

柳存仁：嬰孃

Ying Niang

By Liu Ts'un-yan

Translated by Susan Macdougall

NOTE: *This one-act play is set in olden times, but there is no need to specify any particular period. The dramatis personae include the part of a ghost who can come on stage, or merely appear in the reactions of the other characters on stage. Readers should understand that the play does not advocate superstition. We do not claim any kinship to Shakespeare but would like to point out in all sincerity that this play has been influenced by a poem of Wang Yu-yang (王漁洋) which is found in his Ts'an-wei chi (蠶尾集), and partially by P'u Sung-ling's (蒲松齡) Wang Liu-lang (王六郎), a short story from the Liao-chai chih-i (聊齋誌異).*

Period: See Note above; the characters must be in costume.

Time: Some time during the night, until it is close to dawn.

Place: Tzu-ch'uan in Shantung, or anywhere.

Characters:

YING NIANG A married woman, about 25 years old
HSU CHIH-KANG Her husband, 38, a fisherman
YIN PI Their daughter, the younger the better
HSING LANG One of the bailiffs from the household of Squire Ting, male, 40
LI TA-LI Male, 35, Hsu Chih-kang's friend, (and partner)
LI'S WIFE Age 25
CHUANG CHENG Male, 50, their neighbour; an impecunious scholar
GHOST Male, about 50
NEIGHBOUR A Male, 25
NEIGHBOUR B Male, 40

At rise:

A cold harsh autumn wind is blowing accompanied by thunder and rain. In the woods.

A woman, carrying a modest bundle on her back and holding an umbrella against the rain, circles the stage several times. Sounds of wind and rain. Her steps become gradually more hurried and eventually she disappears in the dimming light.

*When the lights go up again:
A simple scene in the inner room of a fisherman's hut (scenery is not essential).
The stage is silent and empty.*

Fisherman Hsu Chih-kang and his daughter Yin Pi enter from backstage, carrying a table on which is an incense burner and a set of candlesticks. Their manner is extremely respectful and solemn.

HSU (reverently sets the incense table in a suitable position): Yin Pi, hurry inside and bring the dishes of offerings. Though the wind is so cold and dreary, I'd like to keep my promise to the gods.

GIRL: (Exit with a sound of assent.)

*HSU: Let's light the incense and candles.
(The stage becomes brighter. Voices off stage.)*

HSING LANG (*enters from the far left*): Ah, I've walked twenty miles or more tonight, and in such poor weather too. What tough luck! "*I am a royal messenger and dare not tarry long.*" Sure enough, our Squire Ting is lording it like an emperor here in Tzu-ch'uan. Aha, here I am. This is Hsu Chih-kang's place, isn't it? Eh, is anyone at home?

HSU: (*In the middle of setting chopsticks and wine cups on the table.*)

HSING LANG: Is anyone at home? That's strange! Anyone home? Better be damn quick and hurry out for me!

HSU: Who's that? Who's causing such a commotion in the middle of the night? (*Suddenly*) So it's Brother Hsing Lang; I'm sorry. . . .

HSING LANG: Well, Hsu Chih-kang, here you are at last. Yes, it's me, it's your Uncle Hsing Lang paying his respects, asking after you, asking for the fishing tax.

HSU (*agitated*): Brother Hsing Lang . . . I mean Uncle, I'm so sorry, I didn't welcome you properly. You've taken the trouble to come in person in the middle of the night. Please come in and sit down. . . .

HSING LANG (*holding a folded bill*): Our Squire Ting told me to come and ask you if you have the money for three months' fishing tax.

HSU: Fishing tax—

HSING LANG: Have you got it or not?

HSU: Uncle Hsing Lang, you know how it is. It hasn't rained until today. The water-level is low and there are a lot of people fishing. My daughter and I fish all day to make a living, and that's not easy. It's much the same for all the fishermen in Tzu-ch'uan. Please, Uncle Hsing Lang, put in a good word or two for me with Squire Ting.

HSING LANG: Huh, you're all in it together and you speak a load of rubbish. Everyone knows that you, Hsu Chih-kang, have money. The other day I went to our neighbouring district of Chao-yuan to do some business for Squire Ting, and I met an old man on the way who'd heard that I came from Tzu-ch'uan. He caught hold of me and asked if I knew a fisherman named Hsu in Tzu-ch'uan, the one who had a daughter at home. He asked what sort of man this Hsu's was and whether he was reliable. I thought, who else could he be asking but you? Just think: a small

fisherman like you, you don't have many friends and acquaintances, and yet people from the next district have heard of you. So you must have money; why pretend to be poor?

