

# Selections from *Jin Ping Mei*

Translated by David T. Roy

## CHAPTER 1

*Wu Song fights a tiger on Jingyang Ridge;  
Pan Jinlian disdains her husband and plays the coquette*

### Prologue

THERE IS A LYRIC to the tune "Pleasing Eyes"  
that goes:

*The hero grips his "Hook of Wu",  
Eager to cut off ten thousand heads.  
How is it that a heart, forged out of iron  
and stone,  
Can yet be melted by a flower?*

*Just take a look at Xiang Yu and Liu  
Bang:  
Both cases are equally distressing.  
They had only to meet with Yuji and*

*Lady Qi,  
For all their valour to prove unavailing.<sup>1</sup>*

The subject of this lyric is *passion* and *beauty*, two concepts which are related to each other as substance is to function. Thus, when beauty bedazzles the eye, passion is born in the heart. Passion and beauty evoke each other; the heart and the eye are interdependent. This is a fact which, from ancient times until the present day, gentlemen of moral cultivation ought never to forget. As two gentlemen of the Jin dynasty once said, "It is people just like ourselves who are most

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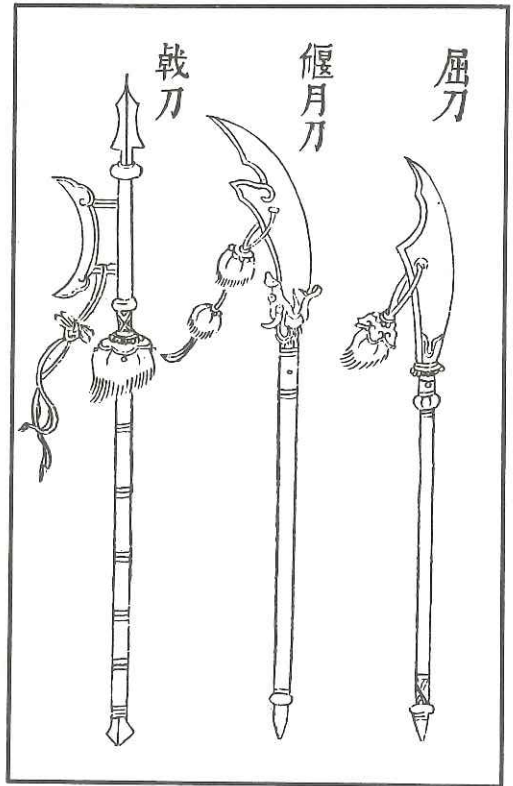
<sup>1</sup>As Patrick Hanan has pointed out in his "Sources of the *Chin Ping Mei*," *Asia Major*, n.s. vol. 10, no. 1 (1963), p. 33, n. 23, this lyric is by Zhuo Tian 卓田 (fl. early 13th cent.). See Tang Guizhang 唐圭璋, comp.,

*Quan Song ci* 全宋詞, 5 vols. (Hong Kong: Zhonghua Shuju, 1977), vol. 4, p. 2481. The proximate source is the middle-period (c. 1400-c. 1575) vernacular story entitled "Wenjing yuanyang hui" 勿頸鴛鴦會, published by Hong Pian 洪楩 ca. 1550. See Tan Zhengbi 譚正璧, ed., *Qingping shantang huaben* 清平山堂話本 (Shanghai: Gudian, 1957), p. 154.

affected by passion;<sup>2</sup> and, "Beauty is like the lodestone which exerts its pull on the needle even when obstacles intervene. If this be true even for non-sentient objects, how much the more must it be so for man, who must spend his days trying to survive in the realm of passion and beauty?"<sup>3</sup>

"The hero grips his 'Hook of Wu.'" Hook of Wu is the name of an ancient sword. In those days there were swords with names such as Ganjiang, Moye, Tai'e, Hook of Wu, Fish Gut, and Death's Head. The poem speaks of heroes with hearts of iron and stone and the sort of prowess that vaults across the heavens like a rainbow, who yet did not escape the fate of allowing their ambitions to be blunted by women. It then goes on to refer to the Hegemon-King of Western Chu, whose name was Xiang Ji, or Xiang Yu. Because the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty was so lacking in virtue that he:

Garrisoned the Five Ranges to the south,  
Built the Great Wall to the north,  
Filled in the sea to the east,  
Constructed the E'bang Palace in the west,  
Swallowed up the Six States,  
Buried the scholars alive, and  
Burned the books,<sup>4</sup>



TRADITIONAL SWORDS (from *Sancai tuhui*).

<sup>2</sup>The proximate source of this quotation is the prologue of "Wenjing yuanyang hui." See Tan Zhengbi, *Qingping shantang huaben*, p. 155. The ultimate source is Wang Yan 王衍 (256-311). In Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403-444), ed., *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 the anecdote in which this quotation occurs is assigned to Wang Rong 王戎 (234-305), Wang Yan's first cousin. See Yang Yong 楊勇, *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian* 世說新語校箋 (Hong Kong: Dazhong Shuju, 1969), ch. 17, no. 4, pp. 488-489; and Richard B. Mather, trans., *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), p. 324. In *Jin shu* 晉書, however, this anecdote is assigned to Wang Yan. See *Jin shu*, 10 vols. (Peking: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974), vol. 4, ch. 43, pp. 1236-1237. Commentators have determined the latter attribution to be the correct one. The anecdote reads as follows: "When Wang Yan's infant son died, Shan Jian 山簡 came to offer his condolences. Wang Yan was beside himself with grief. Shan Jian said, 'It was only a babe in arms, so why carry on to such an extent?' To which Wang Yan replied, 'Sages may be able to forget their feelings, and the lower order of men may lack feeling altogether. It is people just like ourselves who are most affected by passion.'"

<sup>3</sup>As W. L. Idema has pointed out in his "Zhu You-dun's Dramatic Prefaces and Traditional Fiction," *Ming*

*Studies*, vol. 10 (Spring, 1980), pp. 17-18, this quotation occurs in conjunction with the preceding one in at least three earlier sources, in all of which it is attributed to the famous Buddhist figure, Huiyuan 慧遠 (334-416). See Yu Wenbao 俞文豹 (fl. ca. 1250), *Chuijian lu quanbian* 吹劍錄全編 (Peking: Zhonghua Shuju, 1959), part 4, p. 107; Zhu Youdun's 朱有燾 (1379-1439) preface to his play *Zhen Yue'e chunfeng* 甄月娥春風慶湖堂 (microfilm copy of the original edition, preface dated 1406, in the Peking Library), pp. 1a-1b; and the prologue of "Wenjing yuanyang hui," in Tan Zhengbi, *Qingping shantang huaben*, p. 155. I have not been able to locate this quotation in the extant works of Huiyuan.

<sup>4</sup>The first four lines of this passage of parallel prose, with their formulaic boxing of the compass, occur in very similar form in at least three earlier works of vernacular literature. See *Qin bing Liuguo pinghua* 秦併六國平話, originally published in 1321-1323 (Shanghai: Gudian, 1955), p. 3; *Sanguo zhi pinghua* 三國志平話, also published in 1321-1323 (Shanghai: Gudian, 1955), p. 2; and *Hua Guan Suo chushen zhuan* 花關索出身傳, originally published in 1478, in *Ming Chenghua shuochang cihua congkan* 明成化說唱詞話叢刊, 12 ce (Shanghai: Shanghai Museum, 1973), ce 1, p. 1a.

Xiang Yu rose up in rebellion against him and was joined by the King of Han, whose name was Liu Ji, or Liu Bang. Liu Bang succeeded in conquering the area in which the capital of the First Emperor had been located and thus put an end to the Qin dynasty. Later he and Xiang Yu agreed to make the Hong Canal a boundary line between their territories and divided the empire between them.

Now, in the course of their conflict, Xiang Yu was able, with the help of plans provided by Fan Zeng, to defeat the King of Han in seventy-two military engagements. But he was so infatuated with his favourite, Yuji, who possessed the kind of beauty that can topple kingdoms, that he took her with him on his campaigns so they could be together day and night. The result of this was that he was finally defeated by Liu Bang's general, Han Xin, and had to flee by night as far as Yinling where the enemy troops caught up with him. Although Xiang Yu was defeated, he might have sought help from the area east of the Yangtze River, but he could not bear to part with Yuji. Hearing the armies that surrounded him on all sides singing the songs of his homeland, the region of Chu, he realized that his situation was hopeless and expressed his sorrow in song:

*My strength can uproot mountains,  
My valour knows no peer;  
But the times are against me,  
And my steed will run no more.  
My steed will run no more,  
So what can I do?  
Oh, Yuji, Yuji,  
What is to be done?*<sup>5</sup>

When he finished singing his tears fell in streams.

"Your highness must be sacrificing important military considerations on my account," Yuji said to him.

"Not really," the Hegemon-King replied. "It's just that I can't bear to give you up. Moreover, you're such a beauty that Liu Bang, who is addicted to wine and women, is sure to take you for himself if he should see you."

"I would rather die for a righteous cause than compromise myself in order to save my life," Yuji wept. Then, asking Xiang Yu for his sword, she slit her throat and died. The Hegemon-King was so moved by her act that, when the time came, he

followed suit by cutting his own throat.

A historian has composed a poem to commemorate this event:

*Gone was the strength that could uproot  
mountains,  
the dream of hegemony destroyed;  
Laying aside his sword, he merely sang  
that his steed would run no more.  
As bright moonlight flooded the en-  
campment,  
beneath the liquescent sky;  
How could he bear to turn back,  
and bid Yuji farewell?*<sup>6</sup>

Now the King of Han, Liu Bang, was originally no more than a neighbourhood head in Sishui. Yet, with his three-foot sword in hand, he slew the white snake<sup>7</sup> and rose in righteous revolt in the mountainous area between the districts of Mang and Dang. In the first year of his reign he destroyed the Qin dynasty, and in the fifth year destroyed the Chu, thereby winning the empire for himself and establishing the Han dynasty. But he became infatuated with a woman whose maiden name was Qi.

Lady Qi gave birth to a son whose title was Prince Ruyi of Zhao. Because Empress Lü was jealous of her and wished her no good, Lady Qi was extremely uneasy. One day when Emperor Gaozu<sup>8</sup> was ill and lay with his head in her lap,

<sup>5</sup>See *Shi ji* 史記, 10 vols. (Peking: Zhonghua Shuju, 1972), vol. 1, ch. 7, p. 333; and Burton Watson, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), vol. 1, p. 70.

<sup>6</sup>This poem is by Hu Zeng 胡曾 (fl. late 9th cent.). See *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩, 12 vols. (Peking: Zhonghua Shuju, 1960), vol. 10, ch. 647, p. 7423.

<sup>7</sup>On the day in 209 B.C. when Liu Bang, who was only a minor functionary at the time, decided to become an outlaw, he cut in two a white snake that lay across his path. This symbolic act has been taken to mark the inception of his revolt against the Qin dynasty. See *Shi ji*, vol. 1, ch. 8, p. 347; and Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, vol. 1, pp. 80-81.

<sup>8</sup>Gaozu, "supreme ancestor", is the posthumous title conferred upon Liu Bang, the founding emperor of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.), after his death in 195 B.C.

Lady Qi began to weep, saying, "After you have fulfilled your years, on whom shall my son and I be able to rely?"

"That shouldn't be a problem," the emperor said. "When I hold court tomorrow I'll depose the crown prince and set up your son in his stead. How would that be?"

Lady Qi dried her tears and thanked him for his favour.

When Empress Lü heard about this she summoned her husband's chief adviser, Zhang Liang, for a secret consultation. Zhang Liang recommended that the Four Graybeards of Mount Shang be induced to come out of retirement and lend their support to the crown prince.

One day the Four Graybeards appeared in court with the heir apparent. When Emperor Gaozu saw these four men with their snow-white hair and beards and imposing caps and gowns he asked them who they were. They identified themselves as Master Dongyuan, Qili Ji, Master Xiahuang, and Master Luli. Greatly astonished, the emperor asked, "Why did you not choose to come when We offered you employment in the past, only to appear today in the company of my son?"

"The crown prince is destined to be the preserver of what you have established," the Four Graybeards replied.

Upon hearing this Emperor Gaozu felt dejected and upset. As the Four Graybeards were on their way out of the palace he summoned Lady Qi into his presence, pointed them out to her, and said, "I would have liked to replace the crown prince, but these four men have lent him their support. Now that his wings are full-grown his position will prove difficult to shake."

Lady Qi wept inconsolably and the emperor extemporized a song to explain the situation:

*The great swan soars aloft,  
One thousand li in one flight.  
Once his pinions are complete,  
He can range the Four Seas.  
He can range the Four Seas,  
So what can we do?  
Of what avail are stringed arrows,  
Against a target that lies beyond their  
reach?*<sup>9</sup>

The emperor finished his song and, in the end, did

not make the Prince of Zhao his heir apparent.

After the death of Emperor Gaozu, in order to rid herself of her apprehensions, Empress Lü had Prince Ruyi of Zhao put to death with poisoned wine and so mutilated Lady Qi as to turn her into a "human pig".<sup>10</sup>

Poets have remarked, on reaching this point in their evaluations of these two rulers, that Liu Bang and Xiang Yu were certainly heroes of their day, and yet they did not escape the fate of allowing their ambitions to be blunted by these two women.

Although the position of wife is superior to that of concubine, the calamity which befell Lady Qi was even crueller than that which befell Yuji. Thus it is that the way of a wife or concubine who wishes to serve her husband faithfully and yet keep her head and neck intact within her own windows is hard. With regard to these two rulers, is it not true that:

*They had only to meet with Yuji and  
Lady Qi,  
For all their valour to prove unavailing?*

There is a poem that testifies to this:

*The favourites of Liu Bang and Xiang Yu  
are much to be pitied;  
These heroes proved powerless  
to protect their beauties.  
Yet even the site of Lady Qi's burial  
remains unknown;*

<sup>9</sup>See *Shi ji*, vol. 6, ch. 55, p. 2047; and Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, vol. 1, p. 149. The second line of this song has been inadvertently omitted. I have supplied it from the original text in *Shi ji*.

<sup>10</sup>See *Shi ji*, vol. 2, ch. 9, p. 397; and Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, vol. 1, p. 323. Watson translates the relevant passage as follows: "Empress Lü later cut off Lady Qi's hands and feet, plucked out her eyes, burned her ears, gave her a potion to drink which made her dumb, and had her thrown into the privy, calling her the 'human pig'." He also adds a note: "Early Chinese privies consisted of two parts, an upper room for the user and a pit below in which swine were kept. Apparently Lady Qi was thrown into the lower part, hence the epithet." I have altered Watson's romanization in the interest of consistency.

*She was less fortunate than Yuji  
who has a tomb.*<sup>11</sup>

Now why do you suppose your narrator is so concerned with explicating the two words *passion* and *beauty*? It is because gentlemen who presume on their talents are lacking in virtue and women who flaunt their beauty are dissolute.<sup>12</sup> If only they were able to maintain the fullness of their gifts while taking care to avoid the overflow of excess, they could be upright men and virtuous women.<sup>13</sup> What need would they have then to fear the calamity of unnatural death?

This has always been so, in ancient as in modern times:

It is as true for those of exalted station as for the humble.

Now this book is an instance of a beautiful woman who is embodied in a tiger and engenders a tale of the passions. In it a licentious woman commits adultery with a man-about-town:

Every evening devoted to the pursuit of pleasure;

Every morning an occasion for dalliance.

But in the end she does not escape the fate of:

A corpse prostrate beneath the blade,  
A bloodstained carcass in the Yellow Springs.

Forever unable to don silk or satin,  
No longer able to apply rouge or powder.

If we pause to reflect on these events, from whence do they arise?<sup>14</sup> And moreover, what does the death of such a woman matter anyway?

He who coveted her kissed goodbye to his imposing six-foot body;

He who loved her abandoned wealth enough to splash against the sky.<sup>15</sup>

The prefecture of Dongping was dumbfounded;

The district of Qinghe was greatly disturbed.

If you don't know to whose family this woman belonged, whose wife she was, by whom she was subsequently usurped, and at whose hands she died, truly:

The telling of this tale is enough to knock the peak of Mount Hua askew;

Its revelation is sufficient to make the Yellow River flow backwards.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup>This poem is by Fan Chengda 范成大 (1126-1193). See Fan Chengda, *Fan Shihu ji* 范石湖集, 2 vols. (Peking: Zhonghua Shuju, 1962), vol. 1, ch. 12, p. 145.

<sup>12</sup>The proximate source of this sentence is "Wenjing yuanyang hui." See Tan Zhengbi, *Qingping shantang huaben*, p. 155.

<sup>13</sup>The proximate source of these lines is *ibid.*, p. 166. The ultimate source is a literary tale by Huangfu Mei 皇甫枚 (fl. early 10th cent.) entitled "Feiyan zhuan 飛烟傳." See Lu Xun, ed., *Tang Song chuanqi ji* 唐宋傳奇集 (Peking: Wenxue guji, 1958), p. 165; and Jeanne Kelly, trans., "The Tragedy of Pu Fei-yen," in Y. W. Ma and Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., *Traditional Chinese Stories: Themes and Variations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 176.

<sup>14</sup>The source of the preceding eight lines is "Wenjing yuanyang hui." See Tan Zhengbi, *Qingping shantang huaben*, p. 157.

<sup>15</sup>The probable source of these two lines is the middle period vernacular story entitled "Xinqiao shi Han Wu mai chunqing 新橋市韓五賣春情." See Feng Menglong (1574-1646), ed., *Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小說, 2 vols. (Peking: Renmin wenxue, 1958), p. 63; and Robert C. Miller and the editors, trans., "Han Wu-niang Sells Her Charms at the New Bridge Market," in Ma and Lau, *Traditional Chinese Stories*, p. 313.

<sup>16</sup>The probable source of this couplet is the early Ming novel *Sansui pingyao zhuan* 三遂平妖傳, fac. repr. (Tokyo: Tenri daigaku shuppan-bu, 1981), ch. 2, p. 11a.

### TRANSLATOR'S COMMENTARY

THE PASSAGE above is the prologue which occurs at the beginning of chapter one in the earliest edition of *Jin Ping Mei*. Since this chapter has been completely rewritten in the recension of the text on which the existing English translations are based, it has not been translated before. I believe that this rather enigmatic introduction to the novel contributes significantly to our understanding of what is to follow, but it is not self-explanatory. I therefore append a commentary in the hope that it will serve to substantiate my claim that a complete, faithful, and adequately annotated translation of the most authentic version of this work is essential before it can be fully appreciated by readers who are not capable of reading it in Chinese.

The prologue to *Jin Ping Mei* is not an easy document to interpret, but I believe that a close reading will show that it succeeds admirably, albeit subtly, in prefiguring every one of the major issues with which the novel is concerned. As such it must be considered an integral part of the work and any interpretation of the novel as a whole must attempt to elucidate it.

It begins with a poem by the thirteenth-century poet, Zhuo Tian, which appears to restate the conventional view that women are to be blamed for the failures of even some of the greatest men of the past. But in the explication of the words *passion* and *beauty* which immediately follows, it is not alleged that temptation, in the form of beauty, is the cause of passion, but that the two are interdependent, in that the presence of either one can give rise to the other. It follows from this that the moral responsibility for the excesses to which passion so often leads must be borne by the individual who allows this response to go unchecked within himself rather than the one who evokes it. One of the major themes of the novel is the unfortunate consequences, for both society and the individual, of failure to take moral responsibility for one's acts. A line of poetry that is repeated three times in the course of the novel makes this point with unmistakable clarity: "Beauty does not delude people, they delude themselves."<sup>17</sup> Thus the apparent point of the opening poem is subtly undercut by the passage of explication that immediately follows it, leaving the reader to decide for himself. This is one of the most consistently employed rhetorical strategies of the author, who delights in juxtaposing apparently incompatible points of view in order to stimulate reflection on the part of the reader.

This brief excursus on the relationship between passion and beauty introduces the statement by Wang Yan (256-311) that, "It is people just like ourselves who are most affected by passion." This is the punch line of a famous anecdote which reads as follows: "When Wang Yan's infant son died, Shan Jian (253-312) came to offer his condolences. Wang Yan was beside himself with grief. Shan Jian said, 'It was only a babe in arms, so why carry on to such an extent?' To which Wang Yan replied, 'Sages may be able to forget their feelings, and the lowest order of men may lack feelings altogether. It is people just like ourselves who are most affected by passion.'"

The occurrence of this quotation on the first page of the novel is significant for two reasons. First, it indicates that the author intends to focus his attention on that middle range of human beings into which most of his readers, who are neither sages nor insensate brutes, must fall, rather than creating a gallery of plaster saints and cardboard villains with whom his readers could not be expected to feel much affinity. Second, it adumbrates one of the author's major thematic concerns—the consequences of irresponsibility in high places.

Wang Yan was one of the most prominent men in the political and cultural life of his time, and ended his career as chief minister, yet he has been held to be largely responsible for the fall of the Western Jin dynasty (265-317), which took place a few years after his death. He had already attracted favourable attention while still in his teens, but there was something ominous in his character which disturbed his uncle, Yang Hu (221-278), a famous paragon of moral rectitude.

<sup>17</sup>See *Jin Ping Mei cihua* 金瓶梅詞話, hereafter JPMCH, 5 vols. (Tokyo: Daian, 1963), vol. 1, ch. 3, p. 1a; vol. 5, ch. 81, p. 2b; and vol. 5, ch. 94, p. 13a.

A near contemporary of his, Sun Sheng (c. 302-373), reported the following anecdote, as translated by Richard B. Mather: "Wang Yan's father, Wang Yi, had a notification of censure and was about to be dismissed from his post. Yan was in his seventeenth . . . year at the time, and went to see his uncle, Yang Hu, to plead his father's cause. His words were unusually impressive, but Hu did not grant his request. Yan thereupon shook out his clothes and rose to depart. Hu, looking back, said to the other guests, 'This man will certainly have a flourishing reputation and occupy a great position in his own age, but at the same time, the one who will destroy the morals and harm the good influences of his age will also certainly be this man.'"<sup>18</sup>

Another near contemporary, Lu Lin (fl. fourth cent.), commented after Wang Yan's death, as translated by Richard B. Mather: "Although Wang Yan occupied an exalted office, he did not restrict himself with his duties. The contemporary age was so influenced by him that people felt ashamed to talk about the Moral Teaching . . . [i.e. Confucianism], and from clerks in the Imperial Secretariat on down, everybody admired the principle of folding his hands in silence, and took the neglect of duty for their ideal. Although all was still at peace within the Four Seas, those who understood the true state of affairs realized that they were on the verge of ruin."<sup>19</sup> There can be little doubt that the author of *Jin Ping Mei* felt that the society of his day was on the verge of ruin for the same reasons.

