

蒲松齡：醒世姻緣傳

Marriage as Retribution

By P'u Sung-ling

Translated by Chi-chen Wang

Illustrated by Jasper Deane

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

HSING-SHIH YIN-YUAN, or *Marriage as Retribution*, actually consists of two independent parts tied together tenuously through the theme of reincarnation. In the first part, Chao Yuan kills a fox fairy while out hunting and is immediately haunted by her spirit. He takes Chen-ko as a concubine, neglects his wife Chi-shih, falsely accuses her of adultery and causes her to commit suicide, whereupon her father Chi Tu wreaks vengeance upon Chao Yuan by beating him up and wrecking his house before bringing suit against him and Chen-ko. Chao Yuan is eventually murdered by an injured husband whom he has cuckolded. He is survived by his saintly mother, who lives to be 103 and is comforted in her old age by a filial "son" (posthumously borne by her husband's concubine). This child is the reincarnation of Liang Sheng, an actor whom Madame Chao has befriended and protected against the persecutions of her husband and son. In the second part, the reincarnation of Chao Yuan becomes the henpecked husband of a terrible termagant, the reincarnation of the fox, who gets even with him by inflicting on him all kinds of abuse and torture and by making life miserable for all concerned. The events of the novel are supposed to have occurred in the Ming Dynasty, roughly during the period 1440-1500. By making Chao Yuan's mother live to be 103, the author has in effect created a device for tying the two parts of the novel together.

The first twenty-two chapters of the novel are devoted entirely to the fortunes of the Chao family up to the time of Chao Yuan's death and its immediate consequences. After that the story of the Ti family, into which Chao Yuan is reborn, is taken up in great detail through sixty-five chapters, interspersed with thirteen chapters dealing with the good deeds of Chao Yuan's mother and the checkered but eventually happy life of his half brother. From this it is clear that the story of the Ti family forms the main body of the novel. It is for this reason that Hu Shih and Hsu Chih-mo both characterized the novel as a book about henpecked husbands. From this point of view the first part serves only as a sort of prologue to the main story; somewhat like the *ju-hua* 入話 of the type of popular tale known as *p'ing-hua* 平話 found in the *San Yen* 三言 collections. However, the first part is in many respects superior to the second. Though the story of the Chao family covers only thirty-five out of a hundred chapters, it has more interesting incidents and more elaborate plots

than the second part, which is episodic in nature and is padded with numerous digressions bearing no direct relation to the main story, interesting though they are. As examples of ingenious subplots we might consider the fate of Chao Yuan and Chen-ko and the attempt to deprive Chao Yuan's mother and his half brother Chao Liang of their rightful property.

THE TRIAL of Chao Yuan and Chen-ko is reported in great detail in more than half a dozen chapters and gives us a better idea of how the judicial process worked in traditional China than can be found in the semiofficial compilations of actual court cases. The accounts of some of the sessions read like stenographic reports. At the first trial, the magistrate, having accepted a large bribe from Chao Yuan, exonerated him and Chen-ko and imposed fines on the plaintiff and defendants alike. Chao Yuan had no difficulty in paying the fine but Chi Tu, Chi-shih's father, was unable to raise the money and was harassed by the yamen runners at the instigation of Chao Yuan. Then a circuit intendant appeared on the scene, accepted Chi Tu's appeal and ordered the case reopened. At the trial on the prefectural level, Chi Tu was able to produce evidence showing that the magistrate had accepted Chao Yuan's bribe (written evidence which one of the yamen runners had accidentally dropped while harassing Chi Tu). As a result Chen-ko was found guilty of causing the death of Chi-shih and was sentenced to die by strangulation. The sentence was duly reviewed three times by three different presiding magistrates at three different locations and was in each case upheld. Chen-ko was remanded to the Wuch'eng jail to await the execution of the sentence. But because of Chao Yuan's bribes, Chen-ko was able to live in style in prison. She became the warden's mistress and after a while was smuggled out of the prison while another female prisoner was allowed to perish in the fire which the warden had caused. She lived in his house as his concubine until she was finally exposed quite by accident, arrested and executed.

After Chao Yuan's death, his widowed mother was left without male heir and the unscrupulous members of the Chao clan laid siege to her house and tried to dispossess her. She was saved by the new magistrate who happened to pass by. After the fact was established that the concubine of her late husband was with child, the magistrate ordered that he should be notified when her time neared, so that he could appoint an official midwife to attend her and establish the sex of the new-born. In time she gave birth to Chao Yuan's half brother Chao Liang, thus silencing the villainous members of the Chao clan bent on dispossessing Madame Chao.

Then, fifteen or sixteen years later, a worthless rogue by the name of Wei San conceived the idea of blackmailing Madame Chao by claiming that Chao Liang was his son whom he had sold to her so that she could substitute him for the female child that the concubine had actually given birth to. He had sold his son, he claimed, because he was desperately poor; he was now in better circumstances and ready to redeem his son. Madame Chao was quite willing to buy Wei San off but was advised against it since it would cast doubt on Chao Liang's legitimacy and make Madame Chao subject to further harassment

by the unscrupulous members of the Chao clan. Thereupon Wei San petitioned the district magistrate for the recovery of his alleged son. For some unexplained reason, the then sitting magistrate chose to believe Wei San and ordered that Chao Liang should eventually resume the name of Wei and become a member of the Wei clan after the death of Madame Chao, his legal mother.

At this juncture the original magistrate who had had the foresight to have a midwife attest to the legitimacy of Chao Liang at the time of his birth and who had just been appointed commissioner of education of the province happened to pass through the area and tried to intercede for Chao Liang. But the magistrate stubbornly held his ground and ignored the commissioner's request for a new inquiry. The case thus reached an impasse, for though the commissioner of education outranked the magistrate by several steps, he was apparently powerless to set aside the former's verdict because it was outside his jurisdiction. But because Chao Liang had recently passed the examination for the *hsiu-ts'ai* degree, and had thus become his protégé, he decided to conduct an inquiry of his own. The hearing was inconclusive until a voluntary witness came forward and testified that Wei San was serving a sentence in a penal colony from 1450 to 1453, that he never got married until 1455 and that it was therefore impossible for him to have had a son born unto him in the year 1451, in the twelfth month, on the sixteenth day at the hour of the rooster, as he claimed.

FROM THE PRECEDING OUTLINE it can be seen that *Marriage as Retribution* offers the reader a much better constructed plot and more dramatic incidents than either *Hung Lou Meng* or *Chin P'ing Mei*. The author seems to have worked out beforehand a chronology and followed it with a great degree of consistency, sometimes down to the hour of the day, as in the crucial date of the birth of Chao Liang. There are no loose ends as in the unfinished work of Ts'ao Hsueh-ch'in. It also gives a sweeping panorama of all levels of Chinese society instead of limiting itself to the fortunes of an aristocratic family, as in the case of the *Hung Lou Meng*, or the sordid life of a singularly unpleasant character, as in the case of the *Chin P'ing Mei*. It has the most to offer to the reader interested in the institutions and the customs and manners of traditional society, down to the first decade of the present century. Hu Shih did not indulge in unwarranted exaggeration when he asserted in his long introduction to the Ya Tung edition of the novel that it was an indispensable source book for the student of the social, economic and institutional history of China in the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties. His characterization of the novel is even more true today than when he wrote it in 1931, because since then the number of people with firsthand knowledge of what life in traditional China was like has gradually dwindled, and now only a small number of men and women in their eighties and nineties can claim to have any personal experience of those bygone days.

This is not to say, however, that *Marriage as Retribution* is a better novel than either *Hung Lou Meng* or *Chin P'ing Mei*. Being committed to the doctrine of Karma, the author makes no attempt at analysis of character and motiva-

tion. Everything is explained in terms of cause and effect, of recompense or retribution for what occurred in previous incarnations. Thus the hatred of the termagant wife for her husband is explained as solely due to the fact that as a fox in her previous incarnation she was killed by her husband in *his* previous life. To clinch his point, the author has the bride dream of having her heart torn out of her chest by a spirit and replaced with another just before the wedding, so that she comes to have an insane hatred of him, though previous to the literal change of heart the couple are said to have gotten on famously as neighbours and playmates. She is said to become insane with fury at the sight of him and to inflict upon him all kinds of abuse and torture with little or no provocation, though the author elsewhere provides plenty of evidence that the husband was an unpleasant and contemptible character. In contrast to the tightly woven plot, the novel is peopled with caricatures of types instead of real-life characters. Chao Yuan's mother is first represented as a stupid woman who dotes upon and spoils her son and then as a wise and saintly woman who devotes her life to good deeds.

These weaknesses of the novel are not the reasons why it was neglected and fell into oblivion until it was discovered and brought to the attention of modern readers by Hu Shih. Its weaknesses and faults are more or less common to all traditional Chinese fiction, with a few notable exceptions such as *Hung Lou Meng* and *Chin P'ing Mei*, and are overlooked by readers of traditional popular Chinese fiction. The reason for its neglect is that it was too crude for sophisticated readers, who preferred *Hung Lou Meng* and *Chin P'ing Mei*, and not exciting enough for the average reader, who preferred more action and faster movement (as provided by *Shui-hu chuan*, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and many lesser novels). Its tremendous length (exceeded only by the little-known *Yeh-sou p'u-yen* 野叟曝言) and well-integrated plot (as against the episodic arrangement of the more popular novels) placed too much of a strain on the attention span of the average reader. Because of the book's length perhaps another important reason why it was so little known was that it was too costly to produce and too expensive for most people to buy. Previous to the Ya Tung edition, the only known version was cut or engraved in the crudest fashion and printed on very poor quality paper, and only a few copies have survived. It apparently did not have sufficient circulation to make the list of prohibited books (unlike *Chin P'ing Mei*, *P'in-hua pao-chien* 品花寶鑑, and a number of novels with less pornographic elements). Even after its resurrection by Hu Shih, the novel does not seem to have gained wide currency. I do not know of any reprint of it on the mainland except the one published by Shih-chieh Book Company in the 1930s, while the Ya Tung edition has long since gone out of print. The only current edition I know of is that of the Shih-chieh Book Company in Taiwan.*

Though not written in dialect to the same extent as *Hai-shang hua lieh-chuan* the novel has a generous larding of the dialect of central Shantung. This might also be one of the reasons why some readers are put off. As a native of Huan-

*Editor's note: the novel has just been re- the Shanghai Ku-chi Press.
published in China in a three-volume edition, by

t'ai 桓臺, which touches Tzu-ch'uan 淄川 to the south, I'd like to add my testimony to the authenticity of the dialect passages. To give one example: The bat is known locally as *yen-pien-fu* but instead of writing it 燕蝙蝠 as it should be, the author uses the characters 鹽繁戶, which comes closer to the local pronunciation.

