter of the Four Wells.⁶⁸ I am none other than the celebrated Chao the Quack and have practiced medicine all my life. My paternal grandfather was an administrative assistant in the Imperial Academy of Medicine, and my father is currently serving as a medical officer in the mansion of the Prince of Ju.⁶⁹ For three successive generations we have devoted ourselves to the study of the medical arts. Every day I pore over the works of Wang Shu-ho,⁷⁰ Li Kao,⁷¹ and Wu-t'ing-tzu,⁷² as well as such texts as the *Yao-hsing fu* (Rhapsody

on the properties of drugs),⁷³ *Huang-ti nei-ching su-wen* (Essential questions regarding the Yellow Emperor's inner classic [of medicine]),⁷⁴ *Nan-ching* (The classic of difficult issues),⁷⁵ *Huo-jen shu* (The book on preserving human life),⁷⁶ *Tan-hsi tsuan-yao* (Essential teachings of Chu Chen-heng),⁷⁷ *Tan-hsi hsin-fa* (Quintessential methods of Chu Chen-heng),⁷⁸ *Chieh-ku lao mai-chüeh* (Chang Yüan-su's [commentary on Wang Shu-ho's] secrets of pulse diagnosis),⁷⁹ *Chia-chien shih-san fang* (Thirteen alterative prescriptions),⁸⁰ *Ch'ien-chin fang* (Prescriptions worth a thousand pieces of gold),⁸¹ *Ch'i-hsiao liang-fang* (Beneficial prescriptions of unusual efficacy),⁸² *Shou-yü shen-fang* (Divine prescriptions for the realm of longevity),⁸³ and *Hai-shang fang* (Overseas panaceas [from the Isles of the Blest]).⁸⁴

There is no text I have not perused;⁸⁵

There is not a text I have not read.

In prescribing, I use the life-giving
methods stored in my breast;

In pulse-taking, I clearly comprehend
the secrets under my fingers.

The six conditions and the four seasons,
Produce differences in the manifestations
of the Yin and the Yang.

The seven outer and eight inner pulses,
Determine whether blockage or repulsion
cause sinking or floating.

As for the symptoms of wind, vacuity,
cold, and fever,

I have mastered them all without exception.⁸⁶

With regard to thready, swollen, hollow,
and stony pulses,

There are none I do not totally understand.

With my awkward mouth and clumsy lips,⁸⁷

I may fail to explain myself in detail;

But I have composed a few lines of verse,

Which will lay out the general outline.

They go as follows:

I'm a doctor whose surname is Chao,

At my gate people constantly clamor.

I sport placards and rattle my bell,⁸⁸

With no genuine article⁸⁹ to peddle.

In healing, I abjure the best nostrums,

In pulse taking, say what comes to mind.

Incompetent at pharmacology and medicine,

I'm inept even at relieving constipation.
 For headaches I use tightened headbands,
 For eye ailments I rely on moxabustion.
 For heart trouble I recommend surgery,
 For deafness I would advise acupuncture.
 For money I'm prepared to do anything,
 I'm out for profit rather than results.
 Those who consult me are less likely to be
 fortunate than unfortunate;⁹⁰
 Wherever I appear there is likely to be
 weeping rather than laughter.

Truly:

Motivated only one half by benevolence
 and one half by self-interest;
 From of old, the pursuit of medicine is
 like the pursuit of immortality.⁹¹

When the company had heard him out, they all laughed uproariously.

Old Man Ho then asked him, "Did you acquire your expertise professionally, or acquire your expertise extra-professionally?"

Dr. Chao said, "What do you mean by the expressions 'acquire your expertise professionally,' or 'acquire your expertise extra-professionally?'"

"If you acquired your expertise professionally," responded Old Man Ho, "you learned the proper techniques of pulse diagnosis from the example set by your father. If you acquired your expertise extra-professionally, you can do no more than:

Ascertain the symptoms and prescribe accordingly,
 that's all."