HSU (*curious and pensive*): He asked about me? Someone in the next district asked about me? Uncle, you're not joking with me? How very odd.

HSING LANG (*angry*): Joking with you? Who's got time to joke? Very well, I've come to ask for money. Tell me, have you got it or not?

HSU (*beseeking*): Uncle. . . .

HSING LANG: Don't call me Uncle this or Brother that, I ask you, will you pay up today or not? (*Girl enters from the back room bringing a tray of food which she puts on the altar, complete with fish and meat.*)

GIRL: Papa, the food is here.

HSING LANG: Aha, the chicken and meat smell good. Oh, and there's a huge fish to be offered. And you still say the weather is dry and the water is low, while in fact you're hiding in the house having a good time! All right, hand over the fishing tax.

HSU (*looking angrily at the girl, who starts and backs up. He has no choice but to take out a silver piece from his pocket*): Uncle, tonight I'm making an offering to the gods. It's to fulfil a pledge I formerly made. I am not withholding any money I might have from you. All right, I've saved this piece of silver for more than four months. It was intended for mending my boat. Take it. It's my bad luck, but you needn't go home empty-handed.

HSING LANG: One piece of silver. (*Cuttingly*) This opens my eyes. All right, I'll be going. "*I am a royal messenger and dare not tarry long.*" As they say, "*The general does not dismount and each goes his separate way.*" (*Suddenly pinches Yin Pi's face.*) The little girl has a pretty face. (*She shrinks back.*) What are you afraid of? I won't eat you! (*Exit.*)

HSU (*addressing Yin Pi angrily*): Yin Pi! Come here! (*A sudden clap of thunder.*)

GIRL (*trembling, knows she has made a mistake*): Father, father, (*Kneels*) don't be angry, don't strike this motherless daughter!

HSU (*stops in the act of striking and sighs*): Ah, Yin Pi, you'll worry your father to death. You could have brought the offerings out earlier or

Ying Niang was first performed in Hong Kong in 1953, and won a first prize in the Hong Kong Schools Music and Speech Festival sponsored by the Education Department of the Hong Kong Government. It was published in 1959 in a volume entitled *Four Costume-Plays and Essays on Production* by Liu Ts'un-yan. Now Dean of the Faculty of Asian Studies and Head of the Department of Chinese at the Australian National University in Canberra, Prof. Liu writes drama and fiction in his spare time. In 1968, he published his long novel 青春 (Youth), a tale of traditional Chinese family life spanning a period of thirty years from the end of the Ch'ing dynasty to around 1925 in the Republican era.

- you could have brought them out later, but you had to do it just when that devil of a debt-collector was here. And he forced your father to give up the one piece of silver he worked so hard to save from mending our fishing boat.
- GIRL: Father, didn't you say it's important to worship the gods? If I hadn't brought the dishes out they'd soon be cold. You said since the weather was bad and the water low, our food and clothing would depend entirely on this god who's looking after us.
- HSU: All right, Yin Pi. I'll tell you, you needn't be afraid. He is not a god but a ghost.
- GIRL: Ghost?
- HSU: Don't worry, my child. We must go and kowtow. Let me tell you, in this world sometimes devils are less terrible than men.
- (He sprinkles the wine; father and daughter worship together on their knees. Hsu prays to heaven.)
- Ghost, drowned in the river, come and drink the wine! Wang Liu-lang, I beseech you, I beseech you! (GIRL looks frightened and surprised.)
- (The stage gradually becomes five degrees darker. Voices are heard offstage. LI TA-LI, carrying a fishing basket, and CHUANG CHENG, carrying a lute, stumble in. There is a gust of wind.)
- TA-LI (long sigh): How ridiculous! (Puts down his fishing basket.) On a sunny day there are so few fish, but when it rains there are still so few fish.
- HSU: Mr. Chuang, Ta-li, how nice of you to come in the middle of the night. Please sit down. Ta-li, why are you in a temper again? How's your missus?
- TA-LI (angry): If you mention that no-good woman again—
- HSU: What?
- CHUANG: Ta-li! (To Hsu) His wretched temper is coming out again. Just now at home Mrs. Li made a terrible scene, shouting and carrying on. You know he'd hit her. I was the one who pulled them apart. I wanted to come to your place to play my lute for a while. I love the freshness of the scenery here. I told him to come along too, but at first he was a little reluctant. We poor folks, when we come to the end of the road, why be hard on ourselves?
- TA-LI: I hit her? What if I did? She even threatened to kill herself. Huh, might as well die. Living, there are no easy days for the likes of us.
- HSU (vaguely following the drift of the conversation): Ta-li, don't be silly. (Calling the girl.) Bring out the wine and food. Will the two guests please sit at the head of the table. We'll talk over a few drinks.
- TA-LI: Wine?
- CHUANG: Marvellous! Now that we're here, we might as well enjoy your hospitality. "If there is wine today, let us be drunk today. Tomorrow's sorrow will take care of itself."
- (Helps himself. Yin Pi goes off after pouring wine for the others.)
- HSU: Ta-li, have a drink! (All drain their cups.)
- TA-LI: Drinking won't cheer me any. (In a melancholy mood.)
- HSU: Why are you in such a bad temper today? Let me tell you, ever since Ying Niang died I haven't had a day's happiness. (Sobs) Why did I quarrel with her that year—gave her no choice . . . no choice but to jump in the river. . . .