The question of authorship has been a matter of considerable interest to scholars of traditional Chinese fiction. All that can be said is that Hu Shih made a strong case for attributing it to P'u Sung-ling, the author of the well-known collection of strange tales entitled *Liao-chai Chih-i*. Hu Shih's attribution seems to have been generally accepted after it was published. Lu Ta-huang (路大荒 1895-1972), a fellow townsman of P'u Sung-ling from Tzu-ch'uan who was active in promoting the works of P'u in the early thirties and wrote a chronological record of the author, raised no objections to the attribution. It was not until 1955 when it became more or less obligatory to denigrate Hu Shih on mainland China that he took occasion to assert that the latter's attribution was based on wild fancy rather than solid evidence.** His conclusion was that *Hsing-shih yin-yuan* was by an unknown author who called himself Hsi Chou Sheng, or "A man of Western Chou."

The first publication of the novel is also in question. The earliest printed version extant is dated the equivalent of the year 1870.*** Sun K'ai-ti conjectured that a version of the novel existed at least as early 1728, the year it was imported into Japan. This conclusion was based on a catalogue of books imported from China, the title of which, as given by him, is *Hakusai muku* 舶載目, which appears to be a contraction of *Shōhaku sairai shomuka* 商舶載來書目, the manuscript of which is preserved in the Library of the Japanese National Diet. I am indebted to Mr. Che-hwei Lin, the Asian-American bibliographer of the library of the University of California at Los Angeles for a photocopy of the page on which *Hsing-shih yin-yuan* appears, but the only information given, besides the title, is that the book consists of 18 *ts'e* or volumes. From that it is impossible to tell whether the work was in manuscript or in printed form. One cannot even be sure that it is the same work under consideration, for it should be noted that the title is not a particularly original one and might easily have been appropriated by some other writer for his own composition. It is possible of course that Professor Sun's reference is to another work of a similar nature. There is at least one other work dealing with the same subject entitled *Hakurai shomuku* 舶來書目, which Mr. Lin has not been able to locate. So the question remains open until a thorough search can be made in Japan. In the meantime, however, I am inclined to think that the 1870 edition is the earliest known version of *Hsing-shih yin-yuan*. If an earlier edition does exist it is hardly conceivable that its owner would not have long since come forward with it.

—CHI-CHEN WANG

** See Lu Ta-huang, *P'u Sung-ling nien-p'u* 蒲松齡年譜, Revised and enlarged by Li Shih-chao. Ch'i-lu Book Company, Tsinan, 1980. Pp. 98-103 and 136-138.

***Cf. Liu Ts'un-yan's Introduction, pp. 1, 6-

Chapter 1



Under the beneficent influence of the ancient sage kings, there appeared on earth a wondrous animal known as the *ch'i-lin*. So gentle and humane was this creature that when it walked abroad it would pick its way carefully so as not to injure a single blade of grass or harm the life of the most insignificant insect. Although an auspicious omen of the sage kings, the *ch'i-lin* still belonged to the tribe of birds and beasts. Man alone stands above the ten thousand creatures and embodies the finest essences of the universe. Heaven and Earth are his parents and the myriad creatures his kin. It is his duty to help these creatures, which have not been so generously endowed as he and which are less able to take care of themselves. This was the way of the Sages, who not only perfected themselves and their fellow men, but also sought to bring about conditions under which all forms of life, from gracefully swaying plants to clumsily lumbering beasts, might grow and develop according to their natures. Theirs is the way we should all emulate. For if we allowed ourselves to discriminate against the ten thousand creatures because they are different in kind, we should soon discriminate against our fellow men because they are not our immediate kin. We would then be like all other creatures; we would not deserve the designation of man. There are, of course, exceptions, as for instance, the man-eating tiger and wolf, the poisonous viper and scorpion, the rat which makes holes in our houses, steals our food and ruins our clothing and books, the fly which hastens the corruption of our food and the mosquito which sucks our blood. These wicked creatures we can kill with impunity even before the very eyes of the all merciful and compassionate Kuan-yin.

But why should we injure the lives of other creatures which are entirely harmless to us? We may regard them as foreign to our kind, but to Heaven and Earth their lives are just as precious as our own. Moreover, these lesser creatures are not without attributes which we think of as distinctly human, and they are capable of gratitude, as innumerable legends testify. However, we should be moved to kindness not because of the hope that we might be repaid many times over; we should insist upon the love for all forms of life for its own sake, because this is the way of Heaven and Earth. For if we cultivate the kindness with which we have been endowed and extend it to the ten thousand creatures, we shall naturally love our fellow men and live with them in peace and harmony. On the other hand, if we allow the cruel element in us to grow, we shall not be satisfied with the killing of sheep, but must slaughter oxen. From that it is but another step to the slaughter of men, or even to the murder of one's own sons, a step which some princes were known to have taken. It was with this in mind that Mencius said that the Princely Man should keep away from the kitchen, so that he would not be hardened to the sight of slaughter and the cry of dying beasts.

Therefore, in bringing up children, parents should take care to nurture the innate kindness that is in their nature, so that they will be humane when they grow up and refrain from wanton killing. Only in this way can they be expected to live long lives and enjoy happiness always.

Now there once lived in the district city of Wu-ch'eng in Shantung a man by the name of Chao Yuan, the son of a Licentiate named Chao Ssu-hsiao. He was not particularly bright as a child or apt at learning. If his parents had tried to mould and instruct him, they might have been able "to fashion the crude iron rod into an embroidering needle." However, since he was an only son, his mother naturally spoiled him, and his father doted upon him even more. Out of ten days there were easily nine on which he did not go to school at all, and on the day that he did, his parents would interrupt his lessons by sending him tea and sweetmeats and finally have him brought home before it was time. When he grew up, he spent even less time on his studies. He indulged in drinking parties and lake excursions, snaring birds and hunting rabbits, and similar unworthy occupations. His parents looked upon these activities with indulgence; the only check

upon his propensities was the comparatively humble circumstances of his family.

The elder Chao was not a bad scholar, but luck was against him, and he repeatedly failed in the provincial examinations. However, by dint of attending the stipulated tests for Licentiate regularly and doing well in them, he eventually qualified as a Senior Licentiate. It was then not far from the founding of the Dynasty,¹ when degree holders were comparatively scarce, and Licentiate, upon achieving the senior status, received far more gifts from friends and relatives than they do now, and the expenses for the trip to the Capital were less. Because of this, Ssu-hsiao gradually found himself in easier circumstances. He was able to arrange for the marriage of his son to the daughter of a Scholar by the name of Chi Tu, and then set out for the Capital to attend the examinations held by the Board of Civil Service.

Now it happened that the Presidency of the Board of Rites was vacant, and the Vice-President of the Left was acting in his place. The latter had been one time Commissioner of Education of Shantung and Chao Ssu-hsiao had come out first in one of the examinations over which he presided. When the Senior Licentiate Chao made his customary courtesy call on his Master,² the latter said to him, after the usual greetings, "Though you have failed in the provincial examinations, you are not too old to try again. You do not look like one fated to end his days as a district director of education.³ I suggest that you pass up the Board Examinations and enroll in the National Academy, in order to qualify for the Provincial Examinations here. Even if you should fail again, the Board Examinations are always open to you. I'll be in the Capital for the next few years and shall do what I can to help you."

The Licentiate Chao did as suggested, but he failed again, whereupon he said to himself, "I must enter for the Board Examinations while the Master is still in the Capital. Without his good offices, I might do no better than get an assignment as a deputy or assistant magistrate and would have to kowtow to everyone and address them as 'Your Honour'.⁴ How humiliating that would be after all these years of hard grind." Accordingly he went to the Board of Civil Service and made the necessary arrangements. It so happened that the presiding examiner was also a *men-sheng*⁵ of the Acting President of the Board of Rites and had received word from the latter. The result was that Chao Ssu-hsiao, who was not a bad hand at the kind of compositions required, not only passed, but received the grade of magistrate, the highest possible. Needless to say, the Licentiate was overjoyed, and the Acting President of the Board of Rites was pleased also.

Again Chao Ssu-hsiao thought to himself, "Although magistrates are all the same in rank, the actual posts can be as different as heaven is from the abyss. I must arrange for my assignment before the Master is transferred to an outside post." With this in mind, he made the necessary applications without delay. Nothing can stop a man upon whom Fortune smiles. At this juncture, the Presidency of the Board of Civil Service became vacant, and Chao Ssu-hsiao's "Master" was appointed to the post. When the Great Selection took place in the fourth month of the following year, the Licentiate Chao received, without any further effort on his part, the magistracy of Hua-t'ing in Nan Chih-li, one of the richest districts in the Empire, a post which even Metropolitan Graduates⁶ could not hope for without the most influential backing.

