

Chapter 1*

Ximen Qing **Hotly Swears** Brotherhood with Nine Friends Wu the Second **Coolly Encounters** His Brother by Blood and Sister-in-law

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The first stanza: *The first stanza shows the illusory nature of wealth.*

After glory vanishes, visitors have ceased coming;
Flute and harp fall silent, singing stops.
The majestic sword has lost its power, its lustre fading away;
The precious lute is broken, its golden stars sinking into
obscurity.

The second stanza: *The second stanza shows the illusory nature of sex.*

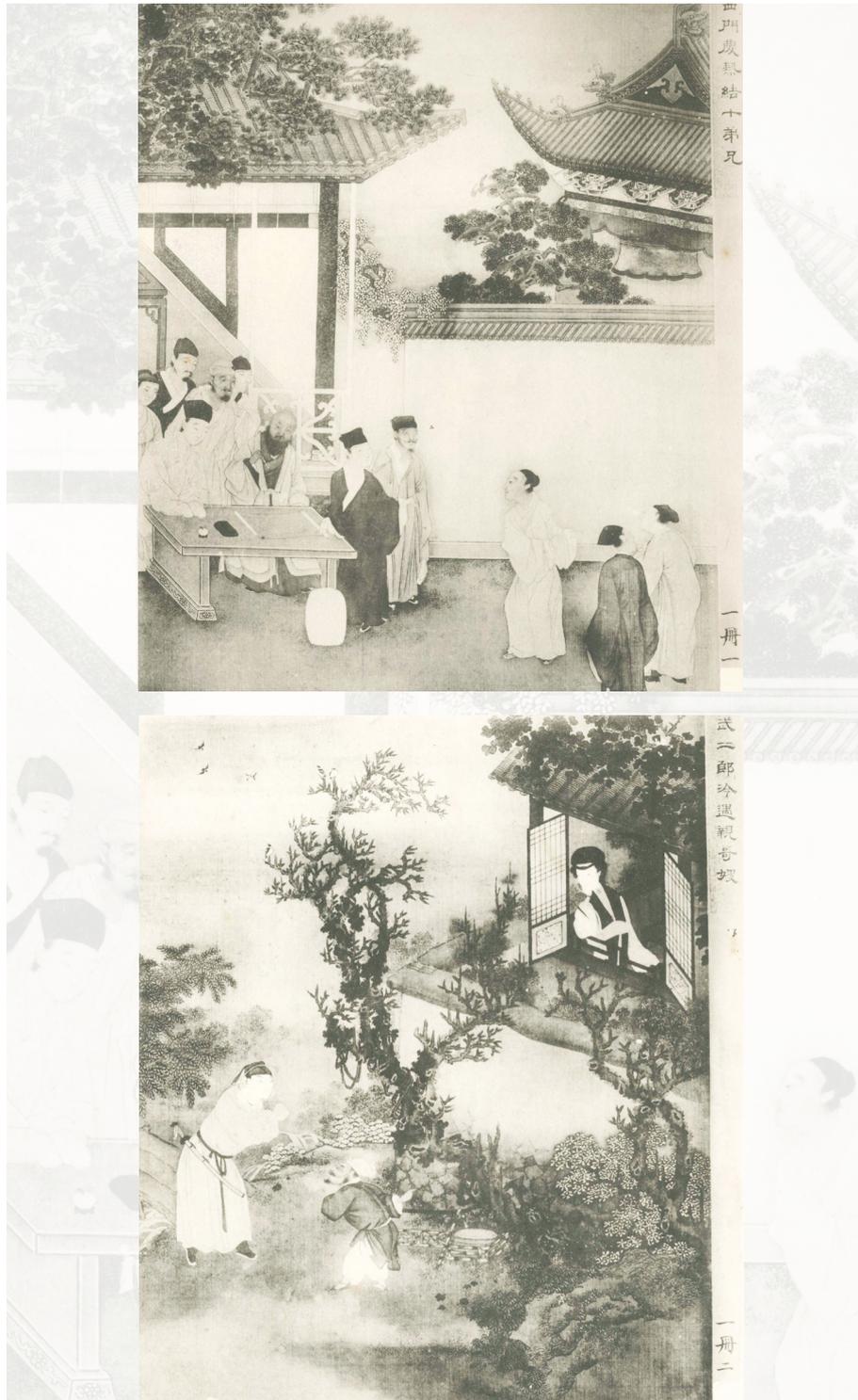
The jade staircase is lonely, soaked in autumn dews;
The moon shines where singing and dancing used to be.
The ones who sang and danced are today no more,
Turned into ashes in the Western Mausoleum.