The next paragraph of the prologue continues the explication of the opening poem by defining "Hook of Wu" as the name of a sword and providing a seemingly gratuitous list of the names of some famous swords of antiquity. This passage is reminiscent of the penultimate paragraph of Xunzi's most famous essay, "Man's Nature Is Evil." Burton Watson translates the relevant passage as follows: "Cong of Duke Huan of Qi, Que of Taigong of Qi, Lu of King Wen of the Zhou, Hu of Lord Zhuang of Chu, and Ganjiang, Moye, Juque, and Bilü of King Helü of Wu were all famous swords of antiquity, but if they had not been subjected to the grindstone, they would never have become sharp, and if men of strength had not wielded them, they would never have been able to cut anything."<sup>20</sup>

It is clear that the sword serves Xunzi as a metaphor for realized human potential, the raw material of which must undergo the tempering and grinding of proper socialization before it can be put to effective use. And even then, to continue the metaphor, if it is not to grow blunt or rusty it must be properly maintained, which, in human terms, requires one to subject oneself to a continuous regimen of self-cultivation. It was not the fact that the swords of Xiang Yu and Liu Bang had not been sharp, but the fact that their self-indulgence had allowed them to become blunted that resulted in their moral and political failures. It is just such a lack of self-cultivation that enables the protagonists of *Jin Ping Mei* to be so acute in detecting the misdeeds of others and so obtuse in applying these lessons to themselves. As Dame Wang says of Ximen Qing, "He can detect a bee defecating forty li outside the city, but trips over a mangy elephant on his own doorstep."<sup>21</sup>

The prologue then goes on to recount selectively the events leading up to the death of Xiang Yu, the most powerful man in China during the interregnum between the Qin and Han dynasties. The description is based on that in Sima Qian's (c. 145-c. 90 B.C.) *Shi ji*, which is justifiably regarded as one of the most famous passages in Chinese literature.<sup>22</sup> In the original source

<sup>18</sup>See Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, pp. 199-200. 1963), p. 170.

<sup>19</sup>See Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, p. 433.

<sup>20</sup>See Burton Watson, trans., *Hsün-tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press,

<sup>21</sup>See JPMCH, vol. 1, ch. 8, p. 7b.

<sup>22</sup>See *Shi Ji*, vol. 1, ch. 7, pp. 333-336; and Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, vol. 1, pp. 70-73.

it is made clear that Xiang Yu's downfall is due more to his own hubris than to any external cause. Three times he declares that it is Heaven that is destroying him, and twice that this outcome is due to no fault of his own. His attitude is a perfect exemplification of the truth of Xunzi's dictum that, "He who understands himself does not blame others; he who understands destiny does not blame Heaven. He who blames others will come to grief; he who blames Heaven lacks resolution. To fail in oneself and place the blame on others, is this not to be deluded?"<sup>23</sup>

Every educated Chinese reader is familiar with the biography of Xiang Yu in *Shi ji* and could be expected to recognize it as the source of the account of his death given in the prologue to *Jin Ping Mei*. Knowledge of the source would thus have the effect of undercutting, or even contradicting, the validity of the point apparently being made on the surface of the text through the use of selective quotation. This is another of the rhetorical strategies most frequently resorted to by the author of *Jin Ping Mei*. Again and again, when the source of an allusion is located, its true significance for the interpretation of the text turns out to lie in something which is not quoted directly. This device is, of course, familiar enough to students of classical Chinese poetry, who often find that the correct interpretation of an allusion is dependent on the identification of its source, but its importance in some of the major works of vernacular fiction remains largely unrecognized. The text of *Jin Ping Mei* is a veritable pastiche of unidentified quotations and allusions, almost as dense as those to be found in the work of such Western authors as Joyce and Nabokov. Until the sources of these quotations and allusions are located and interpreted the meaning of the text will remain enigmatic.

As the prologue continues, it describes at some length the events leading up to the horrible fate of Lady Qi, the favourite consort of the founding emperor of the Han dynasty. As the poem by Fan Chengda (1126-1193) which is quoted at the conclusion of this passage points out, both Xiang Yu and Liu Bang, for all their vaunted might, "proved powerless to protect their beauties." This theme clearly foreshadows the inability of Ximen Qing to prevent the death of his favourite wife, Li Ping'er,<sup>24</sup> which is in fact the outcome of his own tyrannical insistence on having sexual intercourse with her, against her will, during her menstrual period.<sup>25</sup> After her death Ximen Qing is inconsolable and cries out, "Heaven must be blind to leave me so destitute . . . What have I ever done that Heaven should now see fit to rob me so egregiously of my beloved!"<sup>26</sup> Once again, this is a perfect illustration of the truth of Xunzi's dictum that, "It is only an enlightened ruler who is able to show love to those whom he loves; a benighted ruler is sure to endanger those whom he loves."<sup>27</sup>

This point implies that Ximen Qing's role in the novel is meant to be analogous to that of a benighted ruler. There is no doubt in my mind that this is precisely what the author intends to suggest by beginning his novel, which ostensibly focuses on the household of a middle-class man-about-town, with a prologue that deals with the exploits of two famous contenders for the throne. If this were not the case, the prologue would be both superfluous and irrelevant.

But this implication is not confined to the prologue. Innumerable clues, planted inconspicuously in the narrative, indicate that Ximen Qing is intended to function as a surrogate, not only for the feckless Emperor Huizong (r. 1100-1125), of the world ostensibly depicted in the novel, but also for the Wanli Emperor (r. 1572-1620) of the author's own time. His six wives are surrogates for the "six traitors", or six evil ministers, who are traditionally blamed for the fall of the Northern Song dynasty. This particular emblematic correspondence is multivalent in its functions, however, for in popular Buddhism the term "six traitors" is also used as a metaphor for the "six

<sup>23</sup> See *Xunzi xinzhù* 荀子新注 (Peking: Zhonghua Shuju, 1979), ch. 4, p. 40.

<sup>24</sup> Li Ping'er's death occurs in chapter 62.

<sup>25</sup> This incident occurs in chapter 50.

<sup>26</sup> See JPMCH, Vol. 4, Ch. 62, p. 25b.

<sup>27</sup> See *Xunzi xinzhù*, ch. 12, p. 205.



senses". Ximen Qing's sycophants, servants, and employees, in their turn, act as surrogates for the eunuchs and lesser functionaries in the imperial administration. By deliberately restricting his focus to the events in a single middle-class household, but subtly suggesting to the reader that this microcosm stands in an analogical relationship to the society as a whole, he is able to attack the abuses of the day with far greater candour and analytical rigour than would have been possible, or safe, if he had attacked the reigning monarch and the existing political and social structure directly.

The analogy between the household and the state, as well as that between the roles of husband and wife and ruler and minister, are ancient and hallowed components of the Chinese cultural tradition. It is the latter analogy which lends poignancy to the remark in the prologue that, "The way of a wife or concubine who wishes to serve her husband faithfully and yet keep her head and neck intact within her own windows is hard." There can be no doubt that this statement is intended to apply not only to the unfortunate plight of the women in the prologue, and in the novel proper, but also to that of the actual or prospective officials from whose ranks the bulk of the novel's readers could be expected to come.

The story of the favouritism displayed toward Lady Qi by Emperor Gaozu, his willingness to consider replacing the heir apparent with her son, and the fatal consequences that this had for both of them clearly foreshadows the story of the relationship between Ximen Qing and Li Ping'er and her son in the novel. But both of these stories also have a special relevance to crucial events of the Wanli reign period during which the novel was written. The most divisive and protracted controversy of this long and controversy-ridden reign was over the issue of whether or not the emperor intended to prefer the son of his favourite consort, Zheng Guifei (c. 1568-1630), by designating him heir apparent instead of his eldest son by another wife.<sup>28</sup> The author's contemporaries could scarcely have failed to see that this story, which looms so large in the prologue, and the corresponding elements of the plot which loom so large in the novel, might be interpreted as having some relevance to the events of their own day.

By saying this, however, I do not mean to imply that *Jin Ping Mei* is a roman à clef in any meaningful sense of the term. There is no one-to-one correspondence between the characters and incidents of the novel and those of sixteenth-century China, or any other period of Chinese history. The author undoubtedly believed that the moral laws he intended his work to exemplify were universally valid and that the lessons that might be derived from it were, consequently, as true for any one period of history as for another. By the same token, they were as true for the household of a bourgeois social climber as they were for the imperial court. In fact he makes an explicit statement to this effect in the couplet, "This has always been so, in ancient as in modern times; it is as true for those of exalted station as for the humble."

The author's method is to write about the sexual and emotional relations between ordinary men and women and the analogous relations between the ruler and his ministers at one and the same time, rather than merely using one set of terms as substitutes for the other. Thus, when the focus shifts from household to court, or from sexual promiscuity to political irresponsibility, each sphere of conduct is intended to suggest and illuminate relevant aspects of the other, rather than merely to stand for it. Thus *Jin Ping Mei* is allegorical only in the sense that its characters and incidents are intended to be suggestive of analogous characters and incidents wherever and whenever they may occur, but not in the sense that they stand, in any consistent way, for a corresponding set of relationships in some other sphere. One of the functions of the prologue is to prepare the reader to look for such meaningful links between seemingly disparate elements and to

<sup>28</sup> See the biography of Cheng Kuei-fei in L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), vol. 1, pp. 208-211;

and Ray Huang, 1587, *A Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), passim.

consider the relationship between the parts and the whole.

In the paragraph immediately following the lengthy exposition of the opening poem we encounter the quotation: "Gentlemen who presume on their talents are lacking in virtue and women who flaunt their beauty are dissolute. If only they were able to maintain the fullness of their gifts while taking care to avoid the overflow of excess, they could be upright men and virtuous women." This passage comes from the author's comment at the end of a famous Tang dynasty (618-907) tale about the tragic consequences of adultery. The plot of this tale prefigures in many of its details the affair between Ximen Qing and his neighbour's wife, Li Ping'er, which is consummated for the first time when he climbs over the garden wall for an assignation.<sup>29</sup> But this quotation also foreshadows one of the major themes of the novel, which is the consequences of excess in the sexual, economic, and political spheres. If this fault is allowed to go unchecked it results in debauchery, avarice, and tyranny, any one of which may lead, as each of them does in the novel, to death.

In the ensuing paragraph we are told that, "this book is an instance of a beautiful woman who is embodied in a tiger and engenders a tale of the passions." This, obviously, is a reference to Pan Jinlian, the female protagonist of the novel, who first encounters her nemesis, Wu Song, as a result of his exploit in slaying a tiger with his bare fists,<sup>30</sup> and who is herself disemboweled by him at the end of the book<sup>31</sup> in revenge for her murder of his brother.<sup>32</sup> The first syllable of her given name associates her with the lethal element, metal, and in turn, according to the traditional Chinese system of correspondences, with the carnivorous animal, the tiger, and with autumn, the season of death. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that she accomplishes the murder of her rival, Li Ping'er's, baby son with the help of a cat, which is, of course, a tiger in miniature.<sup>33</sup>

Toward the end of the prologue we are told that the setting of the story to follow is the district of Qinghe in the prefecture of Dongping. Even these place names have connotations that make them peculiarly appropriate for the sort of tale the author has to tell. The prefecture of Dongping was located in a low-lying swampy area of western Shandong province, along a major transportation artery between north and south China. Around the middle of the third century A.D. the famous poet, Ruan Ji (210-263), served for a time as governor of Dongping and wrote a *fu*, or rhapsody, about it in which he describes it as a sink of unparalleled iniquity. I will quote at some length from the relevant portions of Donald Holzman's translation of this work:

*There is a vile place, reached through the side roads,  
Where there are heaps of deer and pigs;  
It is not made beautiful by the fair and clean,  
But is the resort of the filthy and impure.  
To the west of the place one looks off towards Azhen  
And can see Qipu at the same time,  
"Among the mulberries on the Pu"  
Where the dissolute dwelled.  
[Here] the Three Jin concocted their alliances  
And Zheng and Wei spread their disorder.  
The eminent oppressed their followers,  
But it was the followers who remained [?].  
That is why violence ran loose within families*

<sup>29</sup>This incident occurs in chapter 13.

<sup>30</sup>This incident occurs in chapter 1.

<sup>31</sup>This incident occurs in chapter 87.

<sup>32</sup>This incident occurs in chapter 5.

<sup>33</sup>This incident occurs in chapter 59.

And poisoned hate sprang up between husband and wife.  
 These people still had boundless desires to do bad:  
 How could it be long before they gave vent to them? . . .  
 With its back to the mountains, facing the waters,  
 The region was filthy, full of egotism,  
 So that in the small quarters and border towns,  
 No one would deny the bad things said of it.  
 True sentiments were cut off and thinking warped  
 So that the inhabitants could gain more and more possessions . . . .  
 Arrogant menials from small towns  
 Lived here.  
 The waterways lead, by the quickest route,  
 To Lake Dongting and to the state of Chu,  
 And they carry [southern] influences to [Dongping],  
 Directly to it, and to its entire domain.  
 Thus they inherited [southern] customs  
 And were without rules, without modes:  
 Not barbarians, they still followed no laws,  
 And came to do harm.  
 Thus, in their cooperative ventures, each vaunts his own power;  
 They turn away from reason and towards debauchery.  
 Extolling the passions and chasing after profit,  
 The only thing they respect is excess.  
 Their dwelling places are hidden and obstructed,  
 Obscure and dark,  
 Built near tombs,  
 And surrounded by clandestine rooms.  
 Therefore, to live in them befuddles the mind;  
 To speak of them makes one feel sadness.<sup>34</sup>

It would be hard to imagine a more appropriate geographic setting for the sordid story that is unfolded in *Jin Ping Mei*.

The choice of Qinghe is also significant, but for a different reason. As is well known, the episode involving Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian that forms the nucleus of the plot of *Jin Ping Mei* is borrowed from *Shuihu zhuan*;<sup>35</sup> but in that work it takes place in the district of Yanggu, whereas in *Jin Ping Mei* the scene of the action has been shifted to the district of Qinghe. Since the other features of the original episode are copied almost verbatim, it is apparent that this change of locale must reflect a conscious choice on the part of the author of *Jin Ping Mei*. The question is what may have motivated this change?

The name Qinghe means Clear River. It is an ancient Chinese idea that the waters of the Yellow River will run clear only if a true sage is on the throne. The explanation for this belief is clearly stated in chapter 12 of *Xunzi*, "The Way of the Ruler," where we read: "The ruler's role vis-a-vis the people is that of a source. If the water of the source is clear, the lower reaches of the stream will be clear. If the water of the source is muddy, the lower reaches of the stream will be muddy."<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> See Donald Holzman, *Poetry and Politics: The Life and Works of Juan Chi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 40-42; and Ruan Ji (210-263) 阮籍, *Ruan Ji ji* 阮籍集 (Shanghai: Guji, 1978), pp. 3-4.

<sup>35</sup> See *Shuihu quanzhuan* 水滸全傳, 4 vols. (Hong Kong: Zhonghua Shuju, 1958), chapters 23 to 27.

<sup>36</sup> See *Xunzi xinzhuzhu*, ch. 12, p. 195.

The dire consequences that will ensue, in Xunzi's view, if a society is impure at its source are precisely those described in the world of *Jin Ping Mei*. Xunzi is famous for his insistence on the need for the "rectification of names" and on the dangers inherent in any situation in which names become divorced from realities. What better way could there be to illustrate Xunzi's doctrine on the "rectification of names" than to create in the household of Ximen Qing a microcosm of an utterly corrupt society and to locate it in a place the very name of which implies the beneficial effects of good government?

There may even be a further irony implied by the author's choice of the district of Qinghe as the setting for his novel. According to Xie Zhaozhe (1567-1624), a contemporary of the author who served for a time as an official in the area in which the novel is set, the district of Qinghe is located on a site that was known in ancient times as Beiqiu, or Mound of Cowrie Shells.<sup>37</sup> Since cowrie shells were used as currency in ancient times, the original name might be rendered colloquially as Money Pile, a name that accurately reflects the values of the world of Ximen Qing, where money is all powerful. But this unsavoury reality has been disguised by the imposition of the high-sounding name Clear River, which implies a society in which the most powerful force is not money but the moral example of a sage ruler. This gross discrepancy between name and reality, the dangers of which are given their classic exposition by Xunzi, is a major motif in *Jin Ping Mei*, and the choice of the district of Qinghe as its setting is unlikely to have been fortuitous.

I hope that the above remarks will prove sufficient to demonstrate that the prologue to *Jin Ping Mei*, although it may appear somewhat confusing at first glance, in fact succeeds in adumbrating all of the major issues that are raised in the body of the novel, and must be regarded not only as an integral part of the work, but as essential to our interpretation of the author's intended meaning.

## CHAPTER 7

### *Auntie Xue proposes a match with Meng Yulou; Aunt Yang angrily curses Zhang the fourth*

*I play the role of matchmaker and am  
really  
rather good at it;  
Entirely owing to the assiduity with  
which  
I ply my two legs.<sup>38</sup>  
My lethal lips are practiced at persuading  
widowers to remarry;  
My trenchant tongue is capable of stirring  
the chaste widow's heart.  
Lucky ribbons of festive red constantly  
adorn my head;*

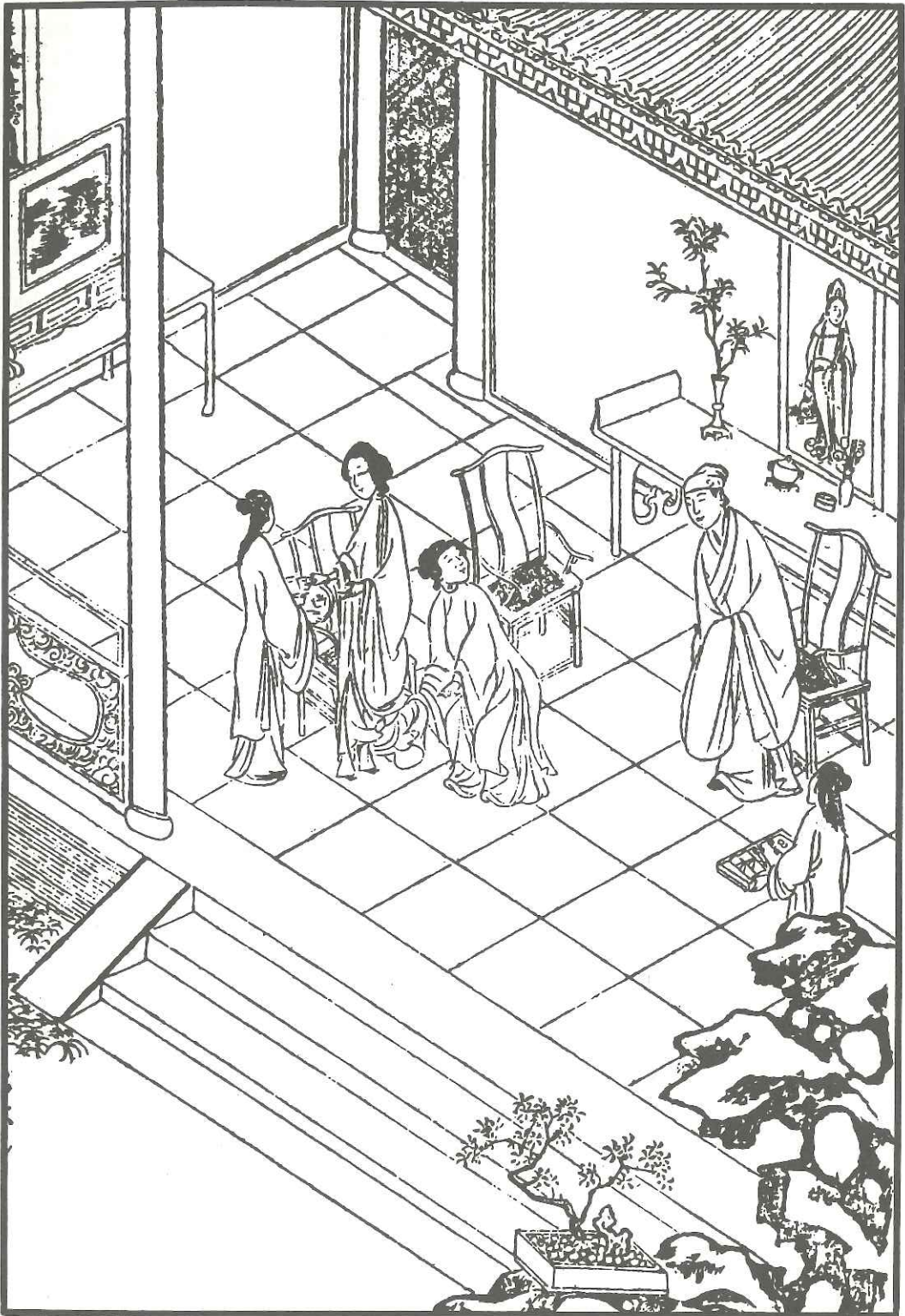
*Party favours from wedding feasts are  
always  
present in my sleeves.  
There is only one thing wrong  
with what I do;  
Half of my clients are helped but  
the other half are ruined.*

The story goes that one day the same Auntie Xue who was constantly to be seen around Ximen Qing's household peddling costume jewellery set out with her box of trinkets and looked every-

<sup>37</sup>See Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛, *Beihe jiyu* 北河紀餘, 4 ch., reproduced in *Siku quanshu zhenben erji* 四庫全書珍本二集, 140 vols. (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1971), vol. 138, ch. 3, p. 16b.

<sup>38</sup>This line occurs in the play *Baojian ji* 寶劍記 by

Li Kaixian 李開先 (1502-1568), a source from which the author of *Jin Ping Mei* is known to have borrowed heavily. See the text of *Baojian ji* in Fu Xihua 傅惜華, ed., *Shuihu xiqu ji, dier ji* 水滸戲曲集第二集 (Shanghai: Gudian, 1958), scene 30, p. 56.



AUNTIE XUE proposes a match with Meng Yulou (from the Ming Chongzheng [1628-1644] edition).

where for Ximen Qing but was unable to find him. Chancing to meet his page boy, Dai'an, she asked, "Where is your master?"

"Father's in the shop," replied Dai'an, "going over the accounts with Uncle Fu the Second."