¹The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644. The events of the novel are supposed to have taken place about 1440-1500.

²When one passes an examination, the examining officials automatically become one's teachers or Masters.

³The position open to Licentiate, from which there is practically no chance of promotion.

⁴A magistrate is the lowest grade of *kuan* or mandarin; officials below that rank are *li*, an officer in the sense that a policeman is an officer.

⁵That is, a student, a man who had passed a civil service examination under him.

⁶*Chin-shih* (literally, scholar presented [to the emperor]), degree awarded to successful candidates in the triennial examination held in the Capital. It was the highest degree that could be achieved.

When the *pao-tzu*⁷ hastened to Wu-ch'eng with the news, Chao's friends and relatives would not believe it. "Hua-t'ing has never been occupied by anyone less than a *chin-shih*," they said. "It is impossible that a mere Senior Licentiate should get such a post." The *pao-tzu* insisted that it was true and demanded three hundred taels of silver for having brought the news. Two days later the Official Gazette arrived and confirmed their claim, whereupon the *pao-tzu* were escorted to the school-house where Chao Ssu-hsiao had once taught, and fêted as expected. They were not satisfied until they had been paid one hundred and fifty taels.

When the toadies and parasites of Wu-ch'eng learned that Chao Ssu-hsiao had been made Magistrate of Hua-t'ing, there was nothing that they would not do to please Chao Yuan; they would have gladly torn out his testicles and paraded them in the streets if they could, or lifted his buttocks to lick his anus. Directly or through intermediaries, they sought the privilege of serving him, the poor ones as servants, while others of some means offered their properties in exchange for stewardships. The money-changers also flocked to him, trying to outbid each other for the privilege of providing funds for his immediate needs, at whatever interest he cared to pay them, or at no interest at all if the loan were for a short period. His friends and relatives also pressed varying amounts upon him, some thirty taels, others fifty, and so on.

Chao Yuan, who had hitherto been unable to follow his propensity for throwing away money because his father was only a poor Licentiate, was now in his element. When he recalled the thousand difficulties that the money-lenders used to raise when he tried to borrow a few hundred *cash* and the ingenious excuses with which his friends and relatives used to put him off when he asked for a few taels, and contrasted them with their present eagerness to anticipate his needs, it was indeed like a dream. He accepted whatever offers came his way and borrowed even more wherever he could. He did not bother to enquire whether the men who sought to enter his service were good or bad, but took them as they came. Thus in ten days or so he had acquired dozens of servants and several thousand taels of silver. He bought three fine horses for two hundred and fifty taels and six riding mules for three hundred. He purchased quantities of satin and brocade and ordered all kinds of household furnishings. Then he sent Chao Shu, an old servant, together with four newly-acquired ones, to Peking with a thousand taels for his father.

In the meantime, Chao Ssu-hsiao had also been besieged by money-lenders, but he had not had time to enter into negotiations with them, because he was occupied with official calls and receptions. His immediate needs were met by advances from small money-changers. Chao Shu arrived just as he was about ready to attend to his personal affairs. Now with the funds his son sent him, he outfitted himself with the necessary costumes and paraphernalia which his office required. Among numerous other things, he bought three No. 1 sedan-chairs made in Fukien, one each for himself, his wife and his son, and one of slightly inferior quality for Chi-shih, his daughter-in-law. When all was ready, he set out for Hua-t'ing by way of Wu-ch'eng, where, needless to say, he was welcomed and fêted in great style. Then with his family he went to his post in Hua-t'ing, where everything went well with him, and his strongbox began to bulge with gold and silver. But we'll not go into these details here.

Chao Yuan, however, did not find life at the yamen⁸ to his liking. Among his father's secretaries was a man named Hsing Ch'en, a Licentiate from Honan Province. Chao Yuan had expected Hsing to toady to him and find ways to amuse him, but Hsing Ch'en was not that kind. There was nothing which he admired more than character and learning, and nothing he detested so much as vulgarity and ignorance. He not only refused to make up to Chao Yuan, but treated him with such perfunctory politeness that even Chao Yuan saw the point, impervious to subtleties

⁷Professional runners who hasten to the homes of the successful candidates with the good news. They make quite a stir with their gongs and demand huge amounts for their services. The runners first on the

scene receive, of course, the largest rewards.

⁸Official residence of a mandarin.

though he was. So, after fretting for about half a year at Hua-t'ing, he left for home by way of Soochow, where he bought a great number of curios in bad taste, trunkfuls of costumes unsuited to his position, and many artificial plants made of precious stones that did not quite match. Thus equipped, he hired a boat and engaged a band⁹ and set out for Wu-ch'eng with his wife Chi-shih.

On learning of his return, his former friends and boon companions came to call on him with presents, in many cases bought with borrowed money, in the hope that he would remember old times and help them out. But now Chao Yuan had no use for them. He received them with cold civility; he hardly looked at them, but concentrated his gaze on the tip of his own nose. After a few perfunctory words, he got up and bowed his callers out. When his friends saw this, their expectations were dashed to pieces, "like a cucumber with which one had hit the donkey." After that his servants would not even announce those who had the persistence to call again. He became even more inaccessible after he bought for six thousand taels a large mansion which had belonged to a former President of one of the ministries.

Having "abandoned his friends because of his position", it was but another step for Chao Yuan "to want a new wife because of his wealth." It was true that Chi Tu was only a Scholar who never passed his examinations for the Licentiate degree, yet his was an old family like that of Chao Yuan. As for Chi-shih, she was no dwarf, though she could be a bit taller; she was not exactly ugly, though she could be a pit prettier. Her complexion, though not clear and white, could not be described as sallow and dark; and her feet, though hardly dainty enough to be called "three-inch golden lilies", were not so large as "to fill half the imperial carriage" as the saying goes. When Chao Yuan first married her, she was just a plain, ordinary girl to unprejudiced eyes, but to Chao Yuan she seemed like "a beauty who caused the fall of cities and empires", so that when she frowned, he trembled with fear. Now Chi-shih was no different from what she had been, but Chao Yuan's eyes were no longer the same. There was now something cheap and common about her, which made her unworthy of a family like his; her father was now nothing but a country yokel and should know better than to soil his doorstep. Thus, because he detested her at heart, he no longer feared or respected her.

Unfortunately Chi-shih did not realize that she no longer had the same husband to deal with. She continued to indulge in fits of temper, "scolding with her tongue and striking with her hand." At first Chao Yuan did not dare answer or strike back, but neither did he accept his punishment meekly, as he used to. He would glare at her sullenly when she scolded, or ward off the blow when she struck him. Then he began to pay her back one for two, then one for one, until finally he took the offensive.

Time was when he considered it a terrible punishment to be denied her favours or shut out of their room. Now it meant nothing to him, since he had his own room in another compound, where he could have the favours of any actress or Prince Lung-yang (sodomite) that he fancied. On the contrary, it was doubtful if he could have been tempted to stay even if Chi-shih had scattered salt on the ground or hung out bamboo leaves to attract the goats that drew his majesty's carriage.¹⁰ Time was when he was afraid that Chi-shih would carry out her threat to hang herself or cut her own throat. Now the sooner she died the better for him. He was sure he could make a much better match. In his present position, there was little that old Chi could do, even if she did commit suicide. As for the elaborate funeral that the Chi family would demand, the expense involved would mean no more to him than a hair plucked from its body would to an ox.

Thus Chi-shih became as helpless as Chang *T'ien-shih* without his magic wand.¹¹ As she

⁹Not so much to amuse himself as to impress people with his importance.

¹⁰Said of the palace ladies of Emperor Wu of the Chin dynasty (r. 265-289 A.D.), who tried to attract the goats and hence his favours by scattering salt, etc.

¹¹The founder of the *T'ien-shih* (Celestial Master) Sect of religious Taoism was Chang Tao-ling, who flourished in the late second century A.D. The title, *T'ien-shih*, became hereditary for his alleged descendants from the eleventh century.

Material not available due to copyright restrictions.

became less and less sure of her position, Chao Yuan became more reckless and spiteful. First he took into his chambers one of the bondmaids. He soon tired of her and bought himself a concubine for sixty taels. In time, he grew tired of her because she did not know how to please him. The only woman who could hold his interest was an actress named Chen-ko, who played the principal female role in the local troupe. She was not especially good-looking, but she was a good singer and, being an actress-courtesan, was skilled in the art of pleasing men. Chao Yuan became quite infatuated with her and sent word to the Turtle¹² that he would like to buy her for his concubine. Chen-ko was quite willing, for Chao Yuan told her that his wife was ailing and that he would make her his proper wife as soon as Chi-shih died. The Turtle, however, took advantage of the situation and said to the intermediary whom Chao Yuan had sent, "It cost me three thousand taels to recruit and train this troupe. It is just beginning to make money, and I have recovered only a few hundred taels of my investment. To lose my principal actress is the same as losing the whole troupe. I might as well turn over the entire troupe to Chao *Ta-yeh*¹³ and let him pay me whatever he feels like." The intermediary went back and forth and conspired with the Turtle and Chao Yuan's servants to cheat him, so that with thank-you's for this and kickbacks for that, the final cost came to eight hundred taels.

Chi-shih spared no words in giving vent to her feelings, but they had no effect on Chao Yuan. After the deed was done, neither she nor Chen-ko would yield an inch; their bickerings soon turned the Chao mansion into a madhouse. Finally, at the suggestion of one of his friends, Chao Yuan set Chen-ko up in another compound, bought her quantities of clothes and jewelry, assigned

¹²A cuckold or a man who runs a house of prostitution. In feudal Chinese society an actress was presumed to be a prostitute; an actor who impersonates females, a sodomite.