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"What is the name of the tune Liu-lang is playing?"—Scene from a production of "Ying Niang", Hong Kong, 1953.

CHUANG: Ah, she's been dead for nearly three years and we've never even found her body.

HSU: Why did I hit her? It's true that "*In poverty man and wife are unhappy about many things.*"

CHUANG (*helps himself to another cupful*): I'll tell you: today that Hsing Lang from Squire Ting's household came again to demand money from Ta-li.

HSU: Oh!

CHUANG: Recently the water-level's gone down and the fish are scarce. Even those who are lucky catch only a few netfuls of fish, just enough to feed themselves. Where'll we find the money for the fishing taxes? It happened that when Hsing Lang came Brother Ta-li was out to try his luck with his fishing basket on the other side of the river. Ta-li's wife was scared to death by his threats, afraid that he would drag Ta-li to gaol, so she lied and told him that there'd definitely be money for him in three day's time. Only then did Hsing Lang go off in anger. When Ta-li came home and heard about it, there was the devil to pay! That's how they began to quarrel. (*GIRL enters silently and sits on a seat at the side.*)

TA-LI: That's all very well. But where do you think I can find the money in three days? Isn't it another dead-end road? Ah, our days here are so hard, and the district governor has cordoned off the supply of fish on both sides of the river for Squire Ting. And he collects such heavy taxes, too. How do you expect we poor folks to go on living? Just to think of it makes you

want to end it all.

HSU: That odious man Hsing Lang (*Glances over at the girl, who is chagrined*) came here just now. We tried everything before he would leave. I even gave him the money meant for repairing my boat.

TA-LI: You had money? And you gave it to him?

CHUANG: It's odd! I always thought it was odd. Everyone is so short of money, but today you could still manage chicken, meat and fish. You even have wine to give us this treat.

HSU (*after consideration finally decides to conceal nothing*): I won't deceive you two gentlemen. I, Hsu Chih-kang, have had such good luck and it's all thanks to a man—no, not a man, and it isn't a god either—he is a ghost. (*Mournful music gradually induces a melancholy trance. Slight sound of wind.*)

CHUANG/TA-LI: Ghost? A ghost?

HSU: Yes, my benefactor Wang Liu-lang is just such a lonely spirit with none to turn to.

CHUANG: "*If you are not able to serve man, how can you serve the spirits?*" That is the teaching handed down to us by the sage Confucius. When man dies, his spirit is extinguished. That is an undisputed principle. You don't mean that such things as ghosts really exist?