It so happens that Ximen Qing's family were the proprietors of a wholesale pharmaceutical business, the hired manager of which was named Fu Ming. His courtesy name was Zixin and he was the second sibling in his generation of the family, which is why he was referred to as Uncle Fu the Second.

Auntie Xue went straight to the door of the shop, pulled the hanging screen aside, and saw that Ximen Qing was indeed inside, going over the accounts with his manager. She nodded to him and motioned for him to come outside. On seeing that it was Auntie Xue, Ximen Qing immediately abandoned his manager and came out to meet her, the two of them walking to a secluded spot where they could talk in private.

Auntie Xue bowed to him with a word of greeting and Ximen Qing asked her what she had to say.

"I've come about a match which I'd like to propose to you, sir," said Auntie Xue. "I guarantee she'll tickle your fancy and she can take the place left by the death of your Third Lady. I've just been in the First Lady's quarters. She bought some of my trinkets and detained me for a cup of tea. I was there for an age, but I didn't dare bring up this subject. I thought it would be better if I found you first and broached it directly to you.

"The young lady in question is someone you probably already know about, sir. She's the legitimate widow of the owner of the Yang family's textile business outside the South Gate, and she's got a tidy sum of money at her disposal. She owns two Nanking beds, with retractable steps; four or five trunks full of clothing for the four seasons, figured gowns and so forth, packed so tightly you can't stick your hand into them; and pearl headbands and earrings, gold jewellery set with precious stones, and gold and silver bracelets and bangles, it goes without saying. In ready cash alone, she has more than a thousand taels of silver at her disposal. And she has two or three hundred bales of fine cotton drill as well.

"Unfortunately, her husband died far away from home while he was out on the road selling

textiles. She has been observing mourning for him for over a year now. She doesn't have any children of her own to worry about, only a young brother-in-law who's just nine years old. There wouldn't be any point in maintaining her widowhood just for him. Her husband's paternal aunt is trying to persuade her to remarry.

"This year the young lady's no more than twenty-four or twenty-five. She's tall and good-looking; in fact, when she's properly done up, she's as pretty as a figure on a decorative lantern. She's romantic and quick-witted, just as clever as can be; and as for the ability to take charge of a household, needlework and suchlike feminine accomplishments, backgammon and elephant chess, and so forth, that goes without saying. There's no reason for me to deceive you, sir. Her maiden name is Meng, she's the third sibling in her generation, and she lives in Stinkwater Lane. Also, she's an expert performer on the moon guitar. If you consent to see her, sir, I guarantee you'll:

Hit the bull's-eye with the first arrow.

How could anyone be as lucky as you, sir, to get all that dowry and a young lady to boot?"

When Ximen Qing heard that the woman could play the moon guitar it struck a responsive note in his heart, so he asked Auntie Xue, "How soon can I arrange to have a look at her?"

"I'll tell you what, sir," said Auntie Xue, "having a look at her is not the first order of business. Right now the senior member of the Yang family is her husband's paternal aunt. There's also a maternal uncle of her husband's named Zhang the Fourth, but since he's on the distaff side he's:

Like the meat of the hickory nut: there's  
always  
a husk in between.<sup>39</sup>

This old lady was originally married to Crooked-head Sun, and lives in a house belonging to Master Xu, the eunuch, on Halfside Street in the northern quarter of the city. After Crooked-head died, the old lady has maintained her widowhood for thirty or forty years. She doesn't have any children and depends on her nieces and nephews for support.

<sup>39</sup>This proverbial saying occurs in the fourteenth century play *Lao sheng er* 老生兒 by Wu Hanchen 武漢臣. See Zang Maoxun 臧懋循 (1550-1620), ed., *Yuanqu xuan* 元曲選, 4 vols. (Peking: Zhonghua Shuju, 1979), vol. 1, scene 2, p. 375.

"It's too late to do anything about it today, but tomorrow I'll come meet you, sir, and we'll go and dump the whole proposition in her lap.

If you appeal for help, appeal to Zhang Liang;<sup>40</sup>

If you appoint a general, appoint Han Xin.<sup>41</sup>

"The only thing this old lady cares about is money. She knows perfectly well that her nephew's widow is well provided for. She doesn't really care whom she marries as long as she can make a few taels of silver out of it. Promise her a little extra silver, sir, and throw in a bolt of that fine satin you have so much of at home. Then, if you go talk it over with her in person, and present her with a bearer's load of appropriate gifts, you'll:

Knock her over with one blow.

If anyone else raises any objections, as long as you've got this old lady behind you, there isn't much they can do about it."

This single conversation with Auntie Xue had such an effect on Ximen Qing that:

Joy manifested itself about his temples  
and between his brows;

Delight spread itself across his cheeks  
and smiling face.<sup>42</sup>

Gentle reader take note: The matchmakers of this world are not really interested in anything but making money for themselves. What do they care whether their clients end up dead or alive? They will describe a marriage prospect who holds no office as an officeholder, and a position as concubine as though it were a position as legiti-

<sup>40</sup>Zhang Liang 張良 (d. 189 B.C.) was the most famous political advisor of Liu Bang, the founder of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.). For his biography see Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, vol. 1, pp. 134-151.

<sup>41</sup>Han Xin 韓信 (d. 196 B.C.) was the most successful general in the service of Liu Bang. For his biography see Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, vol. 1, pp. 208-232.

<sup>42</sup>This couplet occurs in the anonymous early-Ming play *Longmen yinxu* 龍門隱秀. See Wang Jilie 王季烈, ed., *Guben Yuan Ming zaju* 孤本元明雜劇, 4 vols. (Peking: Zhongguo Xiju, 1958), vol. 3, scene 4, p. 10b. It also occurs elsewhere in *JPMCH*, vol. 2, ch. 30, pp. 10b-11a; and, in an abbreviated form, vol. 5, ch. 90, p. 7a.

mate wife. They are such inveterate liars they would attempt to deceive Heaven itself and there is no truth whatever to be found in their asseverations. Truly:

*Though the matchmaker did her utmost  
to promote the union,  
Meng Yulou had already decided  
to marry a rich man.  
Those with affinities will meet though  
separated by a thousand li;  
Those without affinities will miss each  
other  
though face to face.*<sup>43</sup>

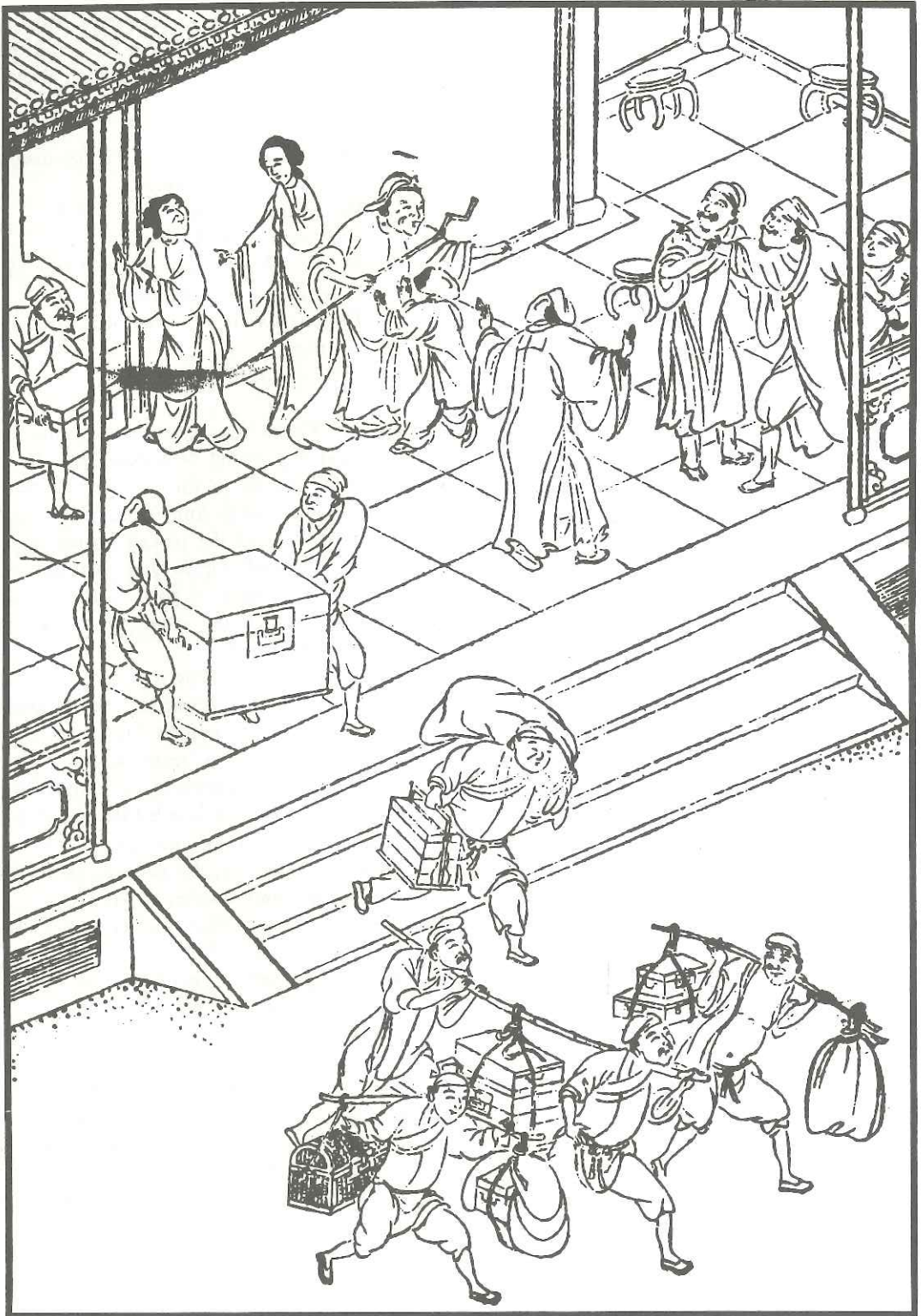
That day Ximen Qing agreed with Auntie Xue that the next day would be a good time to buy some presents and go to the northern quarter of the city to pay a visit to Aunt Yang. When Auntie Xue finished her spiel she picked up her box of trinkets and departed. Ximen Qing went back into the shop and continued to go over the accounts with Manager Fu. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day Ximen Qing rose early and dressed himself to befit the occasion. Then he picked out a bolt of material, bought four trays of preserved fruit, and hired a bearer to carry them. Ximen Qing rode on horseback, accompanied by his page boy, and Auntie Xue led the way straight to the door of Aunt Yang's dwelling in the house belonging to Master Xu, the eunuch, on Halfside Street in the northern quarter of the city.

Auntie Xue went in first to alert Aunt Yang to the fact that she had a visitor.

"A man of property from hereabouts," she told her, "is respectfully waiting outside your door. He is interested in discussing a match with the young lady. I told him that you were the senior member of the Yang family and suggested that he should pay you a visit and discuss the matter before I would presume to take him outside the gate to see the lady herself. I brought him along with me today and he has already dismounted and

<sup>43</sup>The last couplet of this quatrain is a proverbial saying that occurs ubiquitously in Chinese vernacular literature. It also occurs elsewhere in *JPMCH*, vol. 5, ch. 90, p. 3a; and, the first line of the couplet only, vol. 5, ch. 98, p. 7a.



AUNT YANG angrily curses Zhang the fourth (from the Ming Chongzheng [1628-1644] edition).



is waiting outside your door at this very moment.”

“Ai-ya!” the old lady exclaimed when she heard this. “Matchmaker, why didn’t you let me know ahead of time?” She ordered her maid-servant to sweep the parlour, tidy it up, and brew some good tea, and said, “Please, invite him to come in.”

Auntie Xue lost no time in taking charge of the proceedings. First she had the load of gifts brought in and properly displayed, and it was only after the bearer had been dispatched with his empty containers that she invited Ximen Qing to come in.

Ximen Qing was wearing a large palmetto hat, a long gown fastened at the waist with a sash, and white-soled black boots. When he entered the door and met the old lady he bowed to her four times. Leaning on her staff, the old lady made haste to return his salutation. Ximen Qing would not let her proceed, protesting again and again, “Aunt, please accept my salutation.” The two of them dickered politely for a while until the old lady agreed to accept a half kowtow from him. They then sat down in the positions appropriate for guest and host while Auntie Xue took her place to one side.

“What is the gentleman’s name?” the old lady asked.

“I just told you,” said Auntie Xue, “but you’ve already forgotten. This is the Honourable Ximen Qing, who is numbered among the most substantial men of property in Qinghe district. He owns the large wholesale pharmaceutical business on the street in front of the district yamen. He also engages in moneylending to both officials and functionaries. In his home:

The piles of money reach higher than the dipper,

The stores of rotting rice suggest a granary,<sup>44</sup>

but he lacks a wife with the ability to manage the household. On hearing that the young lady from your family who lives outside the South Gate wishes to remarry, he has come especially in order to discuss this match with you.”

<sup>44</sup>This formulaic couplet occurs in *Sansui pingyao zhuan*, ch. 1, p. 1b; and in *Shuihu quanzhuan*, vol. 1, ch. 24, p. 377. It also occurs elsewhere in *JPMCH*, vol. 1, ch. 3, p. 9a; and, the second line of the couplet only, vol. 4, ch. 69, p. 3b.

“As long as the two of you relatives-to-be are both here,” Auntie Xue continued:

“The holes in the water clock let it all spill out;

If you have anything to say now’s the time to say it.<sup>45</sup>

There’s no call for you to complain about the lies of us matchmakers. Since you’re the senior member of the family on the bride’s side, if anyone who had anything to say didn’t come talk to you first, Aunt, who else should they talk to?”

“If you wanted to discuss a match with my nephew’s widow,” the old lady said, “all you needed to do was drop by for a chat. What need was there to go to the trouble of buying all these presents? You put me in a position in which it would be:

Discourteous to refuse, and  
Embarrassing to accept.”<sup>46</sup>

“Worthy Aunt,” said Ximen Qing, “I’m afraid these presents are hardly worthy of the name.”

The old lady bowed to him twice, expressed her gratitude, and had the presents put away, after which Auntie Xue took the trays outside to where the bearer was waiting and then returned to keep them company.

Tea was served, and after they had finished drinking it, the old lady started the conversation by saying, “As far as I’m concerned:

Not to speak up when you ought to is to be  
a coward.

When my nephew was alive he succeeded in amassing a considerable sum for himself and now that he has, unfortunately, died it has all fallen into the hands of his widow. At the very least she is worth more than a thousand taels of silver. Whether it is your wish, sir, to make her your concubine or your legitimate wife is no concern of mine. All I care about is that a proper sutra-reading should be performed on my nephew’s behalf. As his paternal aunt I am related to him by blood; it is not a distaff or marriage relationship. If you were to provide me with the cost of

<sup>45</sup>The first line of this couplet also occurs elsewhere in *JPMCH*, vol. 5, ch. 85, p. 9a.

<sup>46</sup>A variant of this formulaic couplet occurs in *Shuihu quanzhuan*, vol. 3, ch. 72, p. 1221. It also occurs elsewhere in *JPMCH*, vol. 4, ch. 72, p. 12b.

a coffin it would not be as though I had made exorbitant demands on you. In return, I'm prepared to hazard whatever face I've got left in this matter. I'll cast myself in the role of a stinking rat for the benefit of that old dog, Zhang the Fourth, and stick up for the two of you, come what may. After she has been carried over your threshold, sir, if you were to permit her to pay me a visit now and then on birthdays and such occasions, and acknowledge me as a poor relation, I would endeavour not to inflict my poverty upon you."

"Madam," laughed Ximen Qing, "you can relax on that score. I fully understand everything you've just said. Since you've broached the subject, madam, the cost of a single coffin is nothing to me. Even if it were ten coffins you wanted, I could afford it." As he spoke, he reached inside the leg of his boot and drew out six five-tael ingots, making a total of thirty taels of 'snowflake' government silver. Setting these down in front of her, he said, "This may not amount to much, madam, but I hope you will use it to buy a cup of tea. In the future, when the bride has been carried over my threshold, I will provide another seventy taels of silver and two bolts of satin toward your funeral expenses. You will always be a welcome guest in my home at any time of the year."

Gentle reader take note: In this world money is like the central nervous system of all living creatures in that it moves people more effectively than anything else.

When the black pupils of the old vixen's eyes saw the twenty or thirty taels of shiny government silver her face became wreathed in smiles as she said, "Worthy sir, I don't wish to be thought avaricious, but it has always been true that:

If the terms are settled at the outset,

Misunderstandings can be avoided later on."

"Madam," Auntie Xue interjected from the side, "you're being more fastidious than you need to be. Such considerations are quite unnecessary in this case. The honourable gentleman is not that sort of person. After all he:

Sought to make your acquaintance with presents in hand.

You may not know it, madam, but even his honour, the prefect, and his honour, the district magistrate, consort with him. He is acquainted with people in many walks of life from all over the

empire. You're not likely to make much of a dent in his resources."

This single conversation had such an effect on the old lady that she was ready to:

Fart ferociously and pee in her pants in her excitement. After she had entertained her guests a while longer and they had drunk a second serving of tea, Ximen Qing indicated that he was ready to be on his way. The old lady politely endeavoured to detain him, but to no avail.

Auntie Xue said, "Since we've been able to see you today, Aunt, and discuss this matter, tomorrow we can proceed to go outside the South Gate and take a look at the young lady."

"There's no need for the gentleman to take the trouble of paying a call for the purpose of sizing up my nephew's widow," said the old lady. "Matchmaker, just tell her that I said, 'If you don't marry a man like this, what manner of man are you going to marry?'"

Ximen Qing said his farewells and got up to go. "Sir," said the old lady, "I didn't know you were coming, and was unable to make proper preparations on the spur of the moment. Please forgive me for not offering you anything better."

Leaning on her staff she accompanied him out the door and saw him several steps along his way before Ximen Qing succeeded in persuading her to go back inside. Auntie Xue remained outside to see Ximen Qing into his saddle.

"Wasn't I right to propose this way of going about it?" she said. "It's much better to have started out by dumping the whole proposition in the old lady's lap than it would have been to rely on the good offices of anyone else. You go on home, sir," she continued. "I'm going to stay here and have another word with her. We've already agreed to meet and go outside the South Gate together first thing tomorrow."

Ximen Qing pulled out a tael's worth of silver and handed it to Auntie Xue to cover the hire of a donkey. After she had accepted the money he got on his horse and went home, while she remained behind at Aunt Yang's house, chatting and drinking wine until dark, before going home herself.

To make a long story short, the next day Ximen Qing dressed himself to befit the occasion, slipped his betrothal gifts into his sleeve, and mounted a large white horse. Then, accompanied

by his two page-boys, Dai'an and Ping'an, and by Auntie Xue riding a donkey, he proceeded outside the South Gate to the door of the Yang family compound in Stinkwater Lane off Hogmarket Street. This establishment consisted of a twenty-four foot wide frontage opening onto the street and five interior courtyards, receding along a vertical axis.

Ximen Qing reined in his horse at the gate and Auntie Xue disappeared into the interior for some time before coming out to usher him in. After dismounting the first thing he confronted was a two-story structure housing the main gate, which was situated on the south side of the street facing north. Just inside the gate stood a gray screen-wall. Inside the ceremonial gate which led into the second courtyard the entrance was screened by a hedge of crape myrtle and a fence of woven bamboo splints. The courtyard itself was decorated with pomegranate trees and potted miniature plants. Along a raised platform there stood a row of indigo vats for dyeing and two benches for fulling cloth.

Auntie Xue pushed open the red latticework doors of the eighteen-foot wide south-facing reception hall, on the centre of the back wall of which there hung in the place of honour a scroll depicting the Bodhisattva Guanyin of the Water Moon accompanied by her attendant Sudhana.<sup>47</sup> Landscape paintings by well-known artists hung on the other walls. There was also a marble standing screen to either side of which stood tall narrow-necked bronze vases of the kind used in the game 'pitch-pot'. All in all:

The chairs and tables were shiny and

The screens and lattices were posh.

Auntie Xue invited Ximen Qing to take one of the seats reserved for distinguished guests and then disappeared into the interior once again. After a while she came out and whispered in Ximen Qing's ear, "The young lady hasn't finished her toilet yet. Please have a seat and wait a little longer, sir."

At this juncture a young servant brought out a

<sup>47</sup> Guanyin 觀音 is the Goddess of Mercy of Chinese popular religion. For a definitive account of the hagiography that developed around this figure see Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miao-shan* (London: Ithaca Press, 1978). On her attendant, Sudhana, see the works cited in *ibid.*, p. 107, n. 90.

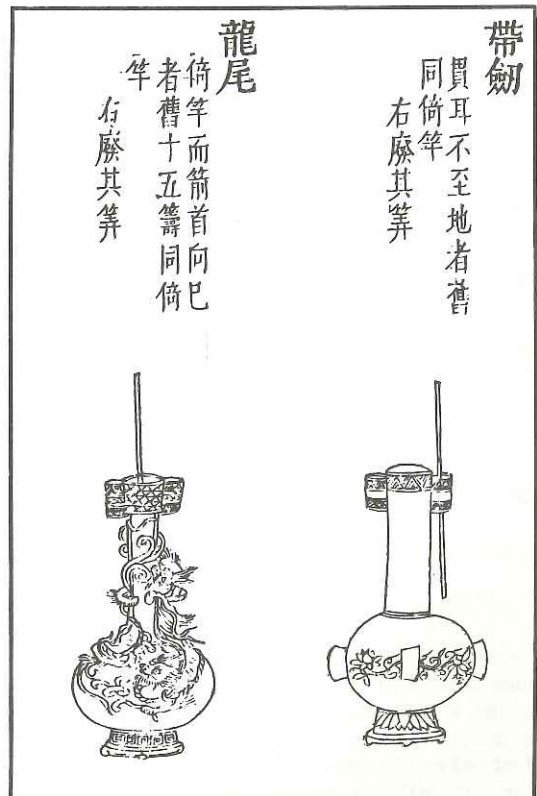
cup of tea flavoured with fruit kernels, and after Ximen Qing had drunk it, took the cup and its raised saucer away again.

Auntie Xue, after all, was a matchmaker by profession, so she kept up an animated monologue:

Gesticulating with both hands and feet, for Ximen Qing's benefit.