¹³*Yeh* is an honorific suffix for males, meaning literally "father" or "lord". *Ta* means great or oldest.

Material not available
due to copyright
restrictions.

CHAO YUAN PERFORMED HIS USUAL DUTIES to Chen-ko in spite of the fact that he had caroused all night.

to her most of the servants and bought for her additional bondmaids. After that he would not go near Chi-shih for a whole month at a time; he neglected her so completely that she was reduced to having to send to Chen-ko for rice and firewood. Truly

*She was like a deaf-mute who has swallowed gentian root,
Quite unable to tell anyone of her bitterness.*

One day, on the sixth of the eleventh month, which happened to be the festival of the Winter Solstice, Chao Yuan decided to invite his friends to his house to celebrate the occasion and to enjoy the snow which had begun to fall. To entertain them, he hired the entire theatrical troupe as wine servers. Being all of them young men whose families had only recently arrived, Chao Yuan and his friends talked of nothing except evil and deceptions and revealed in their manner nothing but vulgarity and arrogance. When the fish course was served, someone remarked that game was plentiful that winter and that wolves and foxes roamed the countryside. That none of these things portended a good harvest the following year meant nothing to these merry-makers; all they thought about was that hunting ought to be good.

"Let us have a hunting party and use Chao *Ta-ko's* farm as our headquarters," one of the guests said. "In the first place, the woods around Yung-shan have the most game; in the second place, Chao *Ta-ko* knows best how to play host." Chao Yuan readily agreed. The almanac was consulted, and the fifteenth was decided upon. All promised to outfit themselves in the most suitable manner possible so as to make their party the talk of Wu-ch'eng for years to come. Then they feasted on until almost the fifth watch, when some of the guests left, while others spent the night with some of the actresses in rooms readied for the purpose. Chao Yuan performed his usual duties to Chen-ko in spite of the fact that he had caroused all night, so he did not get up until

late afternoon of the following day, after all his overnight guests had gone. He had a bit of sour and pungent soup and went back to bed again with Chen-ko shortly afterwards. He told her of the hunting party and the preparations that must be made.

"Let me join the party too," Chen-ko said. "I have been cooped up in here ever since I married you, and I need some diversion."

"But how could you mix with a crowd of men?" Chao Yuan said. "Besides, we shall all be riding on horseback; you won't be able to keep up with us in a sedan-chair."

"You forget that I knew most of your friends before I married you," Chen-ko said. "You need not worry that I'll be shy with them. As for horseback riding, have you forgotten that I used to perform on horses in funeral processions? I don't think it takes more skill than that to keep up with you men."

"It's true, now that you mention it," Chao Yuan said. "You must come with us; it will make the party more fun. Find that piece of dark blue silk and have the tailor make a cape for you."

"How ignorant you are," Chen-ko said, laughing. "Whoever has heard of wearing a cape for hunting? I shall borrow a warrior's costume from the outfit, pheasant feathers and all."

"A wonderful idea!" Chao Yuan exclaimed. "But there is no reason why you shouldn't have a hunting costume of your own. There is plenty of time to have one made."

The next day, Chao Yuan began his preparations for the hunt. He spared no expense in order to make a better showing than anyone else. He took care to deck Chen-ko out in the most expensive fashion possible, spending as much as thirty-six taels for a sable hat. He picked out a black stallion for her and had it specially trained. For her escort, he picked out six stout servants' wives, four strong bondmaids, and more than ten of his tenants' wives, each suitably outfitted and provided with horses. For his own escort, he borrowed thirty horses from the commander of the local garrison, together with a twenty-four piece band. In addition to his own falcons and hounds, he borrowed more from the same source. He sent word to the farm to have three hogs butchered and thirty to forty bushels of wheat milled to provide food for the party.

Around the hour of the hare (5-7 AM) on the fifteenth of the eleventh month the hunting party gradually assembled on the parade-grounds. They all did their best to outfit themselves, but none of those who arrived first were quite correct in their costumes. Chao Yuan's party came last. First a vanguard of women riders appeared, followed by Chen-ko with her standard-bearer. She was in turn followed by another group of women riders. Chao Yuan and his men came last. They all advanced in perfect order, so that although it was but a hunting party, it resembled Marshal Chou's army on the march.¹⁴ Everyone on the parade-ground broke into applause. Chao Yuan and Chen-ko both dismounted and greeted those who had preceded them. Though most of the men in the party had been Chen-ko's clients at one time or another, they refrained from making bawdy remarks before her, since she had taken the path of virtue. Not wishing that his motley crew of friends should spoil the orderly ranks of his own party, Chao Yuan suggested that they each proceed separately.¹⁵

Soon they reached the forest around Yung-shan and started up all kinds of game, deer of many varieties, pheasants, hares, badgers and wolves. They let loose their hounds and unhooded their hawks, drew their bows and shot off their arrows, and caught a great deal of game.

Now there lived in one of the caves in Yung-shan an ancient she-fox who had for many years gone about the region bewitching men. More recently she had cast a spell over a farmer-boy in a far-off village and was rarely seen around Yung-shan. On this fateful day of the hunt, however, she happened to be on her way to her cave to see how things were going there and thus ran into

¹⁴ Marshal Chou was Chou Ya-fu (d. 143 B.C.) of Former Han times, whose army was known for its strict discipline.

¹⁵ Here follows a long verse description, or supposed description, of the hunting procession, partly serious, but mostly burlesque and derisive.

Material not available due to copyright restrictions.

An ancient she-fox who had for many years gone about the region bewitching men

Chao Yuan's party. If she had been prudent and turned away from the hunters, all would have been well, but she was over-confident of her powers and thought that she could deceive the hounds and hawks in the form of a beautiful woman she had assumed, as she had always been able to deceive men. Moreover, she had entertained for a long time the idea of bewitching Chao Yuan but had not dared to go near him on the occasions when he visited his farm, because of a copy of the Diamond Sutra kept there. "This is my opportunity," she said to herself, and so instead of turning away, she kept close to Chao Yuan, casting encouraging glances at him and "causing his soul to leave his body". "Where could this beautiful woman have come from?" he said to himself. "Since she is unattended, she cannot be from a wealthy family. Since she is wearing mourning, she is probably a widow. Here's a chance for me. With Chen-ko she will make a beautiful pair, and I shall be as enviable as Emperor Shun with Lady Ying on his left and Lady Huang on his right!"

But as Chao Yuan thought thus to himself, the hounds and hawks were not deceived. The hounds rushed at her throat, and the hawks circled over her, ready to swoop down. Panic-stricken, the fox resumed her real form and dodged under Chao Yuan's horse, hoping that he would save her. But Chao Yuan was cruel and enjoyed taking life. Instead of protecting the fox, he took his bow from its carrying-case, fitted an arrow to the string and, "pulling up with his right hand and pushing down with his left", he aimed at the fox under his horse and sent the arrow into her. With a howl the fox fell on its back, its four legs kicking the air. Then a hound pounced on her and sank its teeth into her throat, and thus alas, a fairy creature of a thousand years met its end. Retreat was sounded, and the party went to Chao Yuan's farm for dinner. Afterwards they returned to the city and feasted at Chao Yuan's house. Then they divided up the catch, Chao Yuan being allowed to keep the fox.

On entering the gate after seeing his guests off, Chao Yuan jerked his head as if he had been struck in the face, feeling at the same time a chill through his body. Attributing this to the exertions of the day, he went to bed without thinking anything more about it, little knowing that untoward things were to plague him from that time on.

Chapter 2



Now as Chao Yuan was about to enter the gate after seeing his guests off, his head jerked violently, as if someone had struck him in the face. A cold shudder ran through him, and his hair stood on end. He felt ill and, after telling the servants to put away the fox and his share of the game, he retired to his room, where he slumped wearily into a chair, and paid no attention to Chen-ko as she chattered on gaily about the hunt. "What's wrong?" Chen-ko asked, finally taking notice of his listlessness. "You were in such high spirits on your way back. Did you quarrel with Yü Ming-wu or somebody?" Chao Yuan only shook his head. "What is it then?" Chen-ko continued. "You must have caught a cold. You look pale. I'll have them make some sour and pungent soup for you. Eat a couple of bowls, have a good sweat, and you will feel all right."

"Tell them to heat up a pot of wine," Chao Yuan said. "Let's see what that will do for me."

Presently a maid brought a large pot of wine, some cold meat, two lacquered cups inlaid with silver, two pairs of ivory chopsticks, and laid them on a low table on the *k'ang*. But the wine did not raise Chao Yuan's spirits. So he decided to go to bed early, which he did as soon as the maids cleared the things away. He slept fitfully, woke up repeatedly, groaning and complaining of a headache and of a bitter taste in the mouth. Toward the second watch he became feverish and delirious. Chen-ko was alarmed. She woke up the maids and sent one of them to ask Chi-shih to come over and see what should be done.

Now Chi-shih had heard the neighbours say that Chao Yuan was planning a hunting party and taking Chen-ko with him, but she was not inclined to believe it. "These women are always making wind and rain out of a clear sky," she thought to herself. "Though she was formerly a courtesan, yet how could she be so brazen as to go out hunting with a crowd of men after she has married into a respectable family? Even if she wishes to do so, surely that cuckold must have enough sense left in him to forbid it. They must have made this up to provoke me, but I will not give them the satisfaction of showing that I care." So she said to the gossipmonger: "Let him take her hunting if he wishes. We are lucky to have a female warrior in our midst in these times of disorder. With her around, we need have no fear of the roving bandits or Tartar raids."