HSU: I didn't believe it at first either. But three months ago I saw him with my own eyes. You know I'm partial to a few cups of wine. Sometimes in the evening I take a little wine down beside the river and drink while I'm fishing. When I drink I like first to sprinkle some wine

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"Sir, why are you wearing such majestic, shining clothes? We can see our benefactor now."

on the ground and pray to the river: "Ghost, drowned in the river, come and drink!" I always do it like that. When the other fishermen don't catch any fish, my basket is always full. Well, that evening I was alone by the river drinking, when suddenly a man of fifty or more came along. He kept walking up and down beside me. I asked him to have a drink, which he didn't refuse, and we sat down together and drank. But that evening I hadn't caught a single fish and couldn't help feeling a bit put out. He suddenly stood up and said, "I'll go and drive some fish over for you from the other end of the river." So saying, he went off alone. In a while he came back and said, "A great shoal of fish is coming." Sure enough, the river rippled with fish coming one after the other through the water. As soon as I'd cast my net, I caught several big ones, all more than a foot long. I was really delighted. As he was about to go, I gave him some fish. He refused, saying "I've drunk your wine many a time. You needn't thank me for such a small matter. If you don't object, I'll come every day to drink and help you fish."

TA-LI (*Listens, fascinated.*)

CHUANG: So he was the ghost? What is a ghost like?

HSU (*taking no notice*): I thought it strange at the time. He had drunk my wine just this once, how could he say "many a time"? When we parted, I asked him his name. He replied, "My name is Wang. Just call me Wang Liu-lang when you see me."

CHUANG/TA-LI: So he really was Wang Liu-lang! HSU: I was stupid and didn't suspect what he was doing. Several days after that happened, Wang Liu-lang said to me one day, "Hsu, old friend, since we first met you've treated me like a brother. Unfortunately soon we must part." He sounded very sad. I asked where he was going and several times he started to say something but the words stopped on the tip of his tongue. Finally he explained: "I am, in fact, a ghost. I was fond of drinking during my life-time; I got drunk and drowned here; that was a good many years ago. The reason why you used to catch more fish than your companions was that I secretly helped you, in reward for your kindness in offering wine to me on the river bank. Tomorrow retribution for my sins will have been completed. A substitute will come to die for me so that I can go and be reborn into another existence. I'm afraid tonight will be the last time we meet. How could I help being sad?" He was an educated man, too. (*To CHUANG CHENG.*) You were disappointed in the public examination hall and you sought consolation in the arts. Liu-lang said he could recite poetry and play the lute, too. At first the thought that he and I were living in different worlds made me a little afraid. Later I realised that we already had friendly feelings toward each other, and I no longer felt there was anything to fear. Anyway, he was dressed exactly like an elderly man.

CHUANG: Well, did he go away to be reborn?

TA-LI: Was he reborn?

HSU: It's a strange thing. Eventually, it really was a surprise, but he wasn't reborn.

CHUANG/TA-LI: Eh?

HSU: The next day I went down to the other side of the river to see how Liu-lang's words worked out. Sure enough, at the appointed time a woman came along carrying a baby. She went up to the bank and jumped into the water, leaving the child on the bank. It cried and waved its arms and legs about, looking most distressed. Who'd have expected that after going under several times the woman floated up again. Suddenly, her clothes dripping with water, she struggled onto the bank, gasped for a while, then took up the baby in her arms and left. To tell the truth, while she was going under I was very worried and wanted to rush in and save her. Then I remembered she was a substitute for Wang Liu-lang so I didn't, in the end. What a surprise when she climbed onto the bank and didn't drown. I thought it was very strange. Could it be that Wang Liu-lang's words had failed?

TA-LI: How strange!

HSU: That evening I returned to my old spot to fish and Liu-lang came again. He said, "That woman was already fated to die for me, but I reflected that she had a young baby. How could I send off their two lives for my one? So I let her go. Now I don't know when another will come along to be my substitute ghost. Perhaps we are not fated to part just yet."

TA-LI: Chih-kang, this ghost—no, I mean Wang Liu-lang—there aren't many like him. I wonder if he's still willing to help people . . . if he will save me from my troubles?

HSU: Willing? I should think he's always willing. The chicken, meat and wine I brought this evening are to fulfill a vow to Liu-lang.

TA-LI: Eh? What, Liu-lang might come again?

CHUANG: "The master did not speak of extraordinary things and spiritual beings." I think this Liu-lang is probably some sort of supernatural being, but not necessarily a ghost. How could ghosts take on human form?

HSU (helplessly): But the Liu-lang I saw was exactly like a man.

TA-LI (in a startled and admiring voice): Ah!