"Aside from Aunt Yang," she said, "the most important person in this family is the young lady. Of course there is her husband's younger brother, but he's still a minor and doesn't understand anything. Originally, when her late husband was still running the enterprise, in a single day, not even counting the silver, they sold enough blue cotton cloth of the kind used for making shoes to take in two large baskets full of copper cash. He used to charge thirty cash a foot for the stuff. I've seen with my own eyes that on a given day they often had to feed as many as twenty or thirty dyers, and all of this was managed by the young lady.

PITCH POTS (from *Sancai tuhui*).



"She has two maidservants and a page-boy at her beck and call. The older one, who's fourteen, and already dresses her hair in adult fashion, is called Lanxiang. The younger one's just eleven and is called Xiaoluan. In the future, when she's carried across your threshold, they'll all come with her.

"If I succeed in bringing off this match for you, sir, I hope to be able to take out a mortgage on a couple of rooms in a better location than that out-of-the-way corner in the northern quarter where I'm living now. It's not convenient for me to get to your place from there. When you bought Chunmei last year, sir, you promised me several bolts of muslin which you still haven't given me. I'll forget about that when this is all over if you'll compensate me for both occasions at once."

"On your way in just now, sir," she continued, "you must have noticed those two cabinets for displaying cloth. When Mr. Yang was still alive, he put a large sum of money into improvements for the retail shop that opens onto the street. This compound must also be worth seven or eight hundred taels of silver. It contains five interior courtyards and extends all the way back to the street that runs behind it. When she gets married, I'm afraid she'll have to leave it all to her young brother-in-law."

Auntie Xue was still talking when a maid-servant came out to summon her. Some time passed and then, lo and behold:

To the tinkling of girdle pendants,  
Amid the fragrance of orchid and musk,  
the woman herself appeared. She wore a king-fisher blue surcoat of figured silk emblazoned with a mandarin square that featured an embroidered *kylin*<sup>48</sup> over a wide-cut gown of figured scarlet silk. On her head:

Pearls and trinkets rose in piles;

A phoenix hairpin was half askew.

Ximen Qing opened his eyes wide and took a good

<sup>48</sup>The *kylin* 麒麟 is a mythical Chinese beast believed to be very auspicious whose name is often translated somewhat misleadingly as unicorn. The *kylin* in the mandarin square was an insignia of rank that during most of the Ming dynasty could only be worn by nobles and, as a special mark of distinction, commanders of the Embroidered-Uniform Guard. Only for a brief period in the early sixteenth century was the right to wear this



KYLIN (from *Sancai tuhui*).

look at the woman. Behold:

She was tall and slender in build,  
Modeled in plaster, carved of jade.  
Her figure was neither plump nor thin,  
Her stature neither short nor tall.  
On her face though barely visible,  
Were several inconspicuous pockmarks  
That gave her an air of natural beauty;  
Hidden beneath her skirt  
Were a pair of tiny golden lotuses  
That were well-formed and attractive.  
Two gold rings set with pearls  
Hung low beneath her ears;

insignia conferred on certain officials of the fourth and fifth ranks, but this was regarded as anomalous. Needless to say, Meng Yulou, whose deceased husband was only a cloth merchant, was not entitled to wear such an insignia. This is but one of many examples in the novel of the deliberate flouting of sumptuary regulations. See *Ming shi* 明史, 28 vols. (Peking: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974), vol. 6, ch. 67, pp. 1638-1639.

A pair of phoenix hairpins  
 Jutted aslant at either temple.  
 She had only to move  
 In order to make her openwork jade pen-  
 dants tinkle;  
 Wherever she sat  
 The reek of orchid and musk assailed the  
 nostrils.  
 It was just as though Chang'e had come  
 down  
 from her palace in the moon;  
 She was exactly like the Goddess of Witches'  
 Mountain  
 descending her jasper steps.

Ximen Qing no sooner saw her than his heart  
 was filled with joy. Auntie Xue made haste to hold  
 aside the hanging screen over the doorway in order  
 to facilitate her entrance. The woman came in  
 and:

Rather unceremoniously,  
 bowed and uttered a word of greeting, after which  
 she sat down in a seat directly across from that  
 occupied by her visitor. Ximen Qing scrutinized  
 her from head to toe with such intensity that the  
 woman lowered her head.

He opened the conversation by saying, "My  
 wife has been dead for some time and I would like  
 to make you my legitimate wife and put you in  
 charge of the household. What do you think of  
 this proposal?"

"How old are you, sir," the woman asked, "and  
 how long has your wife been dead?"

"I'm twenty-seven," said Ximen Qing, "and was  
 born on the twenty-eighth day of the seventh  
 month, at midnight. Unfortunately my former  
 wife has been dead now for more than a year. I  
 hardly dare ask how old you are, young lady?"

"I'm twenty-nine," the woman replied.

"So you're two years older than I am," said  
 Ximen Qing.

Auntie Xue interjected from the side:

"When the wife is two years older,  
 Yellow gold never moulders;  
 When the wife is three years older,  
 Yellow gold piles up like boulders."<sup>49</sup>

As she was speaking, a young maidservant came  
 in carrying three servings of tea flavoured with

candied kumquats in cups of carved lacquer inlaid  
 with silver and provided with teaspoons shaped  
 like ginkgo leaves. The woman got up, brushed  
 away a few drops of water from the rim of the  
 first cup with her slender fingers, and handed it  
 to Ximen Qing. As he took the proffered cup in  
 his hand, she bowed to him and expressed her  
 good wishes.

Auntie Xue seized the opportunity to step  
 forward and lift the woman's skirt with her hand,  
 revealing:

The up-turned points of her tiny golden  
 lotuses,  
 Barely three inches long  
 But half a span in length,  
 Peeking out beneath her skirt.

She was wearing scarlet shoes that had tips de-  
 corated with cloud patterns of gold brocade and  
 high white satin heels. As he beheld this sight  
 Ximen Qing's heart was filled with joy.

The woman took the second cup of tea and  
 handed it to Auntie Xue, after which she took the  
 remaining cup for herself and sat down again to  
 keep them company while they drank.

Ximen Qing then ordered Dai'an to present the  
 square box containing his betrothal gifts, which  
 consisted of two embroidered handkerchiefs, a  
 pair of jeweled hairpins, and six gold rings. When  
 these had been transferred to a tray and taken  
 inside, Auntie Xue prompted the woman to  
 express her gratitude to Ximen Qing with a bow.

"When are you planning to hold the ceremony,  
 sir," the woman went on to ask, "so that I can  
 make the necessary preparations?"

"Since you have deigned to accept my pro-  
 posal," said Ximen Qing, "I'll present you with  
 some further insignificant gifts on the twenty-  
 fourth day of this month and hold the ceremony  
 proper on the second day of the sixth month."

"If that's the way it's to be," the woman said,  
 "I'll send someone tomorrow to inform my late  
 husband's paternal aunt, who lives in the northern  
 quarter of the city."

"Yesterday," said Auntie Xue, "the gentleman  
 paid her a call in order to discuss this matter."

"What did she say?" the woman asked.

"When she heard that the gentleman was  
 interested in this match," Auntie Xue replied,  
 "she was as happy as could be, and suggested that  
 I bring him here so the two of you could meet.

<sup>49</sup>This rhyming jingle also occurs elsewhere in  
*JPMCH*, vol. 5, ch. 91, p. 8a.

She said, 'If you don't marry a man like this, what manner of man are you going to marry? I'll support this match, come what may, and even undertake to act as guarantor.'

"If that's really what aunt said, everything will be fine," the woman said.

"My dear young lady," said Auntie Xue, "surely you don't mean to suggest that a matchmaker such as myself would dare to make up something like that, do you?"

When she had finished speaking, Ximen Qing said his farewells and got up to go. Auntie Xue accompanied him as far as the mouth of Stink-water Lane and said, "Now that you've seen the young lady, sir, what do you think?"

"Auntie Xue," said Ximen Qing, "I'm indeed deeply indebted to you."

"You go ahead, sir," said Auntie Xue. "I want to have another word with the young lady before I leave."

Ximen Qing mounted his horse and headed back into the city, but Auntie Xue turned around and went inside again where she said to the woman, "Young lady, with a husband like that you'll never have anything to worry about."

"Does Ximen Qing have any women in his household now?" the woman asked. "And what does he do for a living?"

"My dear lady," said Auntie Xue, "even if he does have a few women about the place, none of them amount to anything. If what I say isn't true, when you get there you'll find out for yourself. His reputation is known to everyone. He is numbered among the most substantial men of property in Qinghe district, and is renowned as the Honourable Ximen who owns a wholesale pharmaceutical business and lends money to both officials and functionaries. Even the district magistrate and the prefect consort with him. And recently he has become related to Commander Yang of the Eastern Capital who recognizes him as a kinsman by marriage at four removes. No one dares to cross him."

The woman entertained Auntie Xue with wine and a meal. Just as they were enjoying their repast together, who should turn up but Aunt Yang's page boy, Antong, bearing a gift box containing sweetmeats from the country, including four slices of date cake made of glutinous millet flour, two pieces of candy, and several sugar dumplings made

of glutinous rice flour.

"I've been sent to ask whether you've accepted that person's betrothal gifts or not," he reported. "My mistress says, 'If you don't marry a man like this, what manner of man are you going to marry?'"

"Please thank your mistress for her concern on my behalf," the woman said. "I have in fact already accepted his betrothal gifts."

"My Heavens!" said Auntie Xue. "How lucky it is we matchmakers never make anything up. And now the good lady has sent her servant to confirm it."

The woman took the date cake and other sweetmeats out of the gift box and refilled it with a full complement of appetizers and cured meat. Then she gave it to Antong along with fifty or sixty cash for himself and said, "When you get home, give my compliments to your mistress and tell her that the other party has decided to make the formal presentation of his gifts on the twenty-fourth day of this month and to hold the wedding ceremony on the second day of the next month."

When the page boy had left Auntie Xue said, "How about giving me a little something of whatever the lady sent you to wrap up and take home with me for the children?" The woman gave her a piece of candy and ten sugar dumplings and she went out the door with:

A thousand thanks and ten thousand expressions of gratitude.  
But no more of this.

To resume our story, Zhang the Fourth, the maternal uncle of Meng Yulou's deceased husband, had hopes of being able to exploit his relationship with his young nephew, Yang Zongbao, as a means of laying his hands on some of her property. He had a candidate of his own as a matrimonial prospect for her, for whom he was prepared to act both as advocate and guarantor. This was the widower Provincial Graduate Shang, the son of Prefectural Judge Shang who lived on Main Street. If someone else of no particular distinction had been proposed as a rival candidate he would have had a case to make; but when he heard unexpectedly that she was betrothed to Ximen Qing, the owner of the wholesale pharmaceutical business in front of the district yamen, whom he knew had clout in official circles, he felt himself stymied. After devoting much thought to the

problem he decided that:

Of the thousand schemes and hundred plans,  
The best plan is a frontal assault.

Zhang the Fourth therefore paid the woman a visit and said to her, "Young lady, you really oughtn't to have accepted Ximan Qing's betrothal gifts but should have gone along with my suggestion and married the son of Prefectural Judge Shang, the provincial graduate. He comes from a cultivated family that not only values poetry and propriety, but also possesses enough landed property for you to live on quite comfortably.

"He would certainly be preferable to Ximen Qing. That bastard has been throwing his weight around in official circles for years, he's a tough customer. Moreover, he's already got a legitimate wife who's the daughter of Battalion Commander Wu. You're used to being a legitimate wife and if you marry him you'll only be a concubine; won't that be quite a comedown for you? Moreover, he's already got three or four other bedmates about the place as well as a few maidservants who aren't old enough to put their hair up yet. If you enter his household, as the saying goes:

When people are many, mouths are many,  
and you're likely to have a hard time of it."

"It's always been true," the woman said, "that:

A multitude of boats need not clog the  
channel.<sup>50</sup>

If there's already a First Lady in his household, I'm willing to acknowledge her seniority and be a younger sister to her. Even if he does have a few other bedmates about the place, if my husband takes a fancy to me, do you think I'll try to monopolize him? And if he doesn't take a fancy to me, I can't very well physically restrain him, can I? I'm not afraid; even if there are a hundred people to contend with, I can scull my own boat. To say nothing of the wealthy and prominent, among whom there is hardly a household without four or five concubines; when you get right down to it, even the beggars in the streets:

With boys in hand and girls in arms,  
often have three or four concubines tagging along  
at their heels. You're really making much ado  
about nothing. When I enter his household I'll  
know how to handle the situation so it won't be

<sup>50</sup>This proverbial saying also occurs elsewhere in *JPMCH*, vol. 1, ch. 16, p. 5a; and vol. 4, ch. 74, p. 4a.

a problem for me."

"Young lady," said Zhang the Fourth, "I've heard that this man is given to trading in human flesh and is an old hand at:

Beating his women and abusing his wives.  
Whenever one of them fails to please him in any  
way however slight he calls in a go-between and  
disposes of her without more ado. Are you willing  
to expose yourself to this temper of his?"

"Old Fourth," the woman said, "you're mistaken. No matter how rough a man may be, he won't beat a wife who is diligent and knows what she's about. As a member of his household, if I manage to run a tight ship, so that:

Words spoken inside do not get out, and  
Words spoken outside do not get in,<sup>51</sup>  
what can he do to me? If a wife:

Likes to eat but hates to work,  
Has a big mouth, a long tongue and  
Devotes herself to stirring up trouble,  
then:

If her husband doesn't beat her,  
Should he beat the dog instead?"<sup>52</sup>

"But that's not all," said Zhang the Fourth. "I've also heard he has a thirteen-year-old daughter at home who isn't married yet. I'm really afraid that if you enter his household you'll end up having to:

Make three nests where there's only room  
for two.

Just remember that:

When people are many, mouths are many.  
How will you ever be able to handle it?"

"Old Fourth," the woman said, "you don't know what you're talking about. As a member of his household I'll remember that:

<sup>51</sup>The ultimate source of this admonitory couplet is the Confucian classic the *Book of Rites*, *Li ji* 禮記, compiled in its present form during the Han dynasty. See the text as reproduced in Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764-1849), ed., *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏, fac. repr., 2 vols. (Peking: Zhonghua Shuju, 1980), vol. 2, ch. 27, p. 234, col. 3. See James Legge, trans., *Li Chi: Book of Rites*, 2 vols. (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1967), vol. 1, p. 455. It also occurs elsewhere in *JPMCH*, vol. 5, ch. 83, p. 3b.

<sup>52</sup>This proverbial expression also occurs elsewhere in *JPMCH*, vol. 1, ch. 18, pp. 6a-6b; and vol. 4, ch. 73, p. 9b.

Seniors are senior, and  
 Juniors are junior;  
 and that:

The state of the river depends on what  
 comes downstream  
 from the source.

If I treat his children well, there's no reason to fear  
 that my husband will think ill of me, or that his  
 children will be disrespectful. To say nothing of a  
 single child, even if there were ten of them, it  
 wouldn't be a problem for me."

"As I see it," said Zhang the Fourth, "this is  
 the sort of man whose:

Conduct is lacking in rectitude.

He's always away from home:

Sleeping among the flowers and lolling  
 beneath the willows.

Moreover, he's:

Solid without, but hollow within,  
 and is up to his neck in debt. I'm only afraid he'll  
 be the ruination of you."

"Old Fourth," the woman said, "you're mis-  
 taken again. Even if he does, sometimes, go out  
 on the town and:

Careen around rather recklessly,

as a woman:

I can only concern myself with what goes on  
 within the triple gates;

I can't concern myself with everything that  
 may happen

outside the triple gates.

You don't really expect me to follow him about  
 all day long, do you? As the saying goes:

Money in this world is but a  
 sometime thing;

Where is the family that is long rich  
 or forever poor?

In fact, when you get right down to it, even His  
 Majesty the Emperor himself, when he suffers  
 from a temporary shortage of cash, has been  
 known to appropriate funds realized by the sale  
 of brood mares from the Court of the Imperial  
 Stud.<sup>53</sup> To say nothing of merchants, which of

<sup>53</sup>The importance of this topical allusion to a con-  
 temporary practice for the dating of *Jin Ping Mei* was first  
 pointed out by Wu Han 吳晗 in 1933. See Wu Han, "*Jin  
 Ping Mei de zhuzuo shidai ji qi shehui beijing*," 金瓶梅的  
 著作時代及其社會背景 reprinted in his *Dushi zhaji* 讀史  
 劄記 (Peking: Sanlian, 1957), pp. 20-24; and P. D. Hanan,  
 "The Text of the *Chin P'ing Mei*," *Asia Major*, n.s., vol. 9,  
 no. 1 (1962), p. 39, n. 45.

whom would ever be content to let his money sit  
 idly at home, or scruple to:

Depend upon his wife's dowry for his daily  
 bread,

if the need should arise? There's really no need for  
 you to be so concerned about me."

Zhang the Fourth saw that the only effect his  
 arguments were having on the woman was to bring  
 down her counter-criticisms on his own head.  
 Feeling that he had lost face, he finished his  
 second cup of plain tea, got up, and departed.  
 There is a poem that testifies to this:

*Zhang the Fourth, in uttering his hurtful  
 words,  
 was only wasting his breath;  
 Marriage affinities, whatever one may  
 think,  
 are predetermined.*

*The woman of beauty felt herself pre-  
 disposed  
 in favour of Ximen Qing;  
 Though he had talked himself hoarse  
 it would have been to no avail.*

Zhang the Fourth went home in a state of mor-  
 tification and discussed the situation with his wife.  
 They decided that the only thing to do was to wait  
 until the day when the woman's trousseau was to  
 be delivered to Ximen Qing's household before the  
 wedding and then, on the pretext of protecting  
 the interests of their nephew, Yang Zongbao,  
 attempt to appropriate whatever they could of the  
 woman's belongings.

To make a long story short, on the twenty-  
 fourth day of the fifth month Ximen Qing  
 arranged for the 'presentation of the gifts'. He  
 invited his sister-in-law, who was married to his  
 wife's eldest brother Wu Kai, to ride in the sedan  
 chair and take charge of the gift-bearing pro-  
 cession. What with clothing and jewellery, formal  
 gowns for all four seasons, preserved fruit, tea and  
 pastries, bolts of cotton and silk, supplies of  
 pongee and silk floss, the procession consisted of  
 more than twenty full loads. On Meng Yulou's  
 side, she invited Aunt Yang and her own elder  
 sister to formally accept the gifts on her behalf  
 and help to entertain the visitors, but there is no  
 need to describe this in detail.

On the twenty-sixth, Meng Yulou engaged



twelve Buddhist monks with high attainments to recite a sutra and perform a 'land and water' mass for the benefit of her deceased husband, after which his spirit tablet was burned. It was Aunt Yang who insisted on these observances.

As the day approached on which the trousseau was to be delivered to Ximen Qing's household, Zhang the Fourth recruited a number of neighbours from the locality to join him in coming to have a word with the woman. That day Auntie Xue showed up with a few idlers who had been hired for the purpose by Ximen Qing and ten or twenty soldiers that he had borrowed from the commandant's yamen. As they started inside to move the woman's beds and curtains and the trunks in which her trousseau was packed, Zhang the Fourth intercepted them and said, "Match-maker, don't carry them away yet. I've got something to say about it."

After he had invited the neighbours to come inside and sit down, Zhang the Fourth opened the parley by saying, "Distinguished neighbours, listen to me. The young lady is here, and I oughtn't to have to say it, but your husband Yang Zongxi and your young brother-in-law Yang Zongbao are both my nephews, my elder sister's sons. Now, unfortunately, your husband is dead, but he succeeded in amassing a considerable sum for himself while he was alive. There are people who are trying to tell you what to do in this situation, and I, as a relative on the distaff side of the family, am not in a position to interfere in your affairs. Enough said. Nevertheless, my young second nephew Yang Zongbao remains a burden, the weight of which will fall entirely on my shoulders. He and your husband were born of the same womb. Do you mean to maintain that he is not entitled to a portion of the family property?"

"Now that our distinguished neighbours are here today to act as witnesses—and, after all, whether you've got a tidy sum of money in your hands or not, there's no way I can stop you from marrying someone if you want to—just open up your trunks and let everyone see for themselves what you've got in there before having them carried off the premises. I'm not interested in taking anything away from you, but only in clarifying the situation. Young lady, what do you say?"

When the woman heard these words she started

to cry and said, "Neighbours, listen to me. You are mistaken, sir. It's not as though I plotted with evil intent to murder my husband. Isn't it enough today that I have to bear the opprobrium for entering into another marriage? Whether or not my husband was successful in making money is public knowledge. But what few taels of silver he accumulated were all ploughed back into this house. And the house I'm not taking with me, I'm leaving it all to my young brother-in-law. All the furnishings are being left absolutely intact. In fact, there are three or four hundred taels of outstanding debts, the papers for which have already been turned over to you to collect as they become due. Since when has there been any excess of silver over and above the expenditures required to maintain the establishment?"

"If you haven't any silver, then that's all there is to it," said Zhang the Fourth. "All I'm asking you to do now is to open up your trunks in front of these witnesses so they can see for themselves whether you do indeed have any or not. Then you can carry it all off as you like. I'm not interested in taking anything away from you."

"No doubt you want to have a look at my shoes and foot-bindings too!" the woman said.

Just as they were beginning to wrangle, who should emerge from the rear of the house, leaning on her staff, but Aunt Yang.

"Aunt Yang is here," everyone said in chorus as they bowed to her in greeting.

After Aunt Yang had returned their salutation and sat down to keep them company, she addressed them as follows, "Distinguished neighbours: As the paternal aunt, I am related by blood; this is not a distaff or marriage relationship. Would anyone suggest that I have no say in this matter? The one who is dead was my nephew; the one who is alive is also my nephew.

Every one of the ten fingers,  
Hurts equally if bitten.

Quite aside from the fact that her husband really didn't have any money laid by, even if he had a hundred thousand taels of silver, you wouldn't be entitled to do anything more than take a look at it. She has no children and is still:

A young and delicate lass.

If you interfere and try to prevent her from re-marrying, just what do you want to keep her around for, may I ask?"

In a chorus of loud voices the neighbours responded, "What Aunt Yang says makes sense."

"You don't mean to retain what she brought with her by way of a dowry from her own family, do you?" demanded the old lady. "She hasn't given me a thing behind anybody's back, yet you suggest that I'm being partial to her. Let's be fair about it. There's no reason for me to deceive any of you. This nephew of mine was so kind and just in everything he did that his loss is hard for me to bear. He was always so considerate to me. If that were not the case I certainly wouldn't concern myself about the matter."

Zhang the Fourth eyed the old lady from one side and said, "Are you out of your mind?"