She dismissed the matter from her mind and thought no more about it. Thus she was unprepared for the cannons and bands and the general commotion in Chao Yuan's compound when the morning of the fifteenth arrived. She was just then binding up her feet and, hearing the noise, asked one of the maids what was going on. "It is the hunting party they told you about the other day," the maid answered. "You would not believe it; now you can see it for yourself."

"How could such things be?" Chi-shih exclaimed. "Are they gone yet?" On being told that the party was just setting out, she said, "I must see this for myself." She dressed hurriedly, went to the gate and peeped out through the half-open door. She was filled with anger and humiliation when she saw Chen-ko riding at the head of the procession in her bright new costume.

In the meantime, the women in the immediate neighborhood had already gathered outside their gates and were watching the spectacle, some in simple wonder, while others were highly critical and made sarcastic remarks about it. When they saw Chi-shih, they went and chatted with her. Said a certain Yu *Ta-niang*, "Chao *Ta-shen*, why don't you join the party too, instead of shutting yourself up in the house?"

"My face is plain and my feet large," Chi-shih said. "I am unworthy of going hunting with a crowd of men. It is more fitting that I stay quietly at home."

"You are neither plain nor do you have large feet," said a Kao *Ssu-sao*. "But you are a bit on the heavy side and may be too much for a horse. Now seriously, the young master is going a bit too far. If he wants to dote on that woman and spoil her, he should do so at home instead of

making a public spectacle of it. It's nothing to her, since she used to dress herself up as Wang Chao-chün or Meng Jih-hung and ride in processions, but it is hardly proper for the young master to ride alongside her. Not only will the neighbours talk, but surely His Honour, the Magistrate, won't like it when he hears."

"The neighbours may criticize," Chi-shih said, "but not my father-in-law. He will only marvel at the progress his son has made in learning how to amuse himself and spend money in grand style. He always takes the part of his son, for in his eyes he can do no wrong. You remember that we used to live right next to Niang-niang Temple. Once my mother-in-law and I thought that it was only right that we should pay the Niang-niang a visit, seeing that we were next-door neighbours. We could pick a time when there were no other visitors around. When he heard about it, he raised all kinds of silly objections, saying that it would not be proper for us to rub shoulders with all kinds of men, to be subjected to their lewd glances, to say nothing of being pinched on the buttocks or having our shoes snatched from us. Just imagine a son saying things like that to his own mother. If I had not been provoked beyond endurance and given him a couple of good slaps, there was no telling what else he would have said."

"But surely His Honour would not have permitted the young master to speak like that to his mother?" Kao *Ssu-sao* said in disbelief.

"Even then he still took his son's side," Chi-shih answered. "He chided my mother-in-law saying, 'It serves you right. I told you not to go, but you wouldn't listen. I suppose you are satisfied now, after causing your own son to say those things.' That's how my father-in-law disciplines his son."

"Chao *Nai-nai* is too good-natured," Kao *Ssu-sao* said. "My son never dares speak to me like that, for he knows what would happen if he tried."

"My mother-in-law never dared to answer him back," Chi-shih said. "All she does is hide somewhere and weep. But sometimes, when he went too far, I would give him a scolding and a couple of slaps. Those were the only lessons he ever got in his life."

"How is it then that you allowed him to take that woman on the hunting trip?"

"I allowed him? You have no idea how things have changed. I am the same, but not he. Even before he married that unlicensed whore, he had begun to change and to show what a monster he was. I have long since hauled down my flag and acknowledged defeat. So how can I interfere now?"

"You are a smart woman, Chao *Ta-shen*," Kao *Ssu-sao* advised. "You know perfectly well you must assert the authority befitting the mistress of the house. If you let her do what she pleases, there is no telling what that will lead to. She will squander the family fortune and wear out the young master, and then, I tell you, she will skip out with her buttocks a-wiggling and leave you to spend the rest of your days in poverty and widowhood, as helpless as a grasshopper nymph that can neither jump nor fly. Take that one in my house, for instance. When we used to be better off than we are now, I never cared if the best clothes and jewelry went to her. If he wanted to sleep with her, be it for one night or for two, I never said a word. But I never let her or the old cuckold forget who was the real mistress of the house!"

And so, in much the same vein, the women joked and complained until presently the party broke up. Back in her own room, Chi-shih thought about her unhappy situation and felt more and more outraged. She cried bitterly for a long time, and then went to bed without grooming her hair or having her supper.

Late that night, when she was awakened by the urgent knocking at the gate of her compound, her first thought was that Chao Yuan had come to pick a quarrel. "But what have I done?" she asked herself. "Could it be that some tale-bearer has told him about my standing at the gate and talking to the neighbours? It must be that, though it is no crime and certainly is better than going hunting with a crowd of men. I'll take along a knife and see what he wants with me. If he tries to raise his hand against me, I'll stab him to death and then cut my own throat."

Having thus armed herself, Chi-shih roused her maids, and together they opened the gate. They found that the caller was only a maid from the other compound, who upon seeing Chi-shih, said excitedly, "The young master has suddenly taken ill. He is unconscious and delirious. Will *Nai-nai* come quickly to see what should be done?"

Thereupon Chi-shih answered, "He is nothing to me now! Why should I go running to him now when he never gave me a thought in planning the hunting party? How could he be so sick all of a sudden? The cuckold and the adulteress must have cooked up some scheme to do away with me and are using this as a ruse. Go back and tell him that I'll not come at this hour of the night, be he really sick or only pretending. If he has a plot against my life, it can wait until tomorrow, for I prefer to face him in broad daylight. If he is really sick and should die, it is for his father and mother to square accounts with the adulteress, not I."

The maid went back and repeated word for word what Chi-shih had said, whereupon Chen-ko retorted with equal eloquence, though somewhat more briefly, as she was a bit frightened. Chao Yuan's condition worsened as the night wore on, and Chen-ko decided to send for the doctor without waiting for daybreak.

Chao Chu, the servant who had been sent to summon the doctor, on his way back ran into Yü Ming-wu, who lived across the street and was one of his master's close friends. On being told of what had happened, Yü Ming-wu was greatly surprised, for Chao Yuan had been in such good spirits the day before. He rounded up three of his hunting companions who lived in the neighbourhood, and the four of them went to call on Chao Yuan. They had barely been seated in the reception hall when the physician, named Yang Ku-yueh, arrived. The latter was given a detailed account of the hunt as they all waited to be called to the patient's room.

The physician Yang was a notorious quack, so ignorant that he would not hesitate to prescribe "The Four Simples" for a toothache or "The Three Yellows" for an upset stomach. Moreover, he was given to gossip about the womenfolk of his patients, so that the people of Wu-ch'eng generally shunned him. However, he and Chao Yuan had an affinity for each other, and he was always sent for when Chao Yuan needed medical attention. As he listened to Yü Ming-wu and others while waiting, he thought to himself: "Chao Yuan has just taken Chen-ko into his chambers. I have had encounters with that wench, a powerful adversary for anyone; even after reinforcing myself with my secret formula, I was barely able to hold my own. It is easy to imagine how utterly exhausted Chao Yuan must be, having to meet her challenge all by himself. His last bout with her, after a day of hunting, must have been the last straw. Fortunately he is still in his prime. A few doses of the Great Tonic Decoction of Ten Herbs would surely put him back on his feet." He thought further to himself, "I hear that he now lives with Chen-ko in a separate compound. I ought to have a chance to see her when I go into the sick room later. But then Yü Ming-wu and others will be there too. It won't be the same as in old times, when I could see her alone."

Presently Chao Chu came out to usher them into Chao Yuan's room. As they approached the patient's bed, Yü Ming-wu said, "How is it that you got sick so suddenly? You were more energetic than any of us yesterday at the hunt. You must have caught a cold when you were changing." Chao Yuan was too weak to answer; he merely nodded. The physician Yang said, "No, this is clearly not a case of a chill from the outside. The flush on his face is an unmistakable sign that there is a drying up of the kidney secretions."

The visitors sat down before the bed. The physician asked one of the maids standing by to get a book so that he could place the patient's hand on it and take his pulse. Now if he had asked for silver ingots, our hero would have been able to produce any number of them without difficulty. But books were quite a different matter. After searching around the room, the maid finally spotted an album about an inch thick protruding from under Chao Yuan's pillow. She handed it to the physician, who noted at a glance its title: *Secrets of the Bed Chamber*. "This is too hard to rest the hand on," he said. "Can't you find something else?" The maid tried again and came

up with a book entitled *The Invincible Prince*. Fortunately the physician did not look inside to find out who the prince was or in what way he was invincible. He put the book on top of the album and placed Chao Yuan's hand on top of the book. Then he put his fingers on Chao Yuan's wrist and pretended to feel his pulse, cocking his head to one side with his eyes closed. Actually he had already made up his mind about the diagnosis and wasted no more thought on it. Instead he wondered if Chen-ko, who had done well by herself, ever thought about him, one of her many clients before she became Chao Yuan's concubine. Then, after going through the motions with Chao Yuan's other hand, he said, "It is just as I thought, purely a matter of internal debilitation."

"Is it serious?" Yü Ming-wu asked.

"Nothing to worry about," Yang Ku-yueh said. "But if an ignorant physician had been consulted, he might have diagnosed it as a case of outer affection and prescribed a sudorific. That would have weakened the patient and brought on complications. But I'll give him what he really needs: the Great Tonic Decoction of Ten Herbs reinforced with ginseng and *t'ien-ma*. I guarantee that after four or five doses he will be up and around in time for the New Year festivities."