CHUANG (not quite convinced; taking up his old lute): The rain has slackened off a little. I

thought I'd play a tune against the background of your beautiful scenery; now you've ruined my romantic mood with your ghost story. (He moves his seat a little and begins to play. However, the lute is out of tune.) Ah, why am I so confused today? Could it be . . .

'I talk and listen in carefree manner. The rain falls fine as silk on the bean trellis and cucumber frame. When I find it tiresome to talk with men, I love to hear the ghosts chanting verse among the autumn tombs.'

(At this moment the lights grow five degrees dimmer. Faint noises of wind and rain are heard. An echo of the poem just recited by CHUANG CHENG seems to reverberate everywhere. Indistinct and almost inaudible, its tone is similar to that of CHUANG's chanting.)

(The lights are blurred. Suddenly, as CHUANG CHENG's hand touches the lute, but before he has plucked it, a loud strain is heard from the lute. The music has a fine, ancient quality, such as was rarely heard. CHUANG jumps in fright, LI TA-LI cowers on the floor; CHUANG bursts out in a cold sweat.)

HSU: Liu-lang's come.

CHUANG/TA-LI: Where is he?

HSU (indicating to CHUANG and LI to resume their former positions and ordering YIN PI): You go and bring another pair of clean chopsticks and another wine-cup.

(Exit YIN PI. HSU respectfully offers Liu-lang the seat of honour, then speaks to the other two.)

HSU: Liu-lang is already seated here. (The other two are frightened.) Don't be alarmed. He says he's afraid he might frighten you, and so today he's invisible.

(YIN PI sets out the cup and chopsticks. HSU signals to her to withdraw. She looks at the empty seat and leaves.)

CHUANG (courageously attempting conversation): The notes Liu-lang played just now sounded very refined and ancient. May I ask, what is the name of the tune?

HSU: Hm . . . hm . . . yes, Liu-lang says it's called 'Liu Tuan.' He says nowadays there aren't many

people who can play it. He's heard that Mr. Chuang likes music, and he played the tune to invite his comments. Ah... ah... yes, he thought of playing another piece but was afraid Mr. Chuang would take him for some sort of 'supernatural being', so he decided not to be so bold.

CHUANG (*words tumbling out*): I beg your pardon! I beg your pardon!

HSU (*raises his cup to the other three*): Please drink... ah, Liu-lang tells me that Brother Ta-li doesn't look quite right; he's afraid there might be a bit of trouble.

TA-LI: Absolutely right! I beg Liu-lang to give as much help as he can!

HSU: Liu-lang says that your difficulties are not insurmountable.

TA-LI: I owe fishing tax and have nothing to pay with. When the three days are up that man Hsing Lang from Squire Ting's household will surely bring men to handcuff me and take me to court. Be kind, I beg you, and save me.

CHUANG: I too beg Liu-lang to do him a good turn!

GHOST: Not that I don't want to help him, but in fact I have unavoidable worries of my own.

HSU: Liu-lang, what worries do you still have?

TA-LI (*kneels down*): Liu-lang, save me and my whole family!

CHUANG (*in a sincere and reverent tone*): I beseech you, too. Ta-li's family are all good folk. If you save him, they will always pray for your long life, position and wealth.

GHOST: Chih-kang, you don't know what's on my mind. They have even less idea.

HSU: What is it?

GHOST: I've come especially to say goodbye.

HSU: What? You've come to say goodbye? (*Clap of thunder.*)

GHOST: Yes. Last time I forfeited my substitute, but tonight another substitute will come.

HSU: Tonight another person will come to die for you? Who? What sort of person?

GHOST: I don't know. But I think this time I will definitely be able to go.

CHUANG/TA-LI: Liu-lang is going again to be re-born?

GHOST: You tell them; I did want to help Ta-li, but I'm afraid it is too late.

HSU: He's going. He said he wanted very much to

help Ta-li, but he's afraid it's too late.

CHUANG: Ta-li, even though Liu-lang is a ghost, he's willing to help people. We are all people and what's more, we've been neighbours for many years. How come we aren't willing to help each other? It's enough to make the ghost laugh.

HSU: Don't worry. Liu-lang is a kind-hearted ghost. If he said he couldn't help you, it must be either because it's too late or because he hasn't got the power. We must all think of some way.

CHUANG: My old lute has been handed down in my family for three generations. I'll give it to Ta-li; at least he can get a few silver pieces for it to help meet his needs.