"Venerable sir," said Dr. Chao, "you don't understand. As the authorities of yore have stated:

Inspection, auscultation, interrogation, and palpation,
 are the techniques that show a physician to be:

Divine, sagely, craftsmanlike, or skilled.⁹²

Since I have acquired my expertise professionally through three successive generations, I know that in addition to first inquiring about the symptoms and then examining the pulse, I must scrutinize the patient's coloration; just as the practitioners of the Tzu-p'ing school of fortune-telling⁹³ combine it with the astrological school of the Five Planets, and also resort to palmistry and physiognomy, in order to make sure that their predictions are reliable and unlikely to be incorrect."

"In that case," said Old Man Ho, "Please go inside and examine the patient."

Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon told Ch'in-t'ung to go back and tell them that they were coming, and that he had also arranged for a visit by Dr. Chao.

Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing escorted Dr. Chao into Li P'ing-erh's quarters. Li P'ing-erh, who had just lain down for a rest, was propped up into a sitting position once again, supported by her pillow and bedding.

Dr. Chao first palpated the pulse on her left wrist, and then that on her right, after which he said, "Venerable lady, please lift up your head so I can examine your coloration."

Li P'ing-erh actually lifted up her head, upon which, Dr. Chao said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Your Honor, ask your venerable lady who I am."

Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly asked Li P'ing-erh, "Who do you think this gentleman is?"

Li P'ing-erh raised her head to take a look at him, and then said in a low voice, "I imagine he must be a doctor."

"Your Honor," said Dr. Chao, "there is nothing to worry about. She is unlikely to die since she is able to recognize people."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this, and said, "Dr. Chao, do your best to examine her, and I will see that you are amply rewarded."

After examining her for some time, Dr. Chao said, "As for this ailment of your venerable lady's, pray don't take it amiss if I say so, but, after scrutinizing her coloration and palpating her pulse, I conclude that if it is not an externally contracted intestinal fever, it is an internally contracted miscellaneous disorder, and that if it did not develop postpartum, it must have done so prior to conception."

"That's not what it is," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Please be good enough to make another careful appraisal."⁹⁴

"I venture to say," said Dr. Chao, "that it is a depression brought on by a dietary disorder resulting from overindulgence in food and drink."

"For days on end," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "she has hardly eaten any food at all."

"Perhaps it is a case of jaundice," opined Dr. Chao.

"That's not the case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"If that's not the case," said Dr. Chao, "why is it that her face is so yellow?"

He then went on to say, "No doubt it is a case of spleen vacuity diarrhea."

"It is not a case of diarrhea," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"If it is not diarrhea, what can it be?" said Dr. Chao. "How can it be an ailment that one is at a loss to identify?"

After sitting in thought for some time, he said, "I've finally thought of something. If it isn't a case of swelling of the lymph nodes in the groin caused by venereal disease, it must be a case of irregular menstruation."

"Since she's a woman," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it's unlikely to be a case of swelling of the lymph nodes in the groin caused by venereal disease. But your suggestion that it might be a case of irregular menstruation is a little more reasonable."

“Amitābha be praised!” exclaimed Dr. Chao. “Somehow or other your humble servant has finally gotten something right.”

“What kind of irregular menstruation might it be?” asked Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“If it is not due to debility arising from amenorrhoea,” opined Dr. Chao, “it must be a case of metrorrhagia like the collapse of a mountain.”

“To tell you the truth, sir,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “my spouse, thus and so, has been experiencing incessant hemorrhaging from her lower body, which has caused her figure to become emaciated. If you know of any fast-acting prescription that you can make up and give her to take, I will see that you are amply rewarded.”

“That’s no problem,” said Dr. Chao. “I do possess such a prescription. After we return to the front reception hall, I will write it out, so you can have it made up.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing then proceeded to accompany him back to the front reception hall. Ch’iao Hung and Old Man Ho were still there and asked him what he thought the origin of the ailment was.

“As I see it,” said Dr. Chao, “it is only a case of menstrual flooding.”

“What medicine would you use to treat it?” asked Old Man Ho.