The visitors departed, and Chao Chu went with the physician to get the medicine. "Your master is a rather sick man," Yang Ku-yueh said to the servant. "He appears robust enough, but he is very weak inside, like a wall with undermined foundations. I hear that he no longer shares the inner compound with his wife but lives with little Chen-ko in the front. Was that their quarters where I saw him?" Chao Chu told him that it was so and answered many other questions put to him. Then he returned home with the medicine and handed it to Chen-ko, saying, "Dr Yang says that this should be taken as soon as possible so that the prescription can be modified according to the patient's reactions." "What else did he say about your master's illness?" Chen-ko asked. "He said that, although the master looked strong, he was actually very weak inside, like a wall with hollow foundations," Chao Chu replied. "He also said, 'Tell your Aunt Chen-ko to go easy on him and not work him too hard.'" "Rot his filthy, stinking tongue!" Chen-ko said, laughing.

So saying, she had the medicine pot washed, emptied the packages of herbs into it, together with some freshly-sliced ginger, a few red jujubes and twelve-hundredths of an ounce of ginseng. When the decoction was ready, she gave it to Chao Yuan. Luckily, the physician hit the mark, though his aim was bad. The patient had a good sleep after taking the medicine, which was boiled a second time toward evening and taken as directed. He sweated a little during the night, and by morning his fever was much reduced. Chen-ko related to him how Chi-shih had refused to come to see him, how the physician had been sent for and how Yü Ming-wu and three other friends had come to call. Then blinking her eyes, she let fall a few tears, saying, "May Heaven have pity on me and make you well. If anything should happen to you, the only thing for me is to go before you do, for I am afraid to think of what your wife will do to me without you here to protect me."

"You should have known better than to send for her," Chao Yuan said slowly. "She would like nothing better than for me to die, so that she could say that I deserved it. If you don't believe me, just go and see for yourself. I bet she is chanting the name of Buddha and congratulating herself that I am ill."

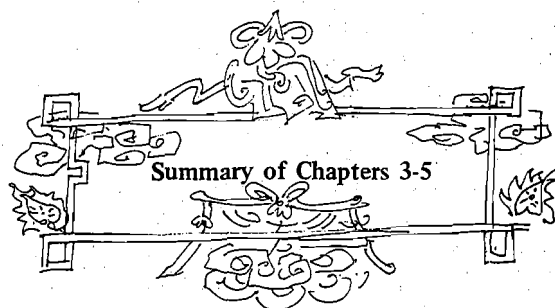
After taking more medicine and resting for about a month, Chao Yuan was able to get up on the fifteenth of the twelfth month, though he still felt unsteady on his feet, probably because he had not refrained from indulging in the pleasures of the chamber with Chen-ko. He made an offering of the three sacrificial beasts to Heaven and Earth, as he had vowed, for his recovery. Then he walked to Chi-shih's compound and shouted to her through the gate, "You daughter of the Chi family, I want to thank you for coming to see me during my illness. Thanks to you, I have at last recovered." "Have you nothing better to do than to come here and blab nonsense?" Chi-shih retorted. "What do you take me for? Why should I have visited you? Go away from my door and go thank those to whom thanks are due."

After a few more exchanges in a like vein, Chao Yuan returned to his own compound and

went back to bed before dark. The following day he got out and examined his share of the game and found that it had not spoiled in the least in the cold weather. The fox turned out to be an even better prize than he had first realized; its fur was exceptionally thick and soft and almost pure white. He had it skinned and sent to the furrier to be cured and made into a riding rug.

During the remaining days of the year, Chao Yuan was busy with the supervision of preparations for the great festival—making candles, laying in a supply of sweetmeats, slaughtering hogs, putting up new decorative couplets on doors, buying incense sticks and New Year prints, and so on, not to mention the distribution of presents, which took the most time of all—and he therefore had no time to go outside his own gate. The days passed quickly during this season of long nights, and soon it was New Year's eve,

*When peach-charms usher out the old year,
And firecrackers herald in the new.*



CHAPTER 3. On New Year's Eve (1446 A.D., according to the tentative chronology I have worked out) Chao Yuan's grandfather appeared to him in a dream, rebuked him for his unbecoming conduct and warned him not to leave the house as the spirit of the fox was watching for a chance to do him injury. She had kept away from the house only because she did not want to frighten Chi-shih, a friend of hers three incarnations back. The grandfather also told him that he should go and join his father in North T'ung-chou, which, being near the imperial palace, was off limits to the fox. Before leaving, he struck Chen-ko on the head, causing her to wake up with a severe headache. Chao Yuan thought nothing of the dream and decided to go out and make his usual New Year calls, with the result that he was severely injured in a fall, caused, of course, by the spirit of the fox. He was laid up for most of the month and took care not to leave the house again.

Most of the chapter is taken up with the plight of Chi-shih. The New Year festivities in Chao Yuan's compound made her feel more keenly than usual the neglect and deprivation that she had suffered ever since Chen-ko arrived on the scene and she gave vent to her feelings by loud lamentations against her fate. Somewhat moved by her cries, Chao Yuan sent over to her some wine and New Year delicacies in the name of Chen-ko. Chi-shih was too proud to accept anything from her arch enemy and swore at the messenger into the bargain. When Chen-ko found out, she raised a scene and cursed Chao Yuan for humiliating her. That night (it was the 16th of month), Chao Yuan's grandfather again appeared to him and repeated his warning. He upbraided Chen-ko for causing the disharmony in the family, raised his staff to strike her but refrained out of consideration for his grandson.

CHAPTER 4. The next day Chao Yuan received some callers, among whom was a man who peddled aphrodisiacs. Chao Yuan got a generous supply of these and tried them out with Chen-ko with gratifying results. But Chen-ko was at the time pregnant and her indulgence brought about a miscarriage and a serious illness, made worse by the ministrations of the quack Yang Ku-yueh. Another physician was secured and saved her life. In the meantime Chao Yuan had decided to heed the warning of his grandfather, *selected the tenth day of the second month to begin the journey, contracted for twenty-four mules at two taels and five mace per head from Wu-ch'eng to Hua-t'ing, drew up a contract and paid a deposit of three taels.* (I give a verbatim translation here to give an example of the kind of detail with which the novel is cluttered. It will be seen that this inconsequential detail has its own little dénouement.)

CHAPTER 5. The following morning, the tenth of the second month, seven or eight muleteers, driving twenty four mules before them, came to the gate of the Chao house. On being told by the gate keeper that there was illness in the house and that the journey had been postponed, the muleteers protested. "The mules have to be fed whether they work or not. Who is going to pay for the feed?" When this was reported to Chao Yuan, he said, "The mistress is not well; we cannot start today. It will be next month before we can set out, after selecting a lucky day. If they can wait, fine; if not, let them return the deposit and hire out the mules to some other customer. We'll make new arrangements when the time comes."

The muleteers were in an uproar when this was relayed to them. "This was a busy season," they said. "Many people have come to us seeking to hire our mules but we refused them because the animals had already been hired by you people. So you are responsible for our loss of business. It takes a lot of money to feed the mules; the three taels which was paid in advance was only enough for two or three days. Your people must pay for the days we have lost." Thus an endless dispute arose, with one side wanting his deposit back while the other side wanted to be paid for lost time in addition to the deposit. Fortunately, Yü Ming-wu appeared at this juncture and effected a compromise settlement, whereby Chao Yuan was to forfeit the deposit to pay for the feed before the mules could be rented out again and that it would not be counted as part of the fee if the same muleteers were hired again when Chao Yuan was ready for the journey.

Except for this trifling incident of the muleteers, Chapter 5 is entirely taken up with a detailed account of how Chao Yuan's father was able to secure another good post. To celebrate his wife's birthday, the elder Chao had hired a theatrical troupe and became friendly with the two principal actors, one named Liang Sheng and the other Hu Tan. In appreciation for the generous tip they received, they volunteered to approach on his behalf Wang Chen, the powerful eunuch who controlled the emperor and virtually ruled in his name. The offer was accepted, Liang Sheng went to the capital and was successful in his mission. For a bribe far below the going rate, Chao Yuan's father was appointed sub-prefect of North T'ung-chou, which was only a short distance from Peking and was considered a very prestigious and lucrative post. Thus it came about that Chao Yuan eventually joined his parents at T'ung-chou instead Hua-t'ing as he had expected. Under what circumstances Chao Yuan's father left Hua-t'ing, how Chao Yuan was able to conceal from his parents the fact that he had taken a concubine, and how in the face of an imminent Tartar raid against Peking Chao Yuan abandoned his parents and fled back to Wu-ch'eng—these and other events are told in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, which are translated (and in part summarized) below.

* * * * *

Chapter 6



he nineteenth day of the second month was the birthday of the white-robed goddess, Kuan-yin. Chen-ko, who had almost entirely recovered from her illness, decided to make an offering of two pairs of shoes, together with incense, candles and paper horses, to the goddess for the occasion. On that day, just as Chao Chu's wife was about to leave for the temple with the offerings, Chao Yuan and Chen-ko were startled by a commotion in the street. Soon a servant appeared and reported that the same runners who had brought the news of the elder Chao's appointment as the magistrate of Hua-t'ing were again outside, with the news that the elder Chao had been promoted to Prefect of North T'ung-chou. Chao Yuan was overjoyed and then thought to himself: "No wonder grandpa twice in my dreams told me to go and join father and mother in the north. I was puzzled because they were in the south. So grandpa knew beforehand that father was going to be promoted." He went out to receive the runners and sent to the shop for eight bolts of red silk for them to drape themselves in and then had them lodged in the east compound. At the banquet for them the next day, he presented them with a hundred taels of silver. They complained that it was not enough and were not satisfied until the amount was increased by another fifty taels. A procession of friends and relatives came to offer their congratulations. Chao Yuan received them with the proper courtesies, but on seeing them out, he did not dare cross the gate.