TA-LI: That won't do! My dear Sir, selling your beloved instrument!

HSU: Anyway, even if you wanted to sell it, you wouldn't find a buyer in Tzu-ch'uan.

CHUANG: Ta-li, that doesn't matter. Wu-chen in nearby Chao-yuan district is a large place crowded with people. You can go and try there.

TA-LI: I can't go. But I do appreciate the kind regard you have always shown me.

CHUANG (*in the weak, distressed tone of a scholar*): What shall we do, what shall we do?

HSU: I've got it.

CHUANG/TA-LI: What?

HSU (*feeling in his pocket*): I've remembered I've still got a bit of money....

TA-LI (*in joyful surprise*): Chih-kang, I'm so grateful....

HSU (*with a disappointed sigh*): I forgot, I've just given that piece of silver to that shameless Hsing Lang to get rid of him.

CHUANG/TA-LI (*crestfallen*): Oh!

(*At this point the lights gradually rise five degrees. The wind blows mournfully. In the distance a dog's bark, and voices can be heard faintly shouting. NEIGHBOURS A and B enter, B holding a paper lantern.*)

A & B: Ta-li, we couldn't find you anywhere, and here you are at Chih-kang's.

TA-LI (*startled*): What's up?

A: Your missus went out all by herself, late in the night, and the baby was howling.

TA-LI (*has a premonition of bad news*): Where did she go? It's pouring with rain and it's so late and pitch-black.

B (*thoughtlessly*): What if she was not careful....

TA-LI (*loudly*): No need to say it. (*Pulls up CHUANG CHENG who hurriedly grabs his lute in his arms. TA-LI forgets to take his fishing basket.*) Quick, we must go find her! Leave the rest till tomorrow. Goodbye, Chih-kang!

(*TA-LI, CHUANG CHENG and the two neighbours hurry off. Sounds of wind and rain. All along the river voices can be heard calling and the beating of gongs.*)

HSU (*can no longer see Liu-lang*): Sir, (*Bows in all directions*) Sir, where have you gone? (*to himself*) He's disappeared. (*Calling GIRL*) Yin Pi, come quickly. (*YIN PI enters.*)

YIN PI: Father!

HSU: Yin Pi, our benefactor Wang Liu-lang has gone. You help me bring over the candles and incense. Let me burn a stick and worship him again.

(*Father and daughter put the incense table in order. HSU CHIH-KANG offers the incense, kneels in prayer, and YIN PI kneels further off.*)

HSU: Our benefactor, Liu-lang up above, last time we did not succeed in parting, because your fate was not yet fulfilled. Today retribution for your sins has been fully paid and you're going once more to be reborn. You must not grieve. I know that heaven will pity you and will give you a good place to go. I pray that you will have a good journey. (*Suddenly.*) Ah . . . Sir (*Quickly bows down in worship.*) Sir, why have you come back? Didn't you go to the riverside? You did? —Ah, Yin Pi, our benefactor tells you to go inside and boil a pot of water, do you hear? (*YIN PI goes off, giving a sound of assent.*) Sir, I don't understand about the boiling water.

GHOST: Hurry, hurry!

HSU: Yes, yes. Yin Pi, there was some hot water in there. Is it boiling now? You must hurry! (*There is a hubbub of voices in the distance, then a return to silence.*) Sir, what's it all about?

GHOST: Ta-li's wife jumped in the river. (*Distant sound of wind. The voices get closer and closer.*)

HSU: Ta-li's wife jumped in the river?

GHOST: I saw how pitiful Ta-li's family was. Who knows that it should fall into my hands again? I didn't make her die as my substitute, and now they've saved her and brought her to your place.

HSU: You felt she was pitiful and didn't make her die for you? Now she's coming here?

(*The voices are closer. Enter NEIGHBOURS A and B. B is holding a lantern. TA-LI also enters carrying his wife and CHUANG CHENG follows them.*)

TA-LI: She . . . she really did jump in the river to drown herself. She still hasn't come round.

HSU: She truly had a saving star. Just now our benefactor Wang Liu-lang came and told me to boil some water quickly. She will be saved. He said this time he wouldn't take her to be his substitute.

TA-LI: Liu-lang, you really are my family's benefactor.

(*YIN PI enters.*)

GIRL: Father, the water is boiling. What's this all about?