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A proverbial verse on sex:

A beautiful maiden of sixteen, her body soft and white,
A sword between her thighs brings destruction to fools.
Although no one sees the heads roll, the work is done in secret,
As men's bones are sucked dry, their marrow drained.

* Translator's note: In translating chapter 1, I have referenced Clement Egerton's translation of the novel, *The Golden Lotus*, 4 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1939), which was based on the *xiuxiang* recension of the novel (see Rolston's 'Introduction'). For a detailed description of the differences of chapter 1 in this edition and the other major recension of this novel (known as the *chua* edition), see Tian Xiaofei, *Qiushuitang lun 'Jin Ping Mei'* 秋水堂論金瓶梅 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2003; rev. ed., 2005), and 'A Preliminary Comparison of the Two Recensions of *Jinpingmei*', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 62/2 (December 2002), pp. 347–388.



The quatrain above was written by a man who lived during the great Tang dynasty. This man was a great hero who perfected his body and cultivated his nature, transcended the mortal world and obtained sagehood. He was eventually given a seat in the Purple Palace in Heaven,⁵ and his name was entered in the register of the gods. Leading the divine beings of the Eight Caverns, he devoted himself to saving the suffering people of the Four Continents.⁶ This was none other than the immortal Lü Yan, whose religious name is known as Master of Pure Yang.⁷ It seems, however, that the people of this world in their hustle and bustle can never struggle free of the bondage of Seven Emotions and Six Desires, **nor escape from the circle of alcohol and sex, wealth and passion.** But death will come for every one of them, and when the end is here, what does any of those things matter anymore? *The above passage gives a summary statement of the four terms. It uses Lü the Pure Yang to open the novel, which is marvellous. Thereafter there will be Wu the Immortal, Huang the Perfected Being, and Abbot Pan.*

Of the four evils—alcohol and sex, wealth and passion—**wealth and sex are the two most powerful.** How is it so? Suppose a man is impoverished and has fallen into the utmost desolation and frustration: in the evening he feels inside the empty rice jar and knows there is no food for the next day; in the morning he looks into the kitchen hearth and finds it dark and cold; his wife and children are hungry and cold, he himself is starving and shivering. At a time like this, when even a bowl of gruel is hard to come by, how could he spare any money for wine? Worse than this, **his relatives and friends give him**

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⁵ According to the Daoist concept of the celestial realm, the Palace of Purple Tenuity is located in the Heaven of Jade Clarity.

⁶ This refers to the Buddhist view of the cosmos with Mt. Sumeru at the centre, and the rest of the world divided into four main continents: Pürvideha, Jambudvipa, Aparagodāniya, and Uttara-Kuru.