At Hua-t'ing, the magistrate Chao had received the news of his promotion ten days before the arrival of Chao Shu and Chao Feng, for the professional runners always travelled day and night in order to be the first to bring the news and to receive the greatest reward. He immediately proceeded to put in order the books and other documents for his successor and to set the first of the fourth month as the date of his departure. He handed over to Liang Sheng a thousand taels which Hu Tan's maternal grandfather had advanced on his behalf, and invited him to go up north on the same boat.¹⁶

On the day of his departure, the gentry of the district gave him a farewell party and staged the customary ceremonies to show their appreciation for his governance. The poor licentiates and the ordinary people of the district, however, hated him as they hated snakes and scorpions and wanted to do everything they could to embarrass him. There was no movement among the licentiates to present laudatory testimonials to him, nor was there any arrangement among the common people to petition him to leave behind his boots to remind them of his loving kindness. Members of the gentry, however, reasoned thus: "The magistrate will not blame himself for the lack of appreciation on the part of the people but will say that the people of Hua-t'ing are an ungrateful lot. So let us have our own boys prepare a testimonial and present it in the name of all the licentiates. Let us also prepare a float with a pair of boots on it and say that they were the magistrate's, which he has left as a memento at the request of the people." The charade was accordingly enacted by the gentry, with whom the magistrate had always sided, while the common people burned incense and set off firecrackers to celebrate their deliverance. It was under such circumstances that the magistrate Chao left his post at Hua-t'ing.

With a favorable wind and current, magistrate Chao's boat arrived at Chi-ning before the fifth of the fifth month. There the boat was moored, as the magistrate Chao wanted to purchase twenty or thirty catties of rouge, for which the city was famous, to be used as presents on his arrival at T'ung-chou. He also wanted to send a messenger from there to his son, to inform him

¹⁶Hu Tan and Liang Sheng were two actors, the former playing the female role (*tan*), the latter the male (*sheng*). Through their intervention with some

influential eunuchs in Peking who took bribes, the elder Chao was promoted. Details in Chapter 5.

of his pending arrival at Wu-ch'eng. That night, he dreamed that his father came and said to him, "Your son, Yuan, has been behaving very badly. He went out hunting with a wicked woman and shot to death a fairy fox. Twice she sought to take revenge on him, and he was saved from serious harm only by my intervention. I fear that one of these days your fortune and your son's will decline, and the fox will have her revenge. So I want you to take your son with you to T'ung-chou, so as to be as far away from the spirit of the fox as possible. T'ung-chou is but a short distance from the residence of the emperor, where the spirit of the fox will not dare approach." When the magistrate woke up and spoke to his wife about his dream, he found that they had had the same dream, which surprised them both greatly.

The next morning the elder Chao sent his son a letter, saying "Although Wu-ch'eng is situated on the canal, it would be best for me not to stop off, for I have been away from home for a long time, and it will be necessary for me to exchange calls with friends and relatives and thus delay my journey. I shall leave the boat only to visit the family cemetery to make offerings, after which I shall return directly to the boat. Your mother and I had a very strange dream, in which your grandfather appeared to us. I want you to make all the necessary preparations so that you and your wife, Chi-shih, can proceed to T'ung-chou with us."

Needless to say, the elder Chao knew nothing of his son's neglect of Chi-shih and of his having taken Chen-ko as his concubine. Although many servants had gone back and forth between parents and son, none of them dared to betray Chao Yuan's secret. They all figured that the days for serving their older master were few, while the days on which they had to attend their young master were many, and that it was best to hold their tongues. Now that the elder Chao had specifically asked his son to bring Chi-shih to T'ung-chou, Chao Yuan wondered how he was to evade the issue.

For the immediate moment, he hired eight carriers for the sedan-chair which his father had bought for him previously and travelled south along the canal to meet his parents. In few days, his parents' boat was sighted, and soon he was with them. He gave them a report of events at home, among them the fire at their Yung-shan farm and the consequent loss of over ten thousand bushels of grain. As for his parents' proposal that he and his wife, Chi-shih, go to T'ung-chou with them, he made up the story that Chi-shih had had a miscarriage and was unable to travel, that his parents would have to go on first and that he would follow with Chi-shih as soon as she was well enough to travel. A few days later, they reached Wu-ch'eng, where the elder Chao made offerings to his ancestors. When he resumed his journey, his son accompanied him for a distance before returning home. He again assured his parents that he would proceed to T'ung-chou with Chi-shih as soon as she could travel, either by boat or overland.

To Chen-ko, Chao Yuan said, "Papa was glad that I had married you and wanted you to join them right away. But I told him that you were laid up because of a miscarriage and would have to delay the journey for a while. But as soon as you feel better, we shall have to leave."

The fifth month soon came to an end, and sometime in the following month Chao Yuan decided to begin his journey by land on the seventh day of the seventh month. Mules and chair carriers were hired, and everything was made ready to set out on the selected day. On the afternoon of the fifth day, Chi-shih appeared with four or five women servants in the front hall where the sedan-chair which her father-in-law had bought for her was stored and carried it back into her own compound, saying, "Father-in-law bought this for me. How dare that cheap woman use it. I'd just as soon break it up and use it for firewood as let that happen."

When Chen-ko heard about what had happened, she was speechless with anger. But Chao Yuan said to her, "Let her take the chair. Does she think that without that chair we won't be able to make the journey? I'll get you another one, ten times better than hers." And indeed for twenty-eight taels he bought a fully-equipped chair from a retired official, and Chen-ko was greatly pleased. Chao Yuan then sent a woman servant to Chi-shih to invite her to view the fine new chair that he had just bought for Chen-ko for fifty taels. Chi-shih spat at the servant and said, "What is

it to me even if they paid five thousand taels for it? I have no time to waste. I don't care if they spend fifty thousand taels for one, so long as they do not touch my chair."

On the seventh, Chao Yuan set out with Chen-ko as planned, travelling by day and resting by night, and reached Peking without incident. However, Chao Yuan did not dare take Chen-ko to T'ung-chou without preparing his parents for the meeting, so for three taels a month he rented a small house inside the Sha-wo Gate and installed her in it, leaving with her the women servants that he had brought from Wu-ch'eng. Chao Chu, one of his favorite servants, and Chao Chu's wife were put in charge of the household. After staying with Chen-ko for a few days, he went to T'ung-chou to join his parents. He told them that he had to come alone because Chi-shih did not seem any better. His mother was much troubled by the development and complained to him, "Our house is right on the canal, and she could have travelled all the way by boat, without any undue exertion. How could you have left her alone there without any dependable servants to look after her? She would be better off here, where you can find the best physicians." She was so worried that she wanted to send word to Wu-ch'eng and ask Chi-shih's family to escort her to T'ung-chou. However, Chao Yuan was able to dissuade her for the moment.

On the twenty-fourth day of the seventh month, Chao Yuan said to his father, "Tomorrow is fair day at the temple of the city god. I want to go shopping and do some sightseeing in the capital." His father agreed, gave him sixty odd taels of silver and wanted to assign two detectives to look after him, but Chao Yuan said that a few servants would do. So he left T'ung-chou in a sedan-chair provided by his father and went straight to Chen-ko's house. "It is a good thing that you did not go to T'ung-chou with me," he said to Chen-ko. "It is very cramped there, hardly enough room in which to turn around. You'd have died in the cricket box. If not for my foresight, you'd be kept there like a prisoner." Chen-ko had no reason to doubt him and was glad that she did not accompany Chao Yuan to T'ung-chou. The following day he went to the temple and bought some odds and ends. After staying with Chen-ko for seven or eight days, he went back to T'ung-chou.

Now Chao Chu, the servant who was left in charge of the house where Chen-ko stayed, had not come to the Chao family as a young boy. He had been a gatekeeper and a soldier. He was about twenty-four years old, a ruddy-faced and well-built young man who had entered the service of the family after the elder Chao was appointed magistrate. Chao Yuan liked him because he was quick and efficient, and entrusted him with personal errands, such as hiring actresses and summoning courtesans. He also put him in charge of receipts and disbursements of money. When Chen-ko was still an actress with the troupe, he had ample opportunity to see her and exchange pleasantries with her. He was the one who negotiated the purchase of Chen-ko. He was, in other words, on friendly terms with Chen-ko to a degree that should have put Chao Yuan on his guard. But Chao Yuan was obtuse and put him in charge of the house which he had rented for Chen-ko and thus gave him ample opportunity to come in contact with her. As for Chao Chu's wife, she could not have been more congenial with Chen-ko if they had breathed through the same nostrils. So it soon came about that Chao Chu and his wife began to deck themselves out in fine clothing and to go in and out of Chen-ko's room at all hours of the day and night. Many things went on between Chao Chu and Chen-ko which were too improper to mention. And because Chao Yuan acted as if he were deaf and blind, they made no effort to conceal things from him. But they deceived no one else. Everyone in the household could see that Chao Chu was a grateful man and that he showed his gratitude to Chao Yuan by purchasing and presenting him with a brilliant green hat.¹⁷ Chao Yuan should have been content with the present, but he was not. He hankered after a scholar's hat that would mark him as a member of the Imperial Academy. He made known his desire to his father, and the latter readily acceded to his wishes. The necessary steps were taken and, after paying a fee of less than three hundred taels, he gained admission to that institution.

¹⁷In Chinese, "wearing a green hat" is a satirical term for a cuckold.

From that time on, he would put on his scholar's hat and Provincial Graduate's robe and march into the Academy to answer the roll call.