The phoenix doesn't deign to alight where there's  
no treasure to be had."

These words struck the old lady's sore spot. In an instant her face became purple with rage. Grabbing hold of Zhang the Fourth she started to curse him in earnest.

"Zhang the Fourth," she said, "you'd better stop talking that kind of nonsense. I may be untalented, but at least I'm a certifiable member of the Yang family. You old oily mouth! What Yang-family prick were you sired by?"

"I may have a different surname," said Zhang the Fourth, "but my two nephews are the offspring of my own elder sister. You old blood-sucker! Don't you know that:

A girl faces outward from the moment she's  
born?<sup>54</sup>

You're engaged in:

Setting fires with one hand and  
Pouring water on them with the other."

"You lousy, shameless, old dog-bone!" retorted

Aunt Yang. "She's still:

A young and delicate lass.

Just what do you have in mind in wanting to keep her at home, may I ask? If you aren't hoping to slake your lust with her you must be plotting to fatten yourself at her expense."

"I'm not out for anybody's money," said Zhang the Fourth. "But my nephew is my own sister's child, and if anything goes wrong, it's going to be me that's out of pocket, not you. You old gallows bird! You're out to:

Snatch the big and  
Snitch the little.

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

"Zhang the Fourth!" Aunt Yang retorted. "You old beggar! You old slave! You old mealy-mouth! If you keep on talking such rot with your:

Deceitful mouth and duplicitous tongue,  
you'll die so poor your family won't be able to afford a rope to hoist your coffin with!"

"You waggle-tongued old whore!" replied Zhang the Fourth. "You've had to work so hard for your money you've burnt out your tail. No wonder you don't have any children."

This sally really got under Aunt Yang's skin. "Zhang the Fourth, you louse!" she cursed at him. "You whoreson old dog! I may have no children, but I'm still better than your mother. She divides her time between Buddhist monasteries and Taoist temples, humping the bonzes and fucking the priests, while you're:

Still asleep in dreamland!"

At this point the two of them would have come to blows if the neighbours had not intervened, saying, "Old Fourth, let the lady have her say."

Meantime, Auntie Xue, who had noticed that the two of them were preoccupied with their quarrel, took advantage of the confusion and placed herself at the head of Ximen Qing's servants and hired hands, along with the soldiers who had been sent from the yamen. At her direction, they swooped down hugger-mugger on the woman's beds and curtains and the trunks containing her trousseau and carried them all off like a gust of wind.

When Zhang the Fourth realized what had happened his eyes swelled with rage, but:

Though he dared to be angry,  
He dared not speak.

<sup>54</sup>The ultimate source of this saying is *Baihu tong* 白虎通, a compilation of scholastic opinion dating from the first century A.D. See the text as reproduced in *Baizi quanshu* 百子全書, fac. repr., 8 vols. (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Renmin, 1984), vol. 6, ch. 1, p. 10b. The relevant passage has been translated by Tjan Tjoe Som as follows: "When a son is born he is turned towards the inside of the house because it is his duty to remain in the family; when a daughter is born she is turned towards the outside because it is her duty to follow her husband." See Tjan Tjoe Som, trans, *Po Hu Tong: The Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1949), vol. 2, p. 419.

The neighbours, for their part, seeing that there was nothing further to be done, attempted to smooth things over and then went their separate ways.

On the second day of the sixth month Ximen Qing dispatched a large sedan chair and four pairs of red silk lanterns to fetch the bride for the wedding ceremony. The bride's elder sister Mrs Han acted as her escort, and she was also accompanied by her young brother-in-law Yang Zongbao, who had his hair done up in a topknot, wore a long green gown, and rode on horseback. Ximen Qing rewarded him with a bolt of satin brocade and a jade belt buckle. The bride was accompanied by her two maidservants, Lanxiang and Xiaoluan, whose job it was to:

Make the beds and fold the quilts.

To wait on her, she also brought along the page-boy Qintong, who was just fourteen years old.

On the third day Aunt Yang and the woman's two sisters-in-law, the wives of her brothers, Meng the Elder and Meng the Second, came to participate in the 'third-day celebrations'. Ximen Qing presented Aunt Yang with seventy taels of silver and two bolts of satin, and from that time on the families enjoyed uninterrupted relations.

Ximen Qing prepared three rooms on the western side of the rear courtyard to serve as his new bride's living quarters. She was designated as the Third Lady in the hierarchy of his wife and

concubines, and bore the appellation Yulou, Tower of Jade. Ximen Qing gave orders that all the members of his household from top to bottom should address her as Third Lady.

Beginning with the evening of the wedding day he spent three successive nights in her room. Truly:

Within the bed-curtains of gold lamé  
Two new partners performed their perennial roles;  
Beneath the quilt of red brocade  
Two used objects were brought into play.<sup>55</sup>

There is a poem that testifies to this:

*To encounter close up such a paragon of  
feeling and romance,  
Is a consummation that: "Without good  
fortune,  
one cannot enjoy."  
Wherever has Liezi allowed the wind  
to take him,<sup>56</sup>  
When night after night the beauty of the  
moon  
shines in the willow branches?<sup>57</sup>*

If you want to know the outcome of these events,

Pray consult the story related in the following chapter.

<sup>55</sup>This literary conceit occurs in "Wenjing yuanyang hui" and in the sixteenth century play *Xiuru ji* 繡襦記, attributed to Xu Lin 徐霖 (1462-1538). For the relevant texts see Tan Zhengbi, ed., *Qingping shantang huaben*, p. 160; and Mao Jin 毛晉 (1599-1659), ed., *Liushizhong qu* 六十種曲, 60 vols. (Taipei: Kaiming, 1970), vol. 31, scene 41, p. 110. Both of these texts are sources from which the author of *Jin Ping Mei* is known to have borrowed heavily.

<sup>56</sup>Liezi 列子 is the name of a shadowy personage who

figures prominently in ancient Taoist thought and for whom one of the Taoist classics has been named. See A.C. Graham, trans., *The Book of Lieh-tzu* (London: John Murray, 1960). In *Zhuangzi* 莊子 he is alleged to have been able to ride the wind. See Burton Watson, trans., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), ch. 1, p. 32.

<sup>57</sup>This quatrain also occurs elsewhere in *JPMCH*, vol. 5, ch. 97, p. 11b.

## CHAPTER 19

*Snake-in-the-grass shakes down Jiang Zhushan;  
Li Ping'er appeals to Ximen Qing*

*When flowers bloom they do not disdain  
the plots of the poor;  
The moon shines on mountains and rivers  
making everything bright.  
In this world the heart of man alone  
remains vile;  
In all things demanding that Heaven  
show him favour.  
The foolish, the deaf, and the dumb  
everywhere prosper;  
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.<sup>58</sup>*

The story goes that Ximen Qing had been constructing a formal garden and summer-house in his residential compound for nearly half a year before the final decorating, oiling and varnishing were completed. From front to back:

Everything was put on an entirely new footing.

The housewarming celebrations lasted for several days. But no more of this.

One day during the first decade of the eighth month, Ximen Qing was invited to celebrate the birthday of Judicial Commissioner Xia Yanling at his newly purchased country estate. Xia had engaged the services of four singing girls, a band of

musicians, and a troupe of tumblers and acrobats to entertain his guests. At ten o'clock in the morning, Ximen Qing, having dressed himself to befit the occasion, set off on horseback accompanied by four page-boys.

During her husband's absence, Wu Yueniang prepared a feast of wine and delicacies and invited Li Jiao'er, Meng Yulou, Sun Xue'e, Mistress Chen, and Pan Jinlian to join her. They opened the gate of the new garden and proceeded to enjoy its beauties at their leisure. When they surveyed the scene within:

Flowers and trees, pavilions and terraces  
Stretched before them as far as the eye  
could see.

Truly, it was a fine garden. Behold:

At the main entrance, fifteen feet high,  
There stands a red-lacquered memorial arch;  
All the way round in twenty segments,  
There stretches a crenellated wall of crushed  
limestone.

At the portal there is a gate tower;  
Terraces and kiosks spread in all directions.  
There are artificial hills and genuine streams,  
Blue-green bamboos and glaucous pine trees.  
The structures that are high but not pointed  
are called terraces;

Whereas those that are lofty but not for-  
bidding  
are called kiosks.

If one wishes to enjoy the four seasons there are places for each of them:

In spring there is Swallow-flight Hall  
Where cypress and cedar vie in verdancy.

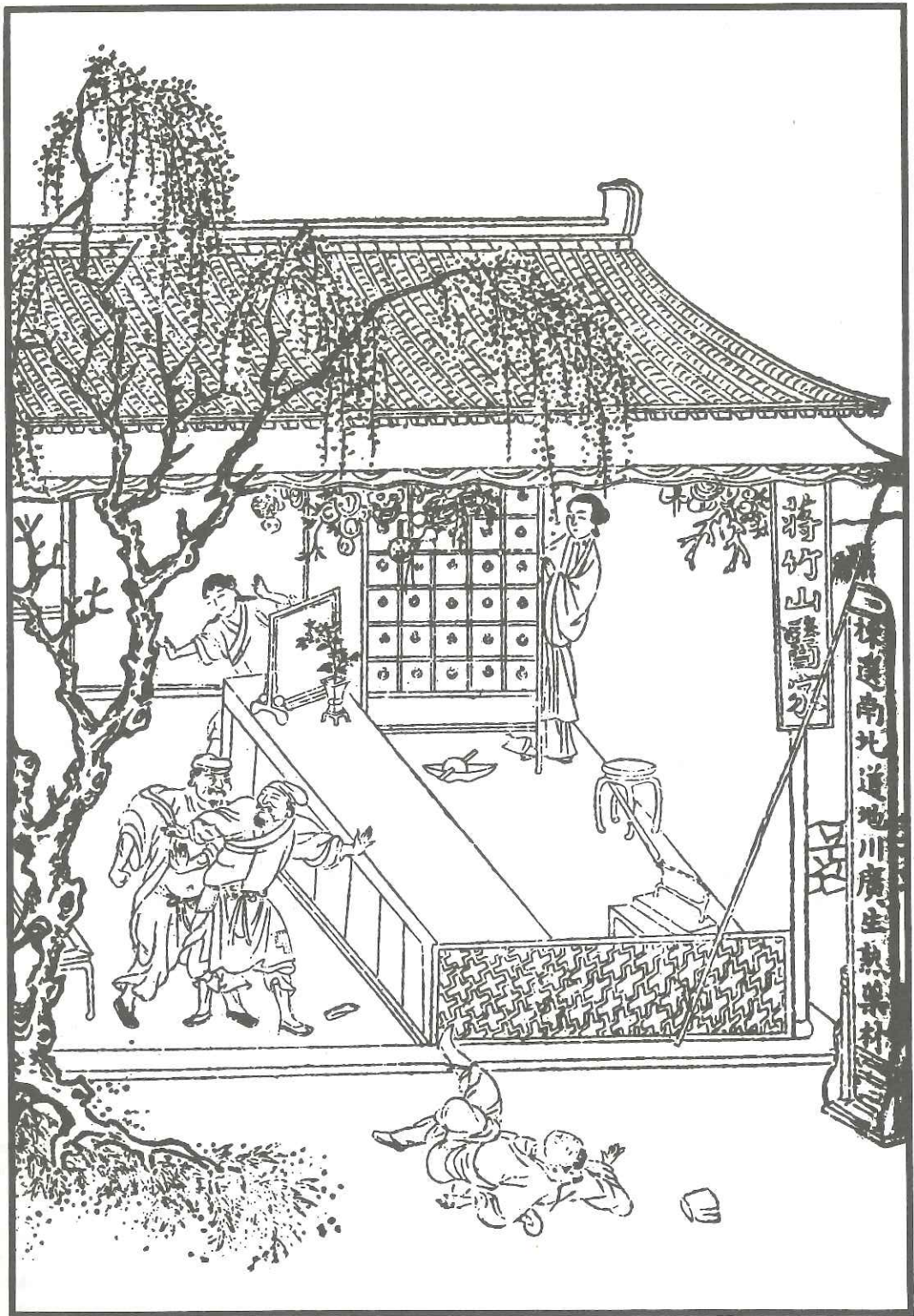
In summer there is Brookside Lodge  
Where lotus and water lily display their  
colours.

In autumn there is Halcyon House  
Where the golden chrysanthemum braves  
the frost.

In winter there is Hidden Spring Grotto  
Where the white plum blossom gathers snow.

Just see how:

<sup>58</sup>The proximate source of this poem is *Shuihu quanzhuan*, vol. 2, ch. 33, p. 513, ll. 3-4. The first two couplets also occur without attribution in the fifteenth century anthology of moral aphorisms entitled *Mingxin baojian* 明心寶鑑 (microfilm copy of a Ming edition in the Peking Library), ch. 2, p. 5a, ll. 2-3; while the last two couplets occur elsewhere in the same anthology attributed to *Liezi* [sic], see *ibid.*, ch. 1, p. 3b, ll. 12-13. The same poem in its entirety recurs in *JPMCH*, vol. 5, ch. 94, p. 1a, ll. 3-6; while the third and fourth lines recur in *ibid.*, vol. 5, ch. 84, p. 10a, l. 10; and the sixth, seventh, and eighth lines recur in *ibid.*, vol. 4, ch. 61, p. 26a, ll. 7-8.



SNAKE-IN-THE-GRASS shakes down Jiang Zhushan (from the Ming Chongzheng [1628-1644] edition).

Capricious blossoms immure the narrow paths;  
 Lissome willows brush the carved balustrades.  
 Tossed in the breeze, willow fronds raise their moth-like eyebrows;  
 Laden with raindrops, flowering crab apples display their delicate features.  
 Before Swallow-flight Hall  
 The daffodils seem about to open but haven't opened;  
 Behind Hidden Spring Grotto  
 The holly is in half bloom but not yet full bloom.  
 The pale plum blossoms east of the Lowland Bridge bloom and fade;  
 The redbuds above the Cloud Repose Pavilion are not yet in flower.  
 By the ornamental rocks  
 The elecampane has just blossomed;  
 Beside the painted railings  
 The dianthus has just appeared.  
 With a flutter of wings the purple swallows penetrate the curtains;  
 In a burst of song the yellow orioles traverse the shadows.

And there are also:

Moon-shaped windows and snowy grottoes;

Not to mention:

Waterside retreats and breezy pavilions.

The banksia-rose arbour

Runs into the rose-leaved raspberry trellis;

The peach tree with its thousand leaves

Confronts the willow of the three springs.

And there are also:

Lilacs

Mimosa

Caragana

Yellow roses

Jasmine

And narcissus.

In front and behind the summer-house there are:

Juniper hedges and bamboo-lined walks,

Serpentine streams and square pools.

Plantains and palm trees shade the steps;

Helianthus and pomegranate catch the sun.

Amid the waterweeds frolicking fish

startle the beholder;

Among the flowers powdered butterflies dance in pairs.

Truly:

The peonies have hardly begun to reveal their bodhisattva faces;

Before the litchis are ready to put forth their māraraja heads.<sup>59</sup>

Thereupon, Wu Yueniang led the other women-folk into the garden.

Some hold hands as they wander along the flowery paths;

Others compare botanical specimens seated on the fragrant grass.

One, approaching the balustrade to survey the scene

Playfully picks red lovers' beans to toss at the goldfish;

Another, leaning on the railing to enjoy the flowers

Gigglingly flirts her silken fan to startle the butterflies.

Wu Yueniang made her way to the highest point in the garden, the Cloud Repose Pavilion, where she proceeded to play a board game with Meng Yulou and Li Jiao'er. Pan Jinlian, along with Mistress Chen and Sun Xue'e, ascended the Flower-viewing Tower, from which they could see extending before them:

The tree peony grove

The garden peony bed

The crab apple bower

The seven sisters trellis

And the banksia-rose arbour;

Not to mention:

That 'cold-enduring gentleman' the bamboo<sup>60</sup>

And that 'snow-despising grandee' the

<sup>59</sup>This couplet is derived from one by the ninth century poet, Wang Lin 王璘. See *Quan Tang shi*, vol. 11, ch. 795, p. 8948, l. 6.

<sup>60</sup>Bamboos were first referred to as 'gentlemen' in an anecdote about the famous eccentric, Wang Huizhi 王徽之 (d. 388), who is said to have explained why he planted bamboos about his temporary residence by saying, "How could I live a single day without these gentlemen?" See Richard B. Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, p. 388.

pine.<sup>61</sup>

Truly:

All four seasons produce their  
never-fading flowers;  
All eight festivals seem to be one  
everlasting spring.<sup>62</sup>  
Such a vision is not exhaustible;  
Such a view exceeds comprehension.<sup>63</sup>

Before long the wine was served. Wu Yueniang took the seat of honour with Li Jiao'er sitting across from her. To either side of them, Meng Yulou, Sun Xue'e, Pan Jinlian, and Mistress Chen sat down in order of precedence.

"I forgot to invite Master Chen," said Yueniang. Turning to Xiaoyu, she said, "Quick! Run up front and ask our son-in-law to join us."

It was not long before Chen Jingji presented himself:

His head adorned with an ultramarine silk  
cap  
His body clad in an informal gown of purple  
satin  
His feet shod in white-soled black boots.

After making his bow of greeting, he sat down next to his wife Mistress Chen.

After they had been drinking for a while:

With the raising of glasses and passing of  
cups,  
Wu Yueniang went back to playing board games

<sup>61</sup>Qin Shihuangdi (259-210 B.C.) is said to have sought shelter from a storm under a tree while visiting Mount Tai in 219 B.C., and expressed his gratitude by enfeoffing it as a grandee. See *Shi ji*, vol. 1, ch. 6, p. 242, 11. 8-9. Later scholiasts identified the tree in question as a pine. See Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557-641), comp., *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚, 2 vols. (Peking: Zhonghua Shuju, 1965), vol. 2, ch. 88, p. 1512, 11. 1-2.

<sup>62</sup>This couplet occurs in the early vernacular story "Qiantang Meng 錢塘夢," which is preserved in the front matter of a 1498 edition of *Xixiang ji* 西廂記. See *Qimiao quanxiang zhushi Xixiang ji* 奇妙全相注釋西廂記 fac. repr. (Taipei: Shijie, 1961), p. 1b, 11. 7-8. A variant form of the same couplet occurs in the middle period vernacular story entitled "Du Liniang muse huanhun 杜麗娘慕色還魂," reprinted in Hu Shiyong 胡士瑩, *Huaben xiaoshuo gailun* 話本小說概論, 2 vols. (Peking: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), vol. 2, p. 533, 11. 26-27. It also recurs in *JPMCH*, vol. 3, ch. 52, p. 16b, 1. 10.

<sup>63</sup>This couplet also occurs in "Qiantang meng," p. 2b, 1. 8.

with Li Jiao'er and Mistress Chen, while Sun Xue'e and Meng Yulou climbed the Flower-viewing Tower to enjoy the view.

Jinlian wandered off by herself beside the flower beds in front of the artificial hill where she amused herself by batting at the butterflies with her round white-silk fan. Unexpectedly, Chen Jingji, who had crept up behind her to see what she was up to, addressed her saying, "Fifth Lady you don't know the proper way to go about batting a butterfly. Let me show you how it's done. These butterflies dart up one second and down the next as if they can't make up their minds what they want to do. They certainly are elusive creatures."

Jinlian swiveled her powdered neck and gave him a sidelong glance. "You lousy short-life!" she berated him. "If anyone should overhear you, you'd be done for; though I suppose you're too far gone to care."

With a giggle, Chen Jingji pounced upon her, embraced her and gave her a kiss. The woman responded by giving him a shove with her free hand that knocked the young scamp head over heels.

Though neither of them realized it, this scene had been observed from a distance by Meng Yulou from atop the Flower-viewing Tower, who now called out, "Sister Five, come over here. I've got something to tell you." Only then did Jinlian abandon Jingji and go off to climb the tower.

Thus it happened that neither of the two butterflies were caught that day.

Though they may have made a swallows'  
tryst  
or orioles' assignation;  
The bee's antennae had no more than grazed  
the corolla of the flower.<sup>64</sup>

Truly:

Though distracted bees and wanton butterflies  
are sometimes to be seen;  
Once they fly into the pear blossoms  
they disappear from view.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup>This couplet recurs in *JPMCH*, vol. 3, ch. 52, p. 19b, 11. 3-4.

<sup>65</sup>This couplet recurs in *JPMCH*, vol. 5, ch. 82, p. 3b, 11. 5-6.

Now that the woman was gone, Chen Jingji returned to his room without a word. Finding himself beset by melancholy, he improvised a song to the tune "Plucking the Cassia" in order to dispel his depression:

*I saw her rakishly sporting a spray of blossoms  
Smiling as she toyed with her spray of blossoms.*

*On her ruby lips she wore no rouge  
But looked as though she did wear rouge.  
When we met the other day  
And then met again today  
She seemed to have feelings for me  
But displayed no feelings for me.  
Though she wished to consent  
She never gave her consent.  
It looked as though she refused me  
But she really never did refuse me.  
When can we make another assignation,  
When will we see each other again?  
If we don't meet  
She may long for me;  
When we do meet  
I still long for her.<sup>66</sup>*

We will say no more for the moment about Wu Yueniang and the others as they feasted in the garden, but return to the story of Ximen Qing's visit to Judicial Commissioner Xia Yanling's country estate outside the South Gate.

On his way home, after the party was over, he happened to pass through the Southern Entertainment Quarter.<sup>67</sup>

Now in days gone by, Ximen Qing had been a habitu  of the:

Three quarters and two alleys

<sup>66</sup> A version of this anonymous song is included in the sixteenth-century anthology *Yongxi yuefu* 雍熙樂府 (pref. dated 1566), 20 ce, fac. repr. (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1934), ce 17, p. 43b, 11. 2-5. It also recurs in *JPMCH*, vol. 3, ch. 52, p. 19b, 11. 7-9.

<sup>67</sup> For a detailed description based on primary sources of the entertainment quarters in the capitals of the Northern and Southern Song dynasties, see Wilt Idema and Stephen H. West, *Chinese Theater 1100-1450: A source Book* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982), pp. 14-29; and 56-83.

of the pleasure precincts, so all the 'knockabouts' there were well known to him. The people called 'knockabouts' at that time during the Song dynasty corresponded to what are vulgarly referred to today as 'bare sticks'. Among these were two men named Snake-in-the-Grass Lu Hua and Street-Skulking Rat Zhang Sheng, who had often been patronized by Ximen Qing and belonged to the:

Chicken-pinching and dognapping ilk.