⁷ This is Lü Dongbin, a legendary figure of the late Tang or early Song period who, in popular imagination, is considered patriarch of the Quanzhen sect of Taoism.

nothing but dirty looks, and his face is covered in humiliation and shame; in such a situation a man's most noble ambitions would fritter away, and he is certainly in no position to get into passionate rivalry with others. *The above passage brings up wealth negatively. Truly: This 'Truly' is cold.*

As soon as one's mount dies and gold used up,
Kith and kin turn into strangers. *This is a proverb about wealth.*

When a man comes into possession of money, he may spend it like water to purchase the pleasures of romance. The wine he drinks will be like jade elixir, not to mention being poured from precious amber cups. Should he enter into a spirited rivalry with anyone, his wealth will buy him the path to the gods. With a mere nod he can order people about, and people will press forward and flock to him to curry favour. They will even lick his sores and suck the pus out with their tongues. *The above passage describes wealth positively. It is indeed as they say, 'When a man has power, followers come in throngs; when a man loses power, they leave him without a backward glance.' From past to present, no situation is harder to bear than this change from hot to cold. Aren't these people victims of the plague of wealth? The author divides the text here into four branches: one branch is on sex; one branch is on wealth; one branch is on wealth in the eyes of the enlightened man; one branch is on sex in the eyes of the enlightened man. In each of the first two branches, he inserts descriptions of alcohol and of passion, for his true focus is on wealth and sex, but he weaves in alcohol and passion. Thus his method of branching is lively and not rigid.*

Then there is the plague of sex. Look at today's world: how many men are like **Liu Xia Hui**, who was not tempted even with a maiden in his arms? Or like **the man of Lu**, who closed his doors on a woman coming to him? Or like **Guan Yunchang**, who, with a lighted candle, kept chaste watch over his sisters-in-law till dawn? *These three men who were not intimidated by sexual temptation are positive models.*

It is one thing to have several wives and concubines at home

or visit the entertainment quarters to purchase the delights of love; it is quite another, however, to be struck by a pretty face and devise all kinds of ways to enter into an illicit relationship. For the sake of momentary pleasure, he forgets all about the ties of kinship or of friendship. At the beginning of the affair, who knows how much wealth he squanders on her and how much food and drink he wastes on her. **Truly:** *This 'Truly' is hot.*

Three cups of tea⁸ bring the lovers together;
The matchmaker of sex is two glasses of wine. *This is a proverb
about alcohol.*

Later on, when the lovers become inseparable and the affair comes to light, there will be wrath and fury, fighting and killing. Blood will be spilled, wives and children exposed to danger, and one's career completely ruined. Even such a man as **Shi Jilun**, with his immense wealth, lost his life in prison for Green Pearl; **the Hegemon King of Chu**, whose strength could uproot mountains, had his head cut off at Gaixia for the sake of Lady Yu. *These two men who could not rise above sexual temptation are negative examples. It is indeed as they say, 'The gate of my birth is the gate of my death; one knows better, but still gets carried away.'* Aren't these people victims of the plague of sex? *Two 'Aren't these people ...' form a remarkable structural parallel with each other.*

It is easy to talk thus of sex and wealth, but few are enlightened about the truth. If a man is enlightened, *This is a 'single' sentence that contains no parallel structures and begins a separate discourse.* he will see piles of gold and jade as no more than heaps of rubble that cannot follow us beyond the grave; he will see numerous strings of cash and enormous stores of grain as dust and dung to our dead bodies. An enlightened man will know well that lofty halls and spacious mansions, roofs of jade and towers of alabaster cannot be erected and enjoyed in one's tomb; and that brocade gowns and embroidered jackets, fox fur coats and

⁸ Emending *hua* 花 to *cha* 茶.