TA-LI (*awakening from a dream*): She is saved. Come and give her the water to drink. Will you all please give me a hand? (*TA-LI carrying his wife, NEIGHBOURS A and B and CHUANG CHENG all withdraw to the back room.*)

(*A roll of thunder and the mournful blowing of the wind.*)

HSU: Yin Pi, three years ago, the day mother jumped in the river, the circumstances were much the same as these tonight. Unfortunately, (*Sobbing*) then we didn't have a benefactor like this. We didn't even find her mortal remains. Yin Pi, I have wronged your mother; ah, why did I have to quarrel with her. . . .

GIRL: Daddy! (*She weeps.*)

(*TA-LI comes bounding in from the back room. He is excited and deeply moved.*)

TA-LI: Chih-kang, it's all right, it's all right, she's come round. In spite of her sufferings she didn't die. Thank Heaven for it!

HSU: She's come round. Make her have a good rest. You should thank our benefactor Wang Liu-lang.

TA-LI: Thank you, my benefactor. If it hadn't been for him, my family would have been broken up tonight.

HSU: True. (*Grieved*) Oh, dear, my family has been broken up for three years. (*YIN PI starts to cry.*)

TA-LI: Now at last I understand; in life one must struggle. 'Heaven never leaves people without a way out.' If we can't make a living here we can always move somewhere else and create a world of our own. Beating your wife is such cowardly action!

HSU: Our benefactor tells you to rest assured. He says you're already saved.

TA-LI: Our benefactor? Where is he?

HSU: Isn't he there behind you? (TA-LI *hurriedly turns round and bows.*) He says he wants to give you one final piece of assistance.

TA-LI (*curious*): What assistance?

HSU: Open your fishing basket and see.

(TA-LI *picks up his basket which is very heavy; when he opens it fresh fish are seen tumbling inside. The lights gradually become five degrees brighter than before. Ethereal music gradually becomes audible. Noise of wind.*)

GHOST (*opens his mouth; his voice can be heard by HSU CHIH-KANG, TA-LI and YIN PI*): But this is really the last time I help you.

HSU/TA-LI: Sir! Why are you wearing such majestic, shining clothes? I can see our benefactor now.

GHOST: Ta-li, go inside; your wife is crying. (TA-LI *gives a start and hurries off.*) Chih-kang, you ask why I'm wearing these clothes? I'll tell you; I've become a god.

HSU: A god? Liu-lang, I mean sir, how did you become a god?

GHOST: The Emperor of Heaven saw that, although twice it was my turn to be reborn, I wouldn't harm other people; for just this bit of kind-heartedness I'm now being sent to take up a post as earth-god in Wu-chen, in the neighbouring district of Chao-yuan. I have to set out now!

HSU (*kneels in worship*): Benefactor, now that you're off to be earth-god, won't we have to part forever? (GIRL *also kneels.*)

GHOST: Don't be sad. I know what's on your mind. Your wife Ying Niang has been missing for

three years. You thought she had drowned herself by jumping in the river. But in fact she was rescued there and then: she was picked up by a boat and became the adopted daughter of an

old couple. Recently they moved to Chao-yuan district, and every day Ying Niang asks people to inquire after your whereabouts. . . .

HSU: Really? Really? Ying Niang is—

GHOST: Just now she's coming back alone all through the night, braving wind and rain. I'm an earth-god now, and the carriage is coming to take me to my post. With my eyes I can see her and follow her footsteps.

HSU (*hurrying to the back, followed by the girl*): Come, everyone, our benefactor says Ying Niang is not dead! She's come back!

(TA-LI, CHUANG CHENG and NEIGHBOURS A and B *rush to get out.*)

HSU (*turns*): Sir, where are you?

GHOST (*his voice comes from above the clouds*): Look, Ying Niang's come back, hasn't she?

(CHUANG CHENG *hurriedly sits down and picks out a tune of ethereal music on his lute.*

(HSU *gazes into the distance; he still hasn't seen her. Suddenly YIN PI shouts "Mother!" From the distance a woman with a bundle on her back and an umbrella in her hand rushes on to the front of the stage. Together everyone shouts "Ying Niang!" The girl rushes up to YING NIANG.*

(*Chords of ethereal music are heard above the clouds, accompanying WANG LIU-LANG and the carriage as they gradually rise and disappear.*)