Ximen Qing caught sight of the two of them that day as they were engaged in a gambling game and reined in his horse in order to have a word with them. The two men immediately came over and greeted him by falling to one knee asking, "Sir, where are you headed at such an hour?"

"Today is the birthday of his Honour Xia Yanling of the Judicial Commissioner's Office," said Ximen Qing. "He invited some of us to his country estate outside the South Gate to celebrate the occasion. There is a favour I'd like to ask of you. Will you agree to do it for me?"

"Needless to say, sir," the two replied, "we are mindful of everything you've done for us in the past. If you now have a task for us to perform:

Though we should have to go through fire and water

We would not decline to suffer ten thousand deaths."

"If that's the way you feel about it," said Ximen Qing, "come to my house tomorrow and I'll give you your instructions."

"Why wait till tomorrow?" the two demanded. "Tell us about it now. What's up?"

Ximen Qing then:

Whispered into their ears in a low voice and related the whole story of how Jiang Zhushan had deprived him of Li Ping'er. "All I want you two fellows to do is to help me vent my spleen," he concluded.

Still on horseback, Ximen Qing hitched up his robe and groped for his wallet, which turned out to contain four or five taels worth of loose silver. Pouring it all out and handing it to the two men, he said, "Take this and buy yourselves some wine to drink. If you manage to pull this affair off successfully for me, I'll reward the two of you further."

Lu Hua refused to accept the money and said, "It's not as though you haven't already done us



any favours in the past, sir. I thought you might want to send us:

Down to the floor of that great sea the  
Eastern Ocean  
To wrest the horn from the Green Dragon's  
head;  
Or up to the very summit of Mount Hua the  
Western Peak  
To wrench the tusk from the White Tiger's  
jaws;

in which case we might not be able to comply. But if it's only such a piddling task as this, where's the difficulty? This silver I absolutely refuse to accept."

"If you won't take it," said Ximen Qing, "I won't trouble you any further." Whereupon, he told Dai'an to repossess the silver, whipped up his horse, and started on his way.

Zhang Sheng, however, stopped him saying, "Lu Hua, you don't understand his Honour's disposition. If you don't take what you're offered, it will seem as though we're trying to get out of it."

Lu Hua then accepted the silver and kowtowed on his hands and knees, saying, "Just go home and relax, sir. In two days or less, you can rely on us to give you something to laugh about."

"As for me," said Zhang Sheng, "if you could only manage in the future to wangle some sort of position for me with his Honour Xia on the staff of the Judicial Commissioner's Yamen, that would be quite sufficient."

"Is that all?" said Ximen Qing. "That goes without saying."

Gentle reader take note: Afterwards, Ximen Qing did recommend Zhang Sheng to Xia Yanling, who got him a job on the domestic staff of Zhou Xiu, the Commandant of the Regional Military Command. But this is a subsequent event; having mentioned it we will say no more about it now.

These two 'knockabouts' took their newly acquired silver and went back to their gambling. By the time Ximen Qing had ridden into the city through the South Gate and arrived home, the sun was already setting in the west.

When Wu Yueniang and the others heard that he had come home they all went back to the rear compound. Only Pan Jinlian remained in the summer-house to see that everything was properly put away. Ximen Qing did not go back to the rear

compound but came straight into the garden. When he saw the woman supervising the cleaning up in the pavilion, he asked, "What have you all been doing here during my absence?"

"Today," Jinlian said with a smile, "elder sister and the rest of us decided to open up the gate and have a look at the garden for ourselves. How could we have known you would get home so early?"

"Xia Yanling really put himself out today," said Ximen Qing. "It was at his country estate. He had engaged four singing girls and four acrobats to entertain us, and there were only five guests there. Because I was worried about the distance, I left early."

The woman helped him take off his outdoor things and then said, "You could use something to drink. I'll tell the maidservant to bring you some wine."

"You can take the rest of the dishes away," Ximen Qing instructed Chunmei. "Just leave a few saucers of delicacies and decant a flagon of grape wine for me."

Sitting down in the place of honour he noticed that the woman was wearing a blouse of aloeswood-coloured moiré with variegated crepe edging that opened down the middle over a draw-work skirt of white glazed damask. Shoes of scarlet iridescent silk with high white-satin heels and gold-spangled toes were visible beneath her skirt. On her head she wore a chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree, in front of which there was a tiara of jade enchased with gold representing the



scene 'plucking the cassia in the moon palace'. Her hair was further adorned with plum-blossom shaped ornaments with kingfisher feather inlays and a host of trinkets were stuck about the temples, which had the effect of further enhancing:

The fragrant redness of her ruby lips

The glossy whiteness of her powdered face.

Before he knew it Ximen Qing's:

Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused.

Taking her two hands in his, he embraced her and gave her a kiss. Shortly thereafter Chunmei brought the wine and the two of them passed a cup of it back and forth between them. As they drank they sucked each other's tongues so assiduously that the sound of the sucking was quite audible. The woman then hitched up her skirt and sat in his lap. In that position she took a sip of wine and proceeded to transfer it into her companion's mouth like a bird feeding its young, after which she picked up a fresh lotus pod from the table with her slender fingers and fed it to him.

"That's not very appetizing," protested Ximen Qing. "Why feed me that?"

"My son," the woman said, "don't push your luck. You'd do better not to refuse anything from your mother's hand."

Whereupon she put a fresh walnut kernel in her mouth and passed it to him before desisting.

Ximen Qing wanted to play with the woman's breasts, so she unfastened the gold chatelaine with its three pendant charms that she wore at her collar and held it between her teeth while she pulled open her silk blouse, revealing:

The beautiful unblemished jade of

Her fragrant and creamy bosom;

Her tight and squeezey breasts.

Ximen Qing fondled and caressed them for some time, sucking at the teats like a young calf. The two of them laughed and joked together:

Enjoying to the full the pleasures of conubial bliss.

In the midst of his euphoria Ximen Qing said to the woman, "I've got something to tell you that will give you a laugh in a day or two. You may have heard that Dr. Jiang Zhushan has opened a pharmaceutical shop right under my nose. Well, one of these days, you can rely upon it, he's going to look as though he's opened a fruiterer's shop on his own face."

"Why's that?" the woman asked.

Ximen Qing told her the whole story of how he had run into Lu Hua and Zhang Sheng outside the South Gate that day.

"What a depraved creature you are," the woman laughed. "There's no telling how much evil karma you will have accumulated before you're through."

She then went on to ask, "Isn't that Dr. Jiang the same Dr. Jiang whom we often call in to perform medical services here? He always looked circumspect and polite enough to me. He lowers his gaze whenever he meets anyone. The poor fellow! You really oughtn't to give him such a hard time."

"He's got you fooled," said Ximen Qing. "You say he lowers his gaze when he sees you. That only makes it easier for him to ogle your feet."

"You delirious oily mouth!" the woman exclaimed. "He actually ogles the feet of other people's wives!"

"You don't know the half of it," said Ximen Qing. "Someone nearby called on him once while he was on his way home carrying a fish from the market. When he was intercepted he said, 'Let me take the fish home first and come back after that.' His interlocutor said, 'I've got someone seriously ill at home. Please, doctor! Come right away.' This Jiang Zhushan then followed him home. The sick person was on the second floor so he was invited upstairs. It turned out to be a woman who was ill, and a good-looking one at that. When he came into the room, she stuck her hand out of the bed curtains so he could palpate her pulse. The rascal had her wrist in his hand when he suddenly recalled his fish, which had been left hanging on a curtain hook downstairs, forgot himself and said, 'You don't have a pussy down there do you?' When her husband, who was standing there in the same room, heard this, he strode over, grabbed him by the hair, and beat him to a stinking pulp. He not only lost his fee but had his clothes torn to tatters by the time he made his escape."

"A likely story!" the woman said. "I don't believe a cultivated man like that would do such a thing."

"If you go by appearances," said Ximen Qing, "you're bound to miss the boat. As far as he's concerned:

Outside he may be the picture of propriety

But inside he harbours cunning and villainy."

After the two of them had chatted and laughed together for a while, they stopped drinking their wine, finished putting the things away, and went back to Jinlian's room to spend the night. But no more of this. Let us put this strand of our narrative aside for a moment.

To resume our story, two months or so had now passed since Li Ping'er brought Jiang Zhushan across her threshold in wedlock. Initially, out of his desire to please her, Jiang Zhushan had concocted various aphrodisiacs. He had even bought some 'Yunnanese ticklers',<sup>68</sup> 'ladies' delights'<sup>69</sup> and the like in front of the city gate in the hope of arousing her passion. What he failed to realize, however, was that the woman had already experienced every kind of:

Violent storm and sudden downpour at the hands of Ximen Qing, so that his inexperienced efforts often left her unsatisfied. Little by little she began to despise him, until the day finally came when she smashed all the sexual implements to smithereens with a stone and threw them away.

"You're just like a shrimp or an eel," she railed at him, "with no real strength in your loins. What's the point of your buying all this junk to titillate your old lady with? I thought I was getting a real hunk of meat, but it turns out you're:

Good enough to look at, but not fit to eat. You're about as useful as a 'pewter spearhead'<sup>70</sup> or a 'dead turtle'!"

Li Ping'er cursed her husband till he looked as

<sup>68</sup>This appears to be a device attached to the penis in order to titillate the clitoris during intercourse. The same nomenclature occurs in the anonymous Ming drama *Wei Fengxiang gu Yuhuan ji* 韋鳳翔古玉環記, reproduced from a Wanli 萬曆 (1573-1620) edition in *Guben xiqu congkan, chuji* 古本戲曲叢刊初集, no. 22 (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1954), ch. 1, sc. 6, p. 11a, 1. 8. It also recurs in *JPMCH*, vol. 4, ch. 79, p. 6a, 1. 3.

<sup>69</sup>This appears to be the name of another device similar in function to that described in note 68.

<sup>70</sup>The best known occurrence of this expression is in the early fourteenth-century play by Wang Shifu 王實甫 entitled *Xixiang ji* 西廂記. See Wang Jisi 王季思, ed., *Xixiang ji* (Hong Kong: Zhonghua Shuju, 1960), bk. 4, sc. 2, p. 153, 1. 10; and p. 158, n. 26.

though:

His head had been sprayed with dog's blood and drove him out to sleep in the shop up front, though it was the third watch in the middle of the night.

From then on she could think of no one but Ximen Qing and refused to let her husband into her bedroom. Day after day she nagged him about the accounts and tried to monitor the expenditure of her capital.

One day, feeling that he had had a bellyful, Jiang Zhushan had gone into the shop and was sitting there behind the narrow counter when who should appear but two men, staggering and stupefied with drink, who made their way in and sat down on a bench.

"Have you got any 'dog-yellow' in this shop of yours?" one of them demanded.

"You must be pulling my leg," laughed Jiang Zhushan. "I've only got 'ox-yellow'.<sup>71</sup> Who ever heard of 'dog-yellow'?"

"Well, if you haven't any 'dog-yellow'," his interlocutor continued, "I suppose 'ice-ashes' will do. Let me see some. I'll buy a few ounces from you."

"Pharmaceutical houses only carry 'ice-crystals',"<sup>72</sup> said Jiang Zhushan, "the best quality of which comes from Borneo in the South Seas. Who ever heard of 'ice-ashes'?"

"It's no use asking him," the other man said. "He's only been open a few days and could hardly be expected to carry pharmaceuticals like these. We'd do better to go to Ximen Qing's shop."

"Come over here," the first one said. "Let's get down to business. Brother Jiang, there's no use pretending you're:

Still asleep in dreamland.

The principal and interest on those thirty taels of silver you borrowed from Brother Lu here three years ago when your wife died are mounting up, and we've come to collect from you today. If we'd simply demanded payment the moment we

<sup>71</sup>'Ox-yellow' is the Chinese word for bezoar or *Calculus bovis*, a medication extracted from the gallstones of the ox or buffalo. See Shiu-ying Hu, *An Enumeration of Chinese Materia Medica* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1980), p. 76.

<sup>72</sup>'Ice-crystals' is the Chinese word for borneol camphor. See *ibid.*, p. 89.

entered the door, seeing as how you've managed to marry money and open a brand new shop, we were afraid it might reflect unfavourably on your reputation. So we thought we'd do you a favour by starting out with a few words of nonsense so you could see the need to take your medicine. But if you refuse to take your medicine you'll have to repay him the silver just the same."

When Jiang Zhushan heard this he became stupefied with amazement. "But I never borrowed a cent from him," he stated.

"If you didn't borrow the money," said his interlocutor, "why should we be dunning you for it? It has always been true that:

Flies don't cluster on eggs  
unless they're cracked.<sup>73</sup>

You'd better not stick to that line."

"I haven't had the honour of learning your names, gentlemen," said Jiang Zhushan. "I've never met you before. On what grounds can you simply appear and demand money of me?"

"Brother Jiang," his interlocutor stated, "you are quite mistaken. It has always been true that:

Those who achieve office are seldom poor  
and

Those who repudiate debts are seldom rich.  
Remember the days before you made a place for yourself, when you had to peddle your nostrums with bell in hand like any mountebank? It was Brother Lu here who came to your aid then and made it possible for you to arrive at your present state."

"My surname is Lu and my given name is Hua," the other one asserted. "That year you borrowed thirty taels of silver from me to pay for your wife's funeral expenses. Including principal and interest, you owe me forty-eight taels now. You'll have to repay me whether you like it or not."

"Since when did I ever borrow any money from you?" Jiang Zhushan demanded in consternation.

<sup>73</sup>Variants of this proverbial expression recur in *JPMCH*, vol. 3, ch. 52, p. 5b, 11. 3-4; and vol. 5, ch. 86, p. 10b, 1. 9.

<sup>74</sup>The Chinese olive *Canarium album* is said to taste bitter at first and have a pleasing aftertaste. As early as the tenth century this characteristic of the olive was used as a metaphor for the frank remonstrance which is at first distasteful to the person to whom it is addressed but later turns out to be beneficial. See the poems on this theme

"And even if I did, there would have been a contract and a guarantor."

"I was the guarantor," stated Zhang Sheng, and without more ado he reached into his sleeve pulled out a contract and waved it in his face.

Jiang Zhushan was so angry his countenance turned as sallow as wax. "You gallows bird!" he cursed. "You servile cur! You think you can play the 'knockabout', coming in here from nowhere and intimidating me?"

When Lu Hua heard these words he reacted with outrage. He sent a clenched fist whistling across the narrow counter that flew right into Jiang Zhushan's face, knocking his nose to one side. At the same time he started pulling the pharmaceuticals off the shelves and hurling them into the street.

"You lousy 'knockabout'!" cursed Jiang Zhushan. "How dare you despoil my merchandise?"

All he could do was call for Tianfu to come to his aid, but Lu Hua kicked the servant into a corner with one swing of his foot and he was too frightened to make a further move.

Zhang Sheng pulled Jiang Zhushan out from behind the narrow counter and made a show of staying Lu Hua's hand, saying, "Brother Lu, you've already waited long enough as it is. Give him another couple of days to come up with the cash and make an end of it. What do you say, Brother Jiang?"

"I never borrowed his money in the first place," said Jiang Zhushan. "But even if I had, you could have raised the issue more politely. What's the idea of all this rough stuff?"

"Brother Jiang," said Zhang Sheng, I can see that:

You've swallowed the flesh of a bitter olive  
but the pleasing aftertaste is coming  
out;<sup>74</sup>

You've only endured a slap with a flour sack  
but you've done a complete about-face.<sup>75</sup>

by Wang Yucheng 王禹偁 (954-1001) and others in Chen Jingyi 陳景沂 (author's preface dated 1256), *Quansfang beizu* 全芳備祖, 2 vols. (Peking: Nongye, 1982), vol. 2, ch. 4, pp. 7b-8b.

<sup>75</sup>A variant of this proverbial expression recurs in *JPMCH*, vol. 4, ch. 72, p. 23a, 11. 5-6; while the first half occurs by itself in vol. 4, ch. 76, p. 5a, 1. 6; and the last half in vol. 2, ch. 26, p. 2b, 1. 2.

If you had only changed your tune a little earlier, I might have asked Brother Lu to forgive you some of the interest. As it is, even if you have to do it in two or three installments, the only thing to do is pay it off. It won't get you anywhere to talk tough and refuse to acknowledge it. After all, you can hardly expect him to simply forget it."

When Jiang Zhushan heard these words, he said, "I can't take any more of this! I'll go to court with him. Who ever saw the colour of his money?"

"Have you been hitting the bottle again this morning?" Zhang Sheng responded.

Without any warning, Lu Hua struck Jiang Zhushan another blow with his fist, knocking him flat on his back, and nearly precipitating him headfirst into an open drain. His hairdo came undone and his cap and headband were covered with filth.

"In broad daylight too!" Jiang Zhushan started screaming at the top of his voice. This attracted the attention of the head of the local mutual security unit, who proceeded without further ado to truss him up with a length of rope.

When Li Ping'er inside the house heard the sound of this altercation and came to peek out through the front door screen, she was just in time to see the local constable leading her husband away in bonds and was so angry she didn't know what to do. She sent old mother Feng out to take down the plaque over the door and the shop sign. The better part of the pharmaceuticals that had been thrown into the street had already been appropriated by passersby. There was nothing to do but close up shop and return inside to sit it out.

It was not long before someone reported these events to Ximen Qing, who immediately dispatched a message to the local constable telling him to hale the suspect before the Judicial Commissioner's Court first thing the following morning. At the same time he sent a personal note about the case to Commissioner Xia Yanling.

The next morning, the prisoner was brought into the courtroom. When Judicial Commissioner Xia had taken his position on the bench, he read the deposition of the arresting officer and summoned Jiang Zhushan before him.

"I see that your formal name is Jiang Wenhui," he said. "Why did you borrow money from Lu Hua and then not only refuse to repay it but abuse him into the bargain? Such conduct is reprehensible."

"I don't even know this person," said Jiang Zhushan, "nor have I ever borrowed money from him. I was in the process of trying to reason with him, but he wouldn't pay any attention and started kicking and beating me. He even despoiled me of my merchandise."

Commissioner Xia then called Lu Hua before him and asked for his side of the story.

"He originally borrowed the money from me to pay for his wife's funeral expenses," said Lu Hua. "Since then, it's been three years that he's postponed paying me back. The other day I heard that he had married into another family and had gone into business for himself in a big way. But when I asked him to settle up, he started to hurl abuse at me, even claiming that I was despoiling his merchandise. I've still got the contract for the original loan. Zhang Sheng here was the guarantor. I hope Your Honour will look carefully into the matter."

As he spoke, Lu Hua reached into his breast pocket, pulled out a contract and handed it up to the bench. When Commissioner Xia opened it, he found that it read as follows:

The contracting party, Jiang Wenhui, a physician of this district, finding himself without sufficient funds to defray the funeral expenses of his deceased wife, has arranged through the good offices of the guarantor Zhang Sheng, to borrow the sum of thirty taels of silver from one Lu Hua at a rate of three per cent interest compounded monthly for his personal use, and undertakes to repay the principal and interest within one year from this date. If he should default, his personal effects to the equivalent value are offered as collateral. This written contract is set down as evidence of the above transaction.

When Commissioner Xia finished perusing this document, he struck the table in high dudgeon and said, "It's outrageous! In the face of the guarantor and the contract, how can he continue to deny his liability? I can see this rascal is given to:

Hairsplitting and logic-chopping. He has the look of a reneger about him." So saying, he called out to his minions, "Take him down

and give him a good flogging with the heavy bamboo!"

Thereupon:

Without permitting any further explanation, three or four lictors turned Jiang Zhushan over on the ground and gave him thirty hard strokes with the heavy bamboo. They beat him so severely that:

The skin was broken, the flesh was split and  
Fresh blood flowed down his legs.

Two runners were then dispatched to escort Jiang Zhushan to his place of residence, and a bench warrant was issued authorizing the requisition of thirty taels of silver with which to make restitution to Lu Hua; failing this, the prisoner was to be remanded to the yamen for further detention.

Jiang Zhushan's legs had been beaten so severely that he was barely able to waddle. When he made his way home weeping and wailing and pleaded with Li Ping'er to give him enough money to pay off Lu Hua, she spat in his face and cursed him, "You shameless cuckold! Whose money do you think you're giving away? You've got a nerve demanding money of me. If I'd known that:

Even if you lost your head you'd leave  
a stump of debts behind,

I'd never have been blind enough to marry you.  
You turtle! You're:

Good enough to look at, but not fit to eat."

When the two runners and the plaintiffs waiting outside heard the woman berating her husband, they kept up their unremitting pressure, calling out, "Jiang Wenhui, if you can't raise the money, there's no point in delaying any further. Let's go back and report to the yamen."

Jiang Zhushan had to come out to placate the runners and then go back inside to continue pleading with his wife. Getting down on his knees, so his torso resembled a post sticking straight out of the ground, he wept and wailed as he said, "Just look upon it as a good deed,

A pilgrimage to the five temples in the  
Western Hills;

Almsgiving or providing vegetarian meals for  
monks.

If you don't give me these thirty taels of silver and I have to go back to court, how will my lacerated buttocks ever take another flogging? It will be the death of me, that's all."

The woman had no alternative but to dole out

thirty taels of 'snowflake' silver to her husband. Jiang Zhushan in due course turned this over to Lu Hua in the presence of the magistrate, who tore up the contract and thus brought the matter to a conclusion.

Lu Hua and Zhang Sheng took the thirty taels of silver they had thus obtained and paid a visit to Ximen Qing to report on the success of their venture. Ximen Qing invited them into the summerhouse and entertained them with wine and food while they regaled him with their exploits. He was absolutely delighted and said, "You two have enabled me to vent my spleen which was all I wanted."

Lu Hua offered to turn over the thirty taels of silver to Ximen Qing, but he refused to accept it, saying, "You two take it and buy yourselves a jug of wine. You can regard it as an expression of my thanks. I may have further favours to ask of you in the future."

The two of them thanked him again and again as they got up to go and then set off with the silver in hand to resume their gambling. Truly:

He was ever prepared to enjoy the pleasures  
of  
'abusing the innocent and good'

As a makeshift substitute for the delights of  
'addiction to clouds and rain'.<sup>76</sup>

To resume our story, when Jiang Zhushan went home after handing over the silver in the judicial commissioner's courtroom, his wife refused to let him stay there.

"Just who do you think you are?" she demanded. "You might as well regard the whole episode as a fit of delirium on my part and those thirty taels of silver as the fee for your treatment. The sooner you move out of here the better. If I let you stay any longer, I'm likely to discover that even the value of this house of mine will not suffice to pay off your debts."