sable wraps are like worthless rags to one's bleached bones. *Wealth in the eyes of the enlightened man is the wealth after chapter 79.* **Just as** those beautiful, seductive girls who are good at presenting their charms and adorning their appearances are, for the enlightened man, but generals who display their valour and shout out orders on the battlefield; those red lips, gleaming teeth, and furtive glances behind raised sleeves are but the ugly expressions of the demons and yakshas in the underworld; the delicate silken stockings and small golden-lotus feet are but spades and shovels for digging a man's grave; the tender dalliance on the pillow and loving embraces under the coverlet are but how one feels in the cauldron filled with boiling oil in the five halls of the Kings of Hell. *Sex in the eyes of the enlightened man is the sex after chapter 79.* The Diamond Sutra has a nice saying for these illusions of human life, which goes, 'Like a dream, mirage, bubbles, and shadow; like lightning, and again like dew.' *This is the main idea of the whole novel, the great outcome, and the great emancipation. Therefore there is Pujing.*⁹ It shows us that, while a man cannot live without sex and wealth, when his life comes to an end, he has no use for either. *This is another 'single' sentence that contains no parallel structures. It parallels the earlier sentence about 'enlightened man'.* **You may** have god-like strength and can lift up a cauldron or rock a boat, **when the final moment comes, inevitably,** your bones will turn soft, and your sinews go limp. *This is just a foil.* **You may** own a Copper Mountain or a Gold Valley and live in luxury, but **just as you are enjoying your life in high style,** your wealth will dissipate like melting ice and snow in the sun. *This is a dharma lecture delivered for Ximen Qing.* Your beauty **may** well eclipse the moon and bring the flowers to shame, but **once** you close your eyes forever, people will pass by your corpse covering up their noses. *This is a dharma lecture delivered for Golden Lotus and her like.* Your eloquence **may** well

⁹ In the last chapter of the novel, the Chan master Pujing converts Ximen Qing's posthumous son Xiaoge into the Buddhist order.

be like a Lu Jia or a Sui He, but **once** your lips turn cold and your tongue becomes stiff, there is nothing one can do about it. *This is a dharma lecture delivered for Bojue and his like.* Thus, it will be best to terminate the six roots of sensations, put on a monk's cassock, see through the world of sensuous surfaces, and free ourselves from the mechanism of life and death. Thus only may we, instead of being trapped by the rights and wrongs of the mortal world, attain to the highest truth, live a leisurely and comfortable life, and escape the cycle of reincarnation in the fiery pit that is human life. *This is making a case for Pujing.* **Truly:** *This 'Truly' is neither cold nor hot.*

As long as there are three inches of breath, it is used in a thousand ways;
Once a man breathes his last, ten thousand concerns are over. *This is a proverb about passion.*



You may ask, ‘Story-teller, why do you give such a discourse on alcohol, sex, wealth, and passion?’ This, my gentle reader, is all because once upon a time there was just such a household that had enjoyed a great deal of splendour and luxury but ended in desolation and misery. Neither worldly wisdom nor ingenuous strategizing could save it; neither relatives nor friends could be depended upon. For a few brief years the master of the household lived in glory; then he died, his life becoming the subject of stories. In that household there were also quite a few women, who had vied for favour and competed for power, engaged in affairs and flaunted their charms. They had been so lovely and so fair; but in the end they could not escape the fate of lying dead in the lamp shadow, their blood staining red the deserted boudoir. *This passage is a miniature version of the Golden Vase. It is what is called the ‘general principle’.* **Truly:** *This ‘Truly’ means that Heaven does not allow people to remain cold or hot without change.*

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Good will be repaid with good; evil with evil.

The vast net of Heaven has large meshes, but lets nothing through. *The text so far is the general principle of this big book, and these four lines are the general principle of the general principle. Indeed the Golden Vase establishes its discourse by embodying the Way of Heaven.*

During the Zhenghe era of Emperor Huizong of the mighty Song dynasty, *Bear this in mind.* in Qinghe county of Dongping, *Bear this in mind.* which was a prefecture in Shandong, there was a young man of a romantic nature. A tall, good-looking fellow, *First root cause of his disease.* he was unrestrained and dashing by temperament, *Second root cause of his disease.* and the master of a fine estate. *Third root cause of his disease.* He was about twenty-six years old. His surname was Ximen, and his given name was Qing. His father **Ximen Da** was a merchant who had travelled in Sichuan and Guangdong dealing in medicines, and opened a large raw medicine shop in Qinghe. Ximen Qing lived in **a house that had a frontage of five rooms upon the street, and seven wings going**

further back. *Bear this in mind.* He had a host of servants and maids, and numerous mules and horses. **Although not one of the richest,** *This leaves room for his later acquisition of several large sums of money, his son's birth, and his appointment as an official.* **his was an affluent county household.** *This anticipates by contrast the excessive extravagance later.*