“I’ve got a marvelous prescription,” said Dr. Chao, “which contains a number of different ingredients. If she takes it, I can guarantee her recovery. Let me describe it for you.” To the tune “Slavery Chu”:

Take Radix Glycyrrhizae, Radix Euphorbiae,
and Sal Ammoniacum,
Veratri Radix et Rhizoma, Crotonus Semen,
and Daphnes Genkwa Flos;
Emulsify Arsenicum Trioxidum with fresh
Rhizoma Pinelliae,
Use Radix Aconiti, Semen Pruni Armeniacae,
and Semen Cannabis;
Combine all of these ingredients together;
Work them into a pill using honey mixed with
Bulbus Allii Fistulosi,
And take it early in the morning with a draft
of distilled spirits.⁹⁵

“To treat her with drugs such as these,” said Old Man Ho, “would only be to medicate her to death.”

Dr. Chao responded, “It has always been true that:
Toxic medications may be bitter to the taste
but beneficial for an illness.⁹⁶

After all:

To bring the case to an early clear-cut conclusion,
Is superior to letting things drag on interminably.”

"This rascal is talking nothing but nonsense!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Have the servants throw him out of here."

"Since your own manager recommended and vouched for him," said Ch'iao Hung, "you can hardly send the doctor off empty-handed."

"To comply with your suggestion," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll have someone in the shop up front weigh out two mace of silver for him and send him on his way."

Dr. Chao, accordingly, took the two mace of silver and headed for home:

His one mind hastening like an arrow;

His two legs racing as though flying.⁹⁷

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that Dr. Chao was out of the way, he said to Ch'iao Hung, "This man turned out to be an ignoramus."

"Though I did not venture to say so just now," said Old Man Ho, "this fellow is well-known outside the East Gate as Chao the Quack. All he knows how to do is:

Sport placards and rattle his bell,

on the streets, attempting to con the passersby. What does he know about pulse diagnosis or the etiology of disorders?"

"As for this ailment of your venerable lady's," he went on to say, "when I get home, I'll make up a couple of prescriptions for her in the hope that they will do the trick. After she has taken them, if her hemorrhaging is reduced, and her chest feels more comfortable, it will be expedient to prescribe further medication. I am afraid, however, that if the hemorrhaging does not stop, and her appetite does not improve, her condition will prove difficult to treat."

When he had finished speaking, he got up to go. Hsi-men Ch'ing sealed one tael of silver in a packet and sent Tai-an, with a gift box in hand, to pick up the prescribed medications. That evening they were administered to Li P'ing-erh, but they produced not the slightest change in her condition.

"You ought to be sparing in the medications you give her," said Wu Yüeh-niang. "She has already stopped eating and drinking, so what is there left in her stomach? If you insist on continuing to medicate her, it is likely to exhaust her vitality. Formerly, that Immortal Wu predicted that during her twenty-seventh year she would suffer a bloody catastrophe, and this just happens to be her twenty-seventh year. You ought to send someone to look for that Immortal Wu, and have him prognosticate on her behalf to see what the categories 'emolument' and 'horse' in her horoscope forebode for her.⁹⁸ If her fate should prove to be in conflict with some baleful star, he might be able to either avert the calamity or protect her against it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, accordingly, sent a servant with his calling card in hand to the mansion of Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command to inquire as to the whereabouts of Immortal Wu.

The servant was told, "Immortal Wu is an itinerant priest who wanders like a cloud. His comings and goings are uncertain. When he comes here, he

generally stays in the Temple of the Tutelary God south of the city. This year, in the fourth month, he left on a pilgrimage to Mount Wu-tang.⁹⁹ If you want someone to calculate a fortune, there is a Master Huang, who resides outside the Chen-wu Temple, who is good at calculating them. He charges only three mace of silver per calculation but will not make house calls. He can interpret the events of a lifetime, from beginning to end, as clearly as though he were seeing them with his own eyes.”