Jiang Zhushan realized that they had come to a parting of the ways and hobbled off on his painfully wounded legs, weeping and wailing, to look for a place to stay. He had to leave behind all the stock that had been purchased with his wife's money. She pressed him to remove the medical

<sup>76</sup>The proximate source of this couplet is probably *Xixiang ji*, bk. 5, sc. 3, p. 192, ll. 7-8. It also recurs in *JPMCH*, vol. 4, ch. 72, p. 13b, l. 8.

supplies, mortar and pestle, pharmacological sieve and other impedimenta that he had brought with him, and the two of them severed their relationship forthwith. At their final parting as he was on his way out the door the woman even sent old mother Feng to dip up a pewter basin full of water and throw it after him, saying:

“At long last my enemy has been removed from my sight.”<sup>77</sup>

From the day that she got rid of Jiang Zhushan, the woman could think of no one but Ximen Qing. She heard moreover that the difficulties he had been in had come to nothing and much regretted what she had done. Every day found her:

Too languid to consume tea or food,  
Too lazy to paint her moth eyebrows;  
Leaning against one doorjamb after another,  
Wearing out her eyes with constant gazing;  
longing in vain for someone to come. Truly:

*His pillow words remain  
But now his love is dead;  
In her room he is not seen,  
In silence her soul melts.*<sup>78</sup>

We will say no more for the moment about how Li Ping'er longed for Ximen Qing, but relate instead how one day Dai'an happened to pass by her house on horseback and noticed that the front door was shut tight, the pharmaceutical shop was no longer open for business, and everything looked

<sup>77</sup> A variant of this expression occurs in *Shuihu quan-zhuan*, vol. 1, ch. 24, p. 363, l. 9. The same variant also occurs elsewhere in *JPMCH*, vol. 1, ch. 1, p. 20a, ll. 8-9; and vol. 5, ch. 88, p. 3a, l. 4.

<sup>78</sup> A variant of the second couplet in this quatrain occurs in *Zhongqing liji* 鍾情麗集, a long literary-language tale attributed to Qiu Jun 邱濬 (1420-1495) included in *Huazhen qiyan* 花陣綺言 (microfiche from the Van Gulik Collection, Sinological Institute, University of Leiden), ch. 6, p. 36b, ll. 2-3. The whole quatrain occurs in An Yushi 安遇時, comp., *Baijia gong'an* 百家公案 (Hangzhou: Yugeng tang 與畊堂, 1594; xerox copy from Hōsa Bunko, Nagoya), ch. 93, p. 11a, ll. 9-10. Patrick Hanan has demonstrated that this chapter belongs to the earliest of the three strata that make up the work and has speculated that it must have a source, perhaps in some lost vernacular story. See his “Judge Pao’s Hundred Cases Reconstructed,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2 (1980), p. 313. A variant version of this quatrain recurs in *JPMCH*, vol. 5, ch. 85, p. 11a, ll. 5-6.

as quiet as could be. When he arrived home he reported this to Ximen Qing, who said, “I imagine the beating he got was more than the stunted little cuckold could take. He’s probably confined to his room while he recuperates. At best it’ll be half a month before he can reopen for business.” He saw no need to take any further action in the matter.

The fifteenth day of the eighth month was Wu Yueniang’s birthday, and a lot of female guests were being entertained in the main reception hall. Because Ximen Qing and Yueniang were no longer on speaking terms, he took himself off to the licensed quarter to pay a visit to Li Guijie’s establishment. Once there he said to Dai’an, “Take the horse home right away and come back to fetch me this evening.”

Later on he sent someone to invite Ying Bojue and Xie Xida to join him for a game of backgammon. Li Guiqing was also at home that day and the two sisters kept their guests company and plied them with wine. After a while they all went into the courtyard together and amused themselves by playing at ‘pitch-pot’.<sup>79</sup>

As the sun was setting in the west, Dai’an came back with the horse to fetch his master. Ximen Qing was in the toilet at the rear of the establishment, engaged in the act of defecation. When he caught sight of Dai’an, he asked, “Is everything all right at home?”

“Everything’s all right at home,” replied Dai’an. “The guests in the main reception hall have already left and everything has been put away. The first lady has asked her eldest brother’s wife and Aunt Yang to come back to her own room and visit with her for a while.

“Mistress Hua from Lion Street sent old mother Feng over today to deliver some birthday presents to the first lady, including four trays of preserved fruit, two trays of sweetmeats in the shape of birthday peaches, birthday noodles, a bolt of material and a pair of shoes she made for her with her own hands. The first lady gave old mother Feng a mace of silver and explained that you

<sup>79</sup> This was an ancient Chinese game in which the contestants attempted to toss arrows into a narrow-necked vessel. It was important enough to have a chapter devoted to it in the *Confucian Book of Rites*. See Legge, *Li Chi: Book of Rites*, vol. 1, pp. 50-51; and vol. 2, pp. 397-401.

weren't at home, but didn't bother to invite her over."

Ximen Qing noticed that Dai'an's face was red and asked him, "Where've you been drinking?"

"Just now," said Dai'an, "Mistress Hua sent old mother Feng to invite me over and offered me some wine. I told her I didn't drink, but she put so much pressure on me I ended up downing two cups after all. That's why my face is red.

"Mistress Hua has now come to regret what she did. She cried like anything when she saw me. When I told you what had happened the other day you hardly believed me. It seems that the very day Jiang Zhushan was released from the Judicial Commissioner's Court she sent him packing. She's really very sorry for what she did and still has her heart sat on marrying you.

"She's a lot thinner than she used to be. She begged me to ask you to go see her no matter what and get you to decide what you're going to do. If you indicate your assent, she wants me to go right back and let her know about it."

"That lousy worthless whore!" said Ximen Qing. "If she's already found a husband for herself, that ought to be that. What does she want to continue pestering me for?"

"Well, if that's the way things stand, I haven't the time to go see her. Tell her to forget about the ritual presentations of tea and betrothal gifts. Let her pick a good day and I'll have the whore carried across my threshold and be done with it."

"I understand," said Dai'an. "She's waiting at her place for me to go back and give her the word. I'll get Ping'an and Huatong to come wait on you here."

"Go ahead," said Ximen Qing. "I understand."

Dai'an went out through the gate of the licensed quarter and straight to Li Ping'er's house, where he told her what had happened. The woman's heart filled with delight.

"Good little brother," she said, "I'm very much indebted to you today for settling this matter with your master for me."

Thereupon Li Ping'er took the trouble to:

Wash her hands and trim her nails,  
before going into the kitchen and personally preparing some dishes in order to regale Dai'an with food and wine.

"I'm shorthanded here," she said. "I hope you can come over tomorrow without fail, and help

Tianfu supervise the movers in carrying my belongings over to your place."

She hired five or six porters with carrying poles and it took them four or five days to get everything moved. Ximen Qing didn't bother to tell Wu Yueniang what was happening but simply had her effects piled on the upper story of the newly erected Flower-viewing Tower.

On the afternoon of the twentieth day of the eighth month Ximen Qing dispatched a large sedan chair, a length of red satin, and four lanterns together with an escort consisting of Dai'an, Ping'an, Huatong and Laixing to have the woman carried across his threshold. Li Ping'er sent old mother Feng to take her two maidservants to their new home ahead of time and waited for her return before getting into the sedan chair and setting off herself. She turned her own house over to the care of old mother Feng and Tianfu.

Ximen Qing did not go out that day but sat in the new summer-house wearing an informal gown and everyday hat awaiting the woman's arrival. When her sedan chair was set down in front of his gate, a long time elapsed before anyone came out to receive her.

Meng Yulou went to the master suite and said to Yueniang, "Sister, you are the mistress of the household. Right now she's already at the gate. If you don't go out to receive her, how can you help but annoy our husband? He's just sitting in the summer-house and the sedan chair has already been at the gate for an age without anyone going out to meet it. Under the circumstances how can she be expected to come in?"

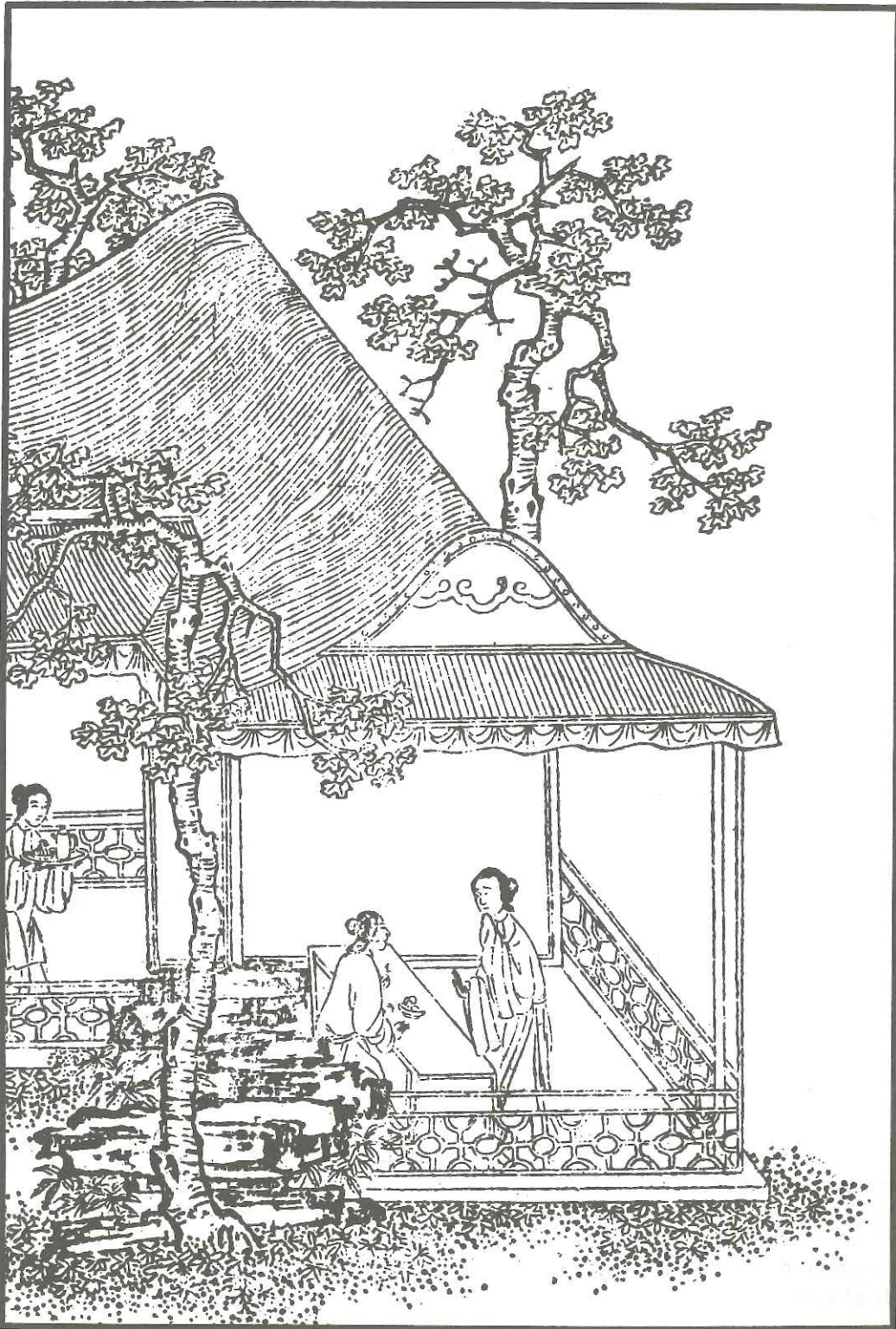
Wu Yueniang was in a quandary. On the one hand she could go out to receive her, but she was still angry about it and didn't want to give in. On the other hand if she refused to go out, she feared Ximen Qing's violent temper. Finally after pondering the matter for a while she:

Lightly moved her lotus feet,  
Gently lifted her beige skirt  
and went out to receive her.

Holding the ceremonial 'precious vase'<sup>80</sup> in

<sup>80</sup>This was a vase filled with different kinds of grain, miniature ingots of gold and silver, or other precious objects, carried by the bride when she entered the bridegroom's home. No doubt it was a symbol of fertility. This custom is still observed in some parts of China. See Lou Zikuang 婁子匡, *Hunsu zhi* 婚俗志 (Taipei: Shangwu, 1968), pp. 74-75.





LI PING'ER appeals to Ximen Qing (from the Ming Chongzheng [1628-1644] edition).

her arms, Li Ping'er was conducted directly to the new dwelling that had been constructed for her. Her two maidservants Yingchun and Xiuchun had already put everything in proper order so she had nothing to do but await Ximen Qing's arrival that evening.

How could she have anticipated that Ximen Qing was still so angry with her that he refused to enter her chamber?

The next day she had to come out and make a formal visit to Wu Yueniang's quarters in the rear compound, where she paid her respects to the other female members of the household and was designated the Sixth Lady. As was customary a large feast was held on the third day to which many female guests and relatives were invited. But her husband had yet to appear in her chamber.

The evening of her arrival he had gone to Pan Jinlian's quarters to spend the night.

"She's your bride, after all," said Jinlian, "and this is her first day in your home. How can you leave her in the lurch at such a time?"

"You don't know her," said Ximen Qing. "That whore has a little too much fire in her eyes for my taste. I'll give her the cold shoulder for a couple of days and then go in to see her in my own good time."

On the third day, after the guests had departed, Ximen Qing still refused to set foot in her chamber, but went instead to Meng Yulou's quarters in the rear compound to sleep. In the middle of the night, when Li Ping'er saw that her husband had avoided coming into her room for the third night in a row, she sent her two maidservants off to sleep, abandoned herself to her tears and, alas, stood upon her bed, threw her foot bindings over the rafter and hanged herself. Truly:

The enamoured branches having failed to  
intertwine  
beneath the mandarin duck curtain;  
Her resentful soul is the first to find its way  
to the realm of the Nine Springs.<sup>81</sup>

The two maidservants, who had dozed off, awoke to find the lamp guttering and were about to trim the wick when they suddenly noticed their mistress suspended above the bed. Frightened into a state of panic, they ran next door and called to

Chunmei, "Our mistress has hanged herself."

Pan Jinlian hurriedly got out of bed and came over to see for herself. She found the woman dressed completely in scarlet hanging stiff and straight over the bed. She and Chunmei promptly cut the foot bindings by which she was suspended and laid her down on her bed. Only after they had administered artificial respiration for some time did she spit up a mouthful of colourless saliva and regain consciousness.

"Run back to the rear compound and ask your master to come here," Jinlian said to Chunmei.

Ximen Qing was in Meng Yulou's room drinking wine, not having yet retired for the night. Before this happened Meng Yulou had been remonstrating with him, "How can you bring her into your household and then refuse to darken her doorstep for three days in a row without arousing her ill feelings? It makes it look as though we give this one thing priority over everything else and insist upon our rights of seniority, begrudging her even one night of your company."

"Let her wait a full three days, then I'll go," said Ximen Qing. "You don't know her. That whore's got a tendency to:

Wolf down the rice in her bowl

While keeping one eye on the pot.<sup>82</sup>

If you think about it she has nothing to reproach me for. From the time her husband died up to now we've been on the closest of terms. What promises didn't she make to me? And then at the last minute she up and married that Dr. Jiang Zhushan. As though I were no match for that scoundrel! So now what's she running after me for?"

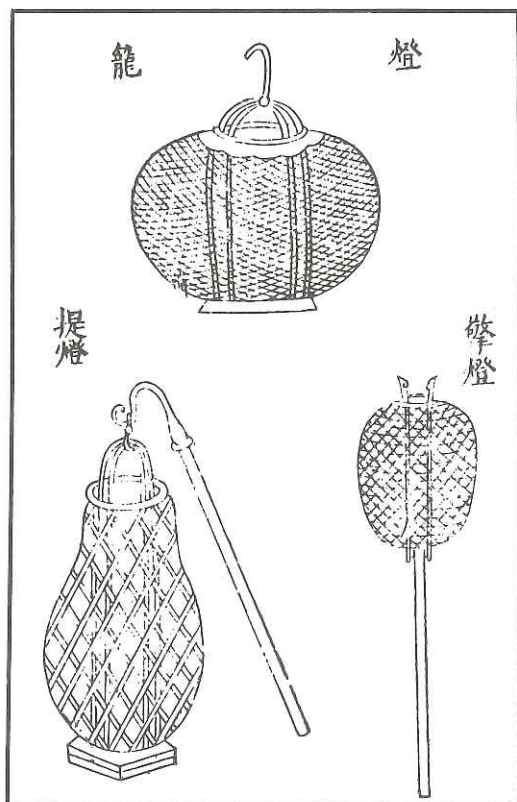
"You have every right to be upset," said Yulou. "But she also was imposed upon."

As they were talking they heard the sound of knocking at the inner gate. Yulou sent Lanxiang to see who it was, and she reported that Chunmei had come to fetch her master because the Sixth Lady had hanged herself in her room.

Meng Yulou lost no time in urging Ximen Qing on his way, "I told you you ought to go look in on her, but you paid no attention. It's not surprising something like this has happened."

<sup>81</sup>The Nine Springs is one of many names for the Chinese underworld, or abode of the dead.

<sup>82</sup>This proverbial expression recurs in *JPMCH*, vol. 4, ch. 72, p. 16b, 1. 11.

LANTERNS (from *Sancai tuhui*).

Thereupon, with lighted lanterns they set out for the front compound to see for themselves. When Wu Yueniang and Li Jiao'er heard what had happened they also got up and went to her room. They found Jinlian supporting Li Ping'er in a sitting position and asked, "Sister Five, have you given her any ginger extract yet?"

The moment I got her down I gave her some," Jinlian replied.

Li Ping'er choked for some time before she was able to cry audibly. Only then did Yueniang and the others feel as though:

The stone on their heads had finally fallen to the ground,  
so they could tuck her back in bed and return to their own rooms to get some rest.

It was not until noon or thereabouts of the next day that Li Ping'er was able to get down some congee and broth. Truly:

Her body was like the moon at the fifth watch

as it is swallowed by the hills;

Her life was like a lamp at the third watch

as it begins to run out of oil.<sup>83</sup>

"Don't you believe that whore," said Ximen Qing to Li Jiao'er and the others, "she's only putting on that suicide act to scare us. I'm not going to let her get away with it. Just wait and see. This evening I'm going to go into her room and get her to stage another hanging for my benefit before I believe her. And if she balks at the idea, I'll give her a good taste of the riding crop. That lousy whore! Who does she take me for, anyway?"

When his womenfolk heard these words, they all broke into a sweat on Li Ping'er's behalf.

That evening, sure enough, they saw Ximen Qing conceal a riding crop in his sleeve and head for her room. Meng Yulou and Pan Jinlian ordered Chunmei to lock the door and not let anyone in, while they took up positions by the postern gate that led into Li Ping'er's courtyard and prepared to eavesdrop on what was happening inside.

To resume our story, when Ximen Qing saw that the woman was lying face down on her bed crying and that she made no move to get up when she saw him come in, he was more than a little annoyed. The first thing he did was to chase her two maidservants into an empty room and tell them to stay there. He then sat down on a chair, pointed his finger at the woman and reviled her, "Whore! If you were really sorry for what you did, what need was there to come to my house and hang yourself. You should have stuck it out with that stunted little cuckold of yours. Who asked you to come here in the first place? I haven't done you any harm, so what are you pissing those tears out of your cunt for? I've never seen anyone hang themselves before. Today you can put on a command performance for my benefit."

Whereupon he pulled out a length of cord and threw it in her face, ordering the woman to hang herself. Li Ping'er remembered that Jiang Zhushan

<sup>83</sup>This formulaic couplet occurs in *Sansui pingyao zhuan*, ch. 3, p. 32a, 1. 7; *Shuihu quanzhuan*, vol. 1, ch. 25, p. 401, 1. 17; the early vernacular story entitled "San xianshen Bao Longtu duanyuan 三現身包龍圖斷冤," ch. 13 in Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, ed., *Jingshi tongyan 警世通言* (Peking: Zuoqia, 1957), p. 175, 1. 4; and two middle period vernacular stories entitled "Xinqiao shi Han Wu mai chungqing" and "Shen Xiaoguan yiniaohai qiming 沈小官一鳥害七命," chs. 3 and 26 in Feng Menglong, *Gujin xiaoshu*, p. 64, 1. 5; and p. 394, 1. 13. All of these are works which are known to have been drawn upon by the author of *JPMCH*.

had told her that Ximen Qing was:

The foreman of the wife-beaters,  
The leader of the lotharios.<sup>84</sup>

"What did I ever do in a previous incarnation to deserve such a fate?" she thought to herself. "Today with my eyes wide open I've plunged right into the fiery pit all over again."

The more upset she became the harder she cried.

This made Ximen Qing even angrier. "Get down off that bed," he ordered. "Take off your clothes and get down on your knees."

The woman was dilatory about taking off her clothes, until Ximen Qing turned her over on the bed, pulled the riding crop out of his sleeve and gave her a few strokes with the whip. Only then did she take off all her clothes and kneel down before him on the bed trembling with fright.

Ximen Qing sat down again and proceeded to subject the woman to a thorough interrogation from beginning to end, "I told you clearly enough to wait a little while because I was tied up with something at home. So why did you ignore my request and rush into a marriage with that scoundrel Dr. Jiang Zhushan? If you'd married anyone else it wouldn't have bothered me. But that stunted little cuckold! What good could he do for you? You brought him across your threshold and then supplied the capital to set him up in business, opening a shop right under my nose, in order to rob me of my livelihood."

"I've already told you," the woman said, "how much I regret what I did, but it's too late to do anything about that now. It was only because you left me and didn't come back that I began to go crazy with longing. The garden of that distaff relative of the imperial family named Qiao that abuts on the rear of my compound is haunted by fox spirits. At the third watch in the middle of the night they constantly:

Assumed names and appropriated identities,<sup>85</sup>

appearing to me in your guise and sapping my vitality, departing only when the day dawned and the cock crowed. If you don't believe me just ask

old Feng or the two maidservants. They'll corroborate my story.

"As time passed my vitality was so sapped that I gradually approached the brink of death and would certainly have perished before long. It was only then that Dr. Jiang Zhushan was engaged to treat me and like a fool I:

Fell right into the paste pot  
and allowed the scoundrel to take advantage of me. He said that you were implicated in some affair and had gone off to the Eastern Capital. It was only for lack of an alternative that I took the road I did.