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Ximen Da and his wife doted on their only child, and allowed him to do as he pleased. *This is the root cause of his negligence of his studies.* **Therefore Ximen Qing paid little attention to his studies,** *This again places special emphasis on the root cause of his sins.* and idled about all day long. His parents died early; after their deaths, he spent all his time in the pleasure quarters. He became quite learned in such martial arts as boxing and quarterstaff fencing, and was also good at gambling. As for backgammon, chess, card games, and riddles, there was nothing he did not know. *All this is the capital for his enterprise, so the author gives a clear account in advance.*

His friends and acquaintances were all scoundrels, **hangers-on, and freeloaders.** His best friend was **Ying Bojue**, whose courtesy name was **Guanghou.** *This is how Ying Bojue is presented. He is the so-called freeloader.* Ying Bojue was the second son of the senior Mr Ying who ran a silk shop. After losing his father's capital, he sank so low that he spent all his time waiting about the Town Hall, ready to go with anyone to a whore house, or to get a meal from anyone who would pay for it. People nicknamed him 'Beggar Ying'. He was an expert at soccer, backgammon, and chess. The second best friend was **Xie Xida**, courtesy name **Zichun,** *This is how Xie Xida is presented. He is the so-called hanger-on.* whose grandfather had been a Battalion Commander at Qinghe. Xie Xida could have inherited this post from his forebears, but since he had been leading a good-for-nothing life after he lost his parents at a tender age, he was dispossessed of the position. He was good at being a sponger, and played the lute exceptionally well. **Ximen Qing had a particular affinity with these two men.** *The author summarizes the two, and moves on to the other eight friends. The writing is interesting in its variation.*

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There were a few others, who were all disreputable rascals. One was called Zhu **Shinian**, whose courtesy name was **Gongcheng**. **One** was known as Sun **Tianhua**, whose courtesy name was **Boxiu**, nicknamed Gabber Sun. **One** was **Wu Dian'en**, who had been the Yin-Yang Master of the County. After being dismissed from his position for some offense, he acted as witness for the officials in their money lending transactions and **so got to know Ximen Qing well**. *Here the author effortlessly brings in Ximen Qing's money-lending business.* There was also Colonel Yun's brother, **Yun Lishou**, whose courtesy name was **Feiqu**. **One** was **Chang Zhijie**, whose courtesy name was **Jianchu**; **one** was **Bu Zhidao**; and the final **one** was **Bai Laiguang**, whose courtesy name was **Guangtang**. When some people criticized Bai Laiguang for having a bad moniker, he would go into a long explanation: 'I would have changed it, but the name was actually given to me by a schoolteacher. He said that my family name "Bai" means "white", and that there is some story about **a white fish leaping into King Wu's boat**; there is also a related quote in the *Book of Documents* that **contains the characters "lai", "guang", and "tang"**. This was how he came up with my first name and my courtesy name, and **so I shall retain them as they are.**' *Look at how the author introduces the ten brothers. Though brief, the writing is varied. Whether their relationship with Ximen Qing is intimate or distant, the way in which each of them carries himself and turns out are all revealed without a word. This is truly the craftsmanship of a god. Only the ancient historian Sima Qian is comparable.*

Thus there were about ten of them in all. When they discovered that Ximen Qing was **not only well-to-do but also quite ready to spend his money most generously**, they followed him about, encouraging him in drinking, gambling, and whoring. Truly,

**Wine-cups in hand, they are thick as thieves;
They regard one another as dear brothers.
One morning storm clouds gather out of the blue;
Then, and only then, will their hearts be shown.** *This summarizes Ximen's friendships.*