Hsi-men Ch'ing, consequently, sent Ch'en Ching-chi, with three mace of silver, to seek out Master Huang's dwelling outside the Chen-wu Temple in the northern quarter of the city. He found a poster pasted on Master Huang's door, that read:

Calculations concerning Anterior Heaven
based on the *Changes*;
The charge for each prognostication is
three mace of silver.

Ch'en Ching-chi went inside, bowed respectfully, proffered the stipulated fee, and said, “I have someone's fortune that I would like to trouble you to calculate, sir.”

He then told him the eight characters that determined Li P'ing-erh's horoscope, as well as the facts that she was a female, that she was currently in her twenty-seventh year, and that she was born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month.

Master Huang performed some calculations on his abacus and then said, “This female's horoscope indicates that she was born in a *hsin-wei* year, in a *keng-yin* month, on a *hsin-mao* day, during the hour *jen-wu*, which calls for analysis of the horoscopic category ‘seal ribbon.’¹⁰⁰ The first of her ‘decennial periods of fate’ began in her fourth year and was designated by the combination *chi-wei*, the second began in her fourteenth year and was designated by the combination *wu-wu*, the third began in her twenty-fourth year and was designated by the combination *ting-ssu*, the fourth will begin in her thirty-fourth year and be designated by the combination *ping-ch'en*. This year of her horoscope is a *ting-yu* year, which means that she will suffer from ‘matched shoulders,’ because the stem of this year, which corresponds to the element metal, will be injured by the stem of her day of birth, which corresponds to the element fire. During this year the planet Ketu¹⁰¹ impinges on her fate, and it is also in conflict with the baleful stars known as Death Knell and the Five Devils, which will make trouble for her. Now Ketu is a dark star, the image of which resembles a tangle of threads without a head, the shape of which changes incessantly. If someone's decennial period of fate collides with it, it is likely to portend something ominous,¹⁰² such as the development of disease. It indicates that in the first, second, and third, or the seventh, or ninth months a medical calamity may occur, involving the loss of property, the untimely death of a child, the scheming of petty people, and the spreading of malicious

gossip,¹⁰³ intended to inflict material damage. If it is the horoscope of a female, it is very unpropitious. The judgment reads:

During this year when the planet Ketu encroaches,
 Her destiny is like propelling a boat on dry land,¹⁰⁴
 Causing the head of the household to knit his brows.
 In quietude, hesitating over the best thing to do,
 In idleness, given over to sorrow without respite;
 If you want to know why his woman is so afflicted,
 And as unlikely to endure as a tangle of threads:
 Ponder the events before conception and postpartum.¹⁰⁵

Her fortune reads:

Aside from the fact that she entered into
 wedlock rather late,
 It is also true that she lost her parents
 early on in life.
 Her fragrant features and alluring beauty
 have bloomed of late,
 Everything that she desired seemed to be
 there for the asking.
 But no sooner was she happily wed than
 the dragon appeared,
 And the congenial union of the sheep was
 menaced by the tiger.¹⁰⁶
 Sadly, when emotions are at their height
 feelings are lost,
 When her fate enters the year of the cock¹⁰⁷
 the leaves will fall."

When Master Huang had copied this information out, he sealed it and entrusted it to Ch'en Ching-chi to take home with him.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was sitting together with Ying Po-chüeh and Licentiate Wen Pi-ku when Ch'en Ching-chi came back with the copied fortune, and he took it back to the rear compound to explicate for Wu Yüeh-niang's benefit. It was apparent that the fortune was:

More likely to be unfortunate than fortunate.¹⁰⁸
 Nothing might have happened if Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard about this, but having heard about it:

His brows became tightly knit, as though
 secured by a triple-spring lock;
 His belly became overburdened, as though
 with ten thousand bushels of woe.¹⁰⁹

Truly:

The lofty and eminent in their youth
meet with calamity;

While the clever and the intelligent
suffer in poverty.

The year, month, day, and hour of birth
determine it all;

However calculated, events are controlled
by fate rather than man.

If you want to know the outcome of these events,
Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.