"How could I have known he was the sort of scoundrel who:

Even if he lost his head would leave  
a stump of debts behind?<sup>86</sup>

Before I knew it his creditors were banging on the gate and he was:

Haled before the judge and exposed in the  
courtroom.

There was nothing I could do but:

Swallow my anger and keep my own  
counsel.

It cost me several taels of silver to do it but I sent him packing without delay."

"I hear you tried to get him to make out a complaint against me," said Ximen Qing, "over all those things of yours I have in storage. If so what are you doing in my house today?"

"Why you! It ought to go without saying," the woman said. "If I ever did any such thing may my body rot completely away!"

"Even if you had," said Ximen Qing, "it wouldn't scare me. They say that:

If you have the means you can change  
husbands at will.

But I'm not about to let you get away with that sort of thing. I might as well tell you the truth. Those two guys who beat up the doctor:

Thus and thus and  
So and so

were acting on my instructions. I had only to:

Put in motion one of my schemes  
in order to fix that scoundrel so he had:

No place to run.

All I would have to do is:

<sup>84</sup>See *JPMCH*, vol. 1, ch. 17, p. 9b, 1. 4.

<sup>85</sup>See *ibid.*, vol. 1, ch. 17, p. 7b, 1. 7.

<sup>86</sup>See *ibid.*, vol. 1, ch. 19, p. 9b, 11. 2-3.

Resort to one of my devices  
in order to put you too in a position to be:  
Haled before the judge.”

“I know it was all a trick of yours,” the woman said, “but take pity on me. If I’m left all by myself in some deserted place it will be the death of me, that’s all.”

As she spoke Ximen Qing’s wrath was gradually assuaged.

“Whore!” he demanded. “Come over here. Let me ask you. How do I stack up next to that scoundrel, Dr. Jiang Zhushan?”

“How can he be compared to you?” the woman said.

“You’re the sky;  
He’s a shard of brick.  
You’re higher than the Thirty-third Heaven;  
He’s lower than the Ninety-ninth Hell.

Quite aside from the fact that you are:

Chivalrous by nature and open-handed with  
your wealth  
Have a voice like plangent bronze and  
tinkling jade

Command a clever and articulate tongue  
Dress in silks and wear brocades and  
Are ever attended by three or five servants,  
thereby showing yourself to be:

A man above other men,  
even the delicacies that constitute your daily fare

are things he would never see, were he to live for hundreds of years. How can he be compared to you? You’re just what the doctor ordered. Ever since I experienced love at your hands, all I do is long for you day and night.”

This last statement had such an effect on Ximen Qing that:

His delight knew no bounds.

Throwing aside the riding crop, he helped the woman to her feet and allowed her to get dressed, after which he took her onto his lap and said, “My child, what you say is true. What does that scoundrel know about anything? To him:

A saucer may look as big as the sky.”

With that he called for Chunmei and told her, “Set the table at once and then go back to the rear compound and fetch us some food and wine as quick as you can.”

Truly:

To the east the sun is shining, to the west  
there are clouds;

Just when you think it will never clear, it  
is already clear.<sup>87</sup>

If you want to know the outcome of these  
events,

Pray consult the story related in the follow-  
ing chapter.

<sup>87</sup>This couplet, which has become proverbial, is from a lyric by Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772-842). See *Quan Tang shi*, vol. 6, ch. 365, p. 4110, l. 12. It depends for its force

on a pun on *qing* 晴, ‘clear weather’, and *qing* 情, ‘emotions’ or ‘feelings’.

## CHAPTER 79

*This excerpt begins during the Lantern Festival, late at night on the thirteenth day of the first month in the year 1118 A.D. Ximen Qing has been overreaching himself socially, economically, and politically for some time. He has also been indulging himself sexually, and as the excerpt begins, he has just concluded an assignation with his mistress Wang Liu'er, the wife of one of his employees who is out of town on a business trip but who is content to play the cuckold as a means of retaining his employer's favour. Ximen Qing has engaged in a strenuous bout of sexual acrobatics, stimulated, despite his waning powers, by the use of a powerful aphrodisiac acquired from a mysterious foreign monk nine months earlier, at the precise mid-point of the novel. Drunk and exhausted, he is about to set off for home. Although his wife and four concubines are aware that he has been carrying on an intermittent affair with Wang Liu'er, they do not know that he was with her on this particular night.*

Wang Liu'er thanked Ximen Qing with a bow and saw him to the door. Her brother Wang Jing was there to hold the lantern for him and his servants Dai'an and Qintong stood by with his horse. Only after his mistress had seen him into the saddle did she return inside and shut the door.

Ximen Qing sat on his horse wearing a purple sheep's wool coat and a scarf wrapped around his neck. It was already the third watch and dark clouds in the sky obscured the moon. Silence had descended over the marketplace, and the only sound in the streets was the rattle and bell of the watchman as he made his rounds.

Ximen Qing gave his horse a touch with the whip and started on his way. Just as he arrived in front of the stone bridge at the western end of the street a dark shadow swirled up from under the bridge and lunged at him. At the sight of the shadow his horse shied and Ximen Qing felt a cold shiver go up his spine.<sup>88</sup> Drunkenly he struck his horse with his whip and it shook its mane. Dai'an and Qintong pulled on the bridle with all their might, but were unable to hold the beast in check. Like a cloud scudding before the wind the horse bolted for home and only slowed to a halt when it reached the front gate. Wang Jing, who had charge of the lantern, was unable to catch up with them.

When Ximen Qing dismounted, he was unsteady on his legs and had to be helped inside by

<sup>88</sup>The site of this apparition is the place where Wu Song had inadvertently killed Li Waichuan in chapter 9, a death for which Ximen Qing, Wu Song's intended victim, was indirectly responsible. See *JPMCH*, vol. 1, ch. 9, pp. 9a-10a.

the servants, whereupon he went straight to Pan Jinlian's quarters in the front garden. Nothing might have happened if he had not gone there, but since he did go, truly, it was a case of:

A homeless waif encountering the General of the Five Ways,<sup>89</sup>

A cold and hungry demon running into Zhong Kui.<sup>90</sup>

Pan Jinlian had returned to her quarters from the rear compound but had not yet gone to sleep. Without bothering to undress she had stretched out on the *kang* to wait for Ximen Qing. When she heard him come in, she jumped up hastily and came forward to take his clothes from him. He was obviously very much the worse for wear and she didn't dare ask him where he had been. He embraced her as best he could with one hand resting on her shoulder and mumbled, "You little whore! Your daddy's drunk tonight. Get the bed ready so I can go to sleep."

The woman helped him onto the *kang* and got him bedded down for the night. No sooner did Ximen Qing's head hit the pillow than he began to snore thunderously and could not be shaken awake. The woman then removed her own clothes,

<sup>89</sup>The General of the Five Ways is one of the remorseless regents of the Chinese Hell. For a vivid description of this deity, see Eugene Eoyang, tr., "The Great Maudgalayana Rescues His Mother from Hell," in Ma and Lau, *Traditional Chinese Stories*, p. 447.

<sup>90</sup>Zhong Kui is a deity renowned for quelling demons. See E.T.C. Werner, *A Dictionary of Chinese Mythology* (New York: Julian Press, 1961), pp. 99-100.

crawled under the covers, and began lazily to grope around his loins for his organ. It was as soft as cotton and as lifeless as could be.

"Wherever has he come from?" she wondered, too restless to sleep. After all, how could she withstand:

The flames of desire that consumed her body;

The lustful visions that disturbed her mind? For some time she devoted herself to manipulating his organ with her hand. Then she crouched down under the covers and toyed with it with her lips. But it refused to rise. Frustrated beyond endurance, she asked Ximen Qing, "Where have you put the monk's medicine?"

She had to shake him for a long time before he woke up. Ximen Qing drowsily protested, "You crazy little whore! What makes you so demanding? You want your daddy to take care of you, but today your daddy's just not up to it. The medicine's in the cylindrical gold pillbox in the sleeve of my jacket. Go ahead and take some. If you can suck the thing till it stands up, more power to you."

The woman groped in the sleeve of his jacket until she found the pillbox. When she opened it she saw that there were only three or four pills left.<sup>91</sup> She picked up a flask of distilled spirits, poured some into a cup, and took one of the pills. There were three pills left. She feared that the normal dosage would not be enough to do the trick and so although:

She never should have done it,

It wasn't right to do,

she put all three pills into his mouth and washed them down with a draught of distilled spirits. Too drunk to know what he was doing, Ximen Qing closed his eyes and swallowed the whole dose.

In less time than it takes to drink a cup of hot tea the medicine began to take effect. The moment the woman tied the white satin fillet around the base of his organ it sprang back to life. Behold:

In the bursting melon-head the sunken eye grows round;

Trailing its side whiskers the body swells itself erect.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>91</sup>The depleted supply of the aphrodisiac remaining in the cylindrical pillbox (an obvious phallic symbol) is emblematic of Ximen Qing's depleted virility.

Although she realized full well that all her partner wanted to do was go back to sleep, the woman sat astride his body,<sup>93</sup> put a glob of aphrodisiac ointment in the mouth of his urethra and plunged the object into her vagina. Thus impaled she gave herself over to wriggling until the tip of his organ penetrated all the way to her cervix. She felt a melting sensation as though her whole body were turning numb; the pleasure was indescribable.<sup>94</sup> Then supporting herself on the pillow with both hands, she raised and lowered her hips, alternately submerging and exposing the knob of his glans one or two hundred times.<sup>95</sup> At first it felt uncomfortably tight, but once her vaginal secretions began to flow it grew more slippery.<sup>96</sup>

Ximen Qing let her disport as she pleased without paying any attention. The woman could control herself no longer. Sticking her tongue into Ximen Qing's mouth, she put her arms around his neck and wriggled for all she was worth, rubbing

<sup>92</sup>This descriptive couplet occurs twice in the earlier part of the novel. See *JPMCH*, vol. 2, ch. 28, p. 1b; and vol. 3, ch. 51, p. 12b.

<sup>93</sup>This detail, along with many others, the most significant of which is the administration of medicine (aphrodisiac/poison) to an incapacitated victim, recalls the scene in chapter 5 in which Pan Jinlian murders her first husband Wu Zhi. There are numerous verbal correspondences. See *JPMCH*, vol. 1, ch. 5, pp. 6a-8b.

<sup>94</sup>The language of these three lines and of many of those that follow echoes that used by the author in the famous erotic description of the scene in the grape arbour in chapter 27 except that significantly Pan Jinlian and Ximen Qing's roles have been reversed. See *JPMCH*, vol. 2, ch. 27, p. 12b. As Patrick Hanan has pointed out, the ultimate source of this language is the scurrilous sixteenth century novelette in the literary language entitled *Ruyi Jun zhuan* 如意君傳 that purports to describe the sexual exploits of the Tang empress Wu Zetian (r. 684-705). See P.D. Hanan, "Sources of the *Chin Ping Mei*," *Asia Major*, n.s. vol. 10, no. 1 (1963), pp. 43-47; and *Ruyi Jun zhuan* (Japanese edition of 1880), p. 11a. The fact that the author of *Jin Ping Mei* drew so heavily from this work in composing his erotic scenes is but one fact among many that suggest that he intended the protagonist of his book to be seen as a surrogate for a sovereign.

<sup>95</sup>See *Ruyi Jun zhuan*, p. 18a.

<sup>96</sup>See *Ruyi Jun zhuan*, p. 9b.

up against him this way and that. His jade chowrie handle was totally submerged inside her, all the way up to the root, leaving only his testicles outside. Meanwhile she stimulated herself with her hand until she began to feel inexpressible delight. She wiped away her vaginal secretions but they continued to flow. By the time the third watch was over she had used up five napkins for this purpose<sup>97</sup> and had two orgasms in rapid succession.

But Ximen Qing did not ejaculate. His turtle head had swollen larger than ever and turned the colour of purple liver.<sup>98</sup> Its blood vessels were visibly distended and it was as hot as fire to the touch. It was gorged with constricted blood, and though he told the woman to remove the fillet that was tied around its base, it continued to swell without ceasing. He told her to suck it, and so she crouched over his body and swallowed his turtle head with her ruby lips. Back and forth she worried it with her mouth for as much time as it would take to eat a meal, until the semen in his urethra suddenly spurted out en masse like mercury pouring into a bucket. She tried to catch it in her mouth and swallow it but she wasn't quick enough.

The emission went on and on. At first it was semen but it soon changed to blood. There was no stopping it. Ximen Qing had fainted and his four limbs lay inert.<sup>99</sup> In a state of panic the

woman put a red date in his mouth and he swallowed it.<sup>100</sup> When the flow of semen ceased it was followed by blood; when the flow of blood stopped nothing came out but a discharge of cold air. It was some time before this came to an end.

The woman was beside herself. Embracing Ximen Qing she asked, "Darling, what do you feel like inside?"

When Ximen Qing finally came to he said, "My head feels so dizzy I don't know what I'm doing."<sup>101</sup>

"Why did you have such a big discharge today?" she asked, but said nothing of the overdose of aphrodisiac she had given him.

Gentle reader take note:

The vitality of the individual is finite

But occasions for lust are infinite.

It has also been said that:

Where desires and cravings are deep

The Heavenly impulse is shallow.<sup>102</sup>

Ximen Qing sought only his own sexual gratification but did not realize that:

When its oil is used up the lamp goes out;

When his vitality is exhausted a man will die.

It so happens that the allure of feminine beauty ensnares men in such a way that:

Where there is initial success

There will be ultimate disaster.<sup>103</sup>

A poet of yore has left us some words of admonition that put this very well:

<sup>97</sup> See *Ruyi Jun zhuan*, p. 18a.

<sup>98</sup> At this point in the narrative the reader will be reminded of Ximen Qing's appearance on his way home from the assignation with his mistress Wang Liu'er at the beginning of this episode. Swaying drunkenly on his runaway horse, dressed in purple, with a scarf wrapped around his neck, he has already become the personification of a bloated penis with a constricting satin fillet tied around its base. In fact, in the course of ingesting the foreign monk's medicine, he has gradually come to replicate the appearance of that emblematic figure from whom he acquired the aphrodisiac in chapter 49, whose complexion is there described in identical words as being "the colour of purple liver." (See *JPMCH*, vol. 3, ch. 49, p. 13a.) Thus the double entendre of the funeral eulogy in chapter 80 which makes the resemblance explicit (See *JPMCH*, vol. 4, ch. 80, p. 11b.) will come as an anticlimax to the perceptive reader.

<sup>99</sup> See *JPMCH*, vol. 2, ch. 27, p. 12b; and *Ruyi Jun zhuan*, p. 9b.

<sup>100</sup> The act of putting a restorative red date into the mouth of the fainting Ximen Qing is obviously intended to parallel the act of putting a glob of aphrodisiac ointment into the mouth of his urethra on the preceding page.

<sup>101</sup> These are the very words uttered by Pan Jinlian at the climax of the episode in the grape arbour in chapter 27. See *JPMCH*, vol. 2, ch. 27, p. 12b; and *Ruyi Jun zhuan*, p. 13b.

<sup>102</sup> This is a quotation from *Zhuangzi*. See *Zhuangzi yinde* 莊子引得 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 15, ch. 6, 1. 7; and A. C. Graham, trans., *Chuang-tzu* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981), p. 84.

<sup>103</sup> This formula echoes and fulfills its earlier use as a predictive device in chapter 6. See *JPMCH*, vol. 1, ch. 6, p. 4a. For its proximate source see *Shuihu quanzhuan*, vol. 1, ch. 26, p. 407.



*A flower-faced guardian god,  
A jade-fleshed demon king,  
She is a ravenous beast attired in silk and  
satin.  
Her bed curtains enclose an execution  
ground,  
Her ivory couch is a deathhouse.  
Her willow-leaf brows are blades,  
Her starry eyes are swords,  
Her ruby lips are spears.  
Her sweet mouth and fragrant tongue  
Mask the entrails of a serpent or scorpion;  
No one who yields to her escapes disaster.  
They are but fine dust in liquid,  
Snowflakes in scalding water.  
The states of Qin and Chu were mighty,  
The states of Wu and Yue were strong,  
But they perished on her account.  
Some may know that beauty is a deadly  
sword  
That slays us all, but few defend them-  
selves.<sup>104</sup>*

There is a poem that testifies to this:

*Only sixteen with a body as smooth as  
cream,  
Her loins a sword to slay the unwary.  
Though no one may see your head fall  
from your neck,  
Before you know it, the marrow of your  
bones is sapped.<sup>105</sup>*

Of the events of that evening no more will be said.

Early the next morning Ximen Qing got up and started to comb his hair when suddenly he was overcome by a spell of dizziness which caused him to pitch forward in his chair. Fortunately Pan Jinlian's maid Chunmei caught him in her arms and prevented him from falling to the floor and hurting his head or face. She sat him back in his chair and it was some time before he recovered.

<sup>104</sup>The proximate source of this poem is the early Ming vernacular story entitled "Zhang Yuhu su nüzhen guan" 張于湖宿女貞觀. See Hu Shiying, *Huaben xiaoshuo gailun*, vol. 2, p. 529. The last couplet of this poem appears to be derived from a quatrain that is variously attributed to the late ninth century figures Du Guangting 杜光庭 and Zheng Ao 鄭遨. See *Quan Tang shi*, vol. 12, ch. 854, p. 9666; and vol. 12, ch. 855, p. 9672.

Jinlian was alarmed and blurted out, "You must be famished. Why don't you just sit where you are and have something to eat before going anywhere?"

She told her other maid Qiuju, "Go back to the kitchen and fetch some gruel for your master to eat!"

Qiuju went to the kitchen in the rear compound, asked Sun Xue'e, "Is the gruel ready yet?" and told her what had happened. "This morning when the master got up he felt so giddy that he nearly collapsed. He wants some gruel to eat right away."

Wu Yueniang, overheard what Qiuju said and called her into the master bedroom to find out what had happened. Qiuju then told her how Ximen Qing had felt so light-headed that morning that he nearly fell over while he was combing his hair. Nothing might have happened if Yueniang had not heard about this, but once she heard about it:

*Her ethereal souls flew beyond the sky,  
Her material souls dispersed among the nine  
heavens.*

After telling Sun Xue'e to prepare the gruel right away she made off in the direction of Jinlian's quarters to see for herself what condition her husband was in.

She found Ximen Qing sitting in a chair and asked him, "What brought about this attack of giddiness today?"

"I don't know what's the matter with me," Ximen Qing replied. "A little while ago I just started feeling woozy."

"It's lucky Chunmei and I were here to catch him" said Jinlian. "Otherwise, light-headed as he was, he might have had a nasty fall."

Yueniang said, "You must have stayed out late last night and had more to drink than was good for you. It's still affecting your head."

"Whose place were you drinking at anyway," Jinlian demanded, "that you didn't get back until

<sup>105</sup>This quatrain is traditionally attributed to Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓 (9th century), the legendary Taoist adept who has been apotheosized as one of the Eight Immortals. See *Quan Tang shi*, vol. 12, ch. 858, p. 9702. Probable proximate sources would include *Shuihu quanzhuan*, vol. 2, ch. 44, p. 723; and the middle period vernacular story "Xinqiao shi Han Wu mai chungqing," in Feng Menglong, *Gujin xiaoshuo*, vol. 1, ch. 3, p. 73.

such an hour?"

Yueniang said, "He went to the shop on Lion Street yesterday to have a drink with my second brother."

A few minutes later Sun Xue'e finished cooking the gruel and told Qiuju to take it to her master. Ximen Qing picked up the bowl but lost interest before he had eaten half of it and set the bowl down on the table.

"What do you feel like inside?" Yueniang asked.

"I don't feel anything in particular," Ximen Qing said, "just empty and queasy and not much like doing anything."

"You really shouldn't go to the yamen today," Yueniang said.

"I'm not going to," Ximen Qing replied. "In a while I'll go out to the front compound and get Chen Jingji to write out the invitations and send them off. I'm inviting Zhou Xia, Jing Zhong, He Yongshou, and some other officials to come over for a drink on the fifteenth."

"You haven't taken your medicine yet today," said Yueniang. "I'll get you some milk, and you can drink that along with it. You've been over-doing things for days on end now and you've let yourself get run down."

She had Chunmei ask the wet-nurse Ruyi to squeeze a little of her milk into a cup for him, and watched Ximen Qing take his medicine before he got up and went to the front compound.

Chunmei helped him along, but before he had gotten as far as the garden gate he started to black out. Unable to stand on his tottering legs, he would have fallen down if Chunmei had not been

there to help him back inside.

"If I were you," Yueniang said, "I'd take it easy for a couple of days and forget about inviting all those people. Who cares about things like that at a time like this? Stay at home and rest for a few days. Forget about going out. And if there's anything you'd specially like to eat," she added, "I'll go back to the kitchen and get the maids to prepare it for you."

"I don't feel like eating anything," Ximen Qing replied.

When they returned to the rear compound Yueniang questioned Jinlian again.

"As if he wasn't already drunk when he came home last night; are you sure you didn't give him anything more to drink? And what sort of shenanigans was he up to with you anyway?"

When Jinlian heard this she only wished she had the extra mouths needed to issue a thousand simultaneous denials.

"Sister," she protested, "It was just like you said. By the time he got home he was so drunk he didn't even bother to greet me. On top of which he demanded that I bring him distilled spirits so he could continue drinking. I gave him tea instead, telling him I didn't have any spirits, and then put him right to bed. Ever since you spoke to me about it the other day, who would have dared to have anything to do with him in that way? How mortifying to suggest such a thing! It may well be that he had been up to something outside. Of course I wouldn't know about that. But I can assure you absolutely nothing of the kind occurred once he got home!"

*Seven days after the events described above, despite the frantic efforts that are made to alleviate his condition, Ximen Qing dies. Deprived of its head, the household begins to disintegrate even before Ximen Qing's body is cold. The remainder of the novel describes the form this disintegration takes as his fair-weather friends and the members of his household disperse to meet the fates which their actions in the earlier part of the novel have ordained for them. By the time the story reaches its conclusion nine years later in 1127, both Ximen Qing's household and the Northern Song dynasty survive in such attenuated forms that they may be said to have come, contemporaneously and by parallel routes, to the same irrevocable end. Unimpeded by the demands of self-cultivation or ritual restraint, both the historical emperor Huizong and his fictional surrogate Ximen Qing have squandered their patrimonies, or in the figurative language of the novel, "shot their wads".*