Thus, under the pretext of having to attend the Academy, Chao Yuan stayed on in the Capital. His expenses were sent to him every few days from T'ung-chou. After a while, he made the acquaintance of an unlicensed prostitute and would stay at her place several days at a time without returning to Chen-ko's house, on the pretext that he was on duty in the Academy. Since Chen-ko herself was similarly occupied with Chao Chu, she did not miss him at all. On the twentieth of the twelfth month, the elder Chao sent word to him by a servant, saying, "At this time of the year even students in the elementary schools are out on vacation. What is keeping you in the Capital?" Chao Yuan told the servant to report to his father that he would go back to T'ung-chou after the fair on the twenty-fifth. For the next few days he busied himself with shopping for the New Year festival. He bought Chen-ko all sorts of clothing, jewelry, hats, shoes and things to eat. He also bought her four ounces of snow-white pearls and some jade.

At the fair that day there were on sale two very unusual items, which attracted a large crowd, but which no one could afford to buy. Chao Yuan pushed his way through one crowd and saw exhibited in the centre a large, gilded, square cage. There was a small square table painted with red lacquer. On the table was placed a copy of the Heart Sutra (*Prajna-paramita-hrdaya* Sutra) written in gold on blue paper, and in front of it, on a cushion, sat a well-fed cat, purring contentedly. The man who was trying to sell the cat was saying, "The cat belonged to Buddha of the Western Paradise. It had broken Buddha's injunction not to kill by killing a mouse which was stealing oil from the glass lamp. The Buddha was very angry and wanted the cat to pay for the life of the mouse with its own. Fortunately, the eight Vajra Kings, the four great Bodhisattvas and the eighteen Arhats interceded on its behalf, and its life was spared on the condition that it be banished from the Western Paradise and made to live among mortal men to be fed like an ordinary house-cat for fifty years. It was brought to our land by some tribute-bearers. If you listen to it carefully, you will hear that it is not purring like an ordinary cat but is chanting the name of the merciful and compassionate Kuan-yin and praying that the Bodhisattva deliver it from punishment and let it return to the Western Paradise." Chao Yuan listened to the cat carefully and found that it indeed seemed to be chanting the name of the Bodhisattva. "It is indeed a remarkable cat," he said. "Remarkable enough with its long red hair, even without singing the praise of Buddha. Where is the tribute-bearer from the West? I would like to see him and find out more about the cat." "He was in a hurry to go back west," the man said, "and sold it to me for two hundred and fifty taels." "How could it be worth so much silver?" Chao Yuan said in surprise. "What good is it?" "What a question!" the man exclaimed. "If it were not good for something extraordinary, why should anyone pay close to three hundred taels for it when for thirty or forty *cash* you can buy a very nice cat? That it will keep away rats goes without saying. In fact you will not find a single rat within ten *li* of where it is.

"It is a curse to those who sell rat poison; it drives them out of business and causes them to suffer starvation. Any family that keeps this cat around will be protected by a host of heavenly generals and warriors from all kinds of evil spirits, such as foxes, monkeys and ghosts, against which even Chang *T'ien-shih*, the Celestial Master, could do nothing. Recently the daughter of a family living near the Hanlin Academy was bewitched by a fox spirit and was on the point of death. Her people hired two well-known Taoist priests to chase away the fox, but instead of getting rid of the fox they were almost killed by the fox. Then they posted a charm written by the Celestial Master's own hand. During the night, they heard a loud rustling noise from the spot where the charm was posted. Thinking that the fox had been caught, the girl's people went into the room to investigate and found that the noise came from the charm. The latter broke out in human speech, saying that it had urgent need of going to the latrine but did not dare to go out because the fox spirit was waiting outside. On the morning of the following day, I happened to pass by the house where the girl lived, and I was carrying the cage with the cat in it. The fox spirit

Material not available due to copyright restrictions.

"The cat belonged to Buddha of the Western Paradise"

knew nothing of this and happened to come out of the gate. As soon as she caught sight of the cat, she gave out a howl and dropped dead on the spot. The family of the bewitched girl invited me in, treated me to an elaborate dinner and gave me five taels of silver for having saved their daughter. I skinned the fox, and had its fur treated and made into a muffler, the very one which I am wearing now."

After a few moments during which the crowd digested the cat man's story, one of the spectators said, "The man has made up the story to make fun of Chang *T'ien-shih*, whose charms are often useless." The cat man then answered with a straight face, "It's not a story I have made up. If you don't believe it, you can go to the bewitched family and find out. The Hanlin Academy is not far from here. The girl's father works in the Academy and is well known in the neighbourhood."

Chao Yuan was impressed by the man's claim that the cat could keep away evil spirits, especially by his claim that it was the death of foxes. He said to the cat man, "Let us not beat around the bush or argue whether the cat did or did not cause the fox fairy to die. Now tell me just how much you really want for the cat—if you really want to sell it."

"Of course I want to sell it," the man said. "Otherwise, why should I brave the cold wind and stand out here. The New Year is upon us, and I have debts to pay. The only thing of value I have to sell is this cat. And to be frank with you, I did not have the entire amount to pay for the cat. Who has that kind of money nowadays? I had to borrow from friends. What I have is not something that you can sell in a hurry. I had been hoping to get three hundred taels, but if you, sir, want it, I'll let it go for two hundred and ninety."

"That's quite absurd," Chao Yuan said. "I'll give you twenty-nine taels and not a candareen more."

"What a counter-offer, my noble sir," the man said. "Even a man from Soochow would have offered half the asking price, and here you offer only one-tenth!"

"All right," Chao Yuan said. "I'll give you three taels more and make it thirty-two taels."

"I would not part with the cat if it were not because of the urgent needs of the New Year," the man said. "If I can manage to pass through this critical juncture, I can make lots of money by using my cat to conquer foxes and other evil things."

The mention of the cat's ability to conquer foxes again made its impression on Chao, and he was determined to buy the cat. So he increased his offer to thirty-five, thirty-eight, forty, and forty-five, but the man still would not part with the cat. Fearing that Chao Yuan might get annoyed at his refusal and walk away, the man's accomplices spoke up and, through their good offices, a bargain of fifty taels was finally struck. Chao Yuan took a large ingot of silver and gave it to the cat seller, the latter handed the cat over, and both parties happily went their separate ways. But before he handed over the cat, the seller fell on his knees and kowtowed to the cat, saying, "My Lord Buddha Cat, I would never part with you if I could possibly help it."

As Chao Yuan was about to go home, a man called to him, "Sir, please buy my parrot. I am also pressed by debts and need money to pay them off." Chao Yuan stopped to look at the parrot and then said to the man, "I have several at home already; I don't want him." Thereupon the man said to the parrot, "The gentleman does not want to buy you. You had better beg him to buy you, for I can no longer afford to buy beans to feed you." Apparently in response to the man's remark, the parrot flapped its wings and said, "If you, sir, don't buy me, who will?" It spoke with a clear, almost human voice. This tickled Chao Yuan, and he said, "Truly, 'One has seen nothing until one visits the two Capitals.' I have never seen a parrot like this." Then he said to the man with the parrot, "Now how much do you want for it?" The man answered, "The parrot cannot be compared to the cat, which gives protection against evil spirits; its only worth is the time it takes to train it. The only practical purpose it serves is to take the place of servants and maids in passing along messages [in announcing guests and so on]. So I cannot ask very much for it. Sir, if you like it very much, give me a good price; if you do not care for it so much, give me less. I am after all a trainer of parrots in the palace, and I get a batch trained every six months or so. I manage to smuggle out a few of them. You, sir, can have it for thirty taels." "I'll give you twelve taels," Chao Yuan said. The man said it was too little. As Chao Yuan turned away, the man held out a handful of mung beans and said to the parrot, "You will starve to death if the gentleman does not buy you," whereupon the parrot flapped its wings and said repeatedly, "If you, sir, do not buy me, who will?" "How remarkable," Chao Yuan said. "It's worth a couple of taels more." So saying, he opened his purse and took out two packages of silver, one with ten taels in it and the other five, and gave them to the man. After opening the packages and looking at them, the man said, "There are only fifteen taels here, really not enough. However, I can see that you, sir, are not a man accustomed to haggling. So I'll let you have it."

Chao Yuan returned to Chen-ko's house with the cat and the parrot triumphantly like a tribute-bearer. But Chen-ko cast only an indifferent glance at them; she showed an interest only in the clothes and jewelry that Chao Yuan had bought her. "Stupid woman," Chao Yuan said. "You *would* get excited about those trinkets instead of these two true treasures." "Treasures nothing!" Chen-ko said contemptuously. "What's so unusual about a long-haired cat or a parrot?" "Stupid woman," Chao Yuan said, "When did you ever see a cat like this or a parrot which can speak so well?" "Now you tell me what's so remarkable about them," Chen-ko said. "Don't be so obstinate," Chao Yuan said. "Where can you find a cat weighing as much as fifteen or sixteen catties, as this must weigh?" "That shows how ignorant you are," Chen-ko retorted. "In the Capital you can find any number of cats that are larger than dogs and dogs smaller than cats." "But how about the parrot?" Chao Yuan persisted. "Do any of the parrots we have speak as well as this one?" "How come that it is not saying anything now?" At this Chao Yuan took some mung beans and said to the parrot: "Say something to the lady, and I'll give you some beans." And the

parrot responded by saying, "If you, sir, do not buy me, who will?" Chen-ko laughed and said, "What it says is perfectly true. Now, parrot, speak some more, and I'll give you some beans to eat." And the parrot again said the same thing. Chen-ko laughed again and said, "My foolish brother, you have been taken in. Now try again and see if you can make it say something else." Chao Yuan said, trying a new tack, "There comes the cat, parrot." He repeated this several times, and every time the parrot answered, "If you, sir, do not buy me, who will?" "What did you buy that thing for," Chen-ko said. "With the few mace you paid for it, you could have bought some melon seeds and candy, always needed for the New Year season." "A few mace!" Chao Yuan said. "It cost fifteen taels." Chen-ko said, "Heng! Fifteen taels! For that you should have gotten fifty parrots at least. How much did you pay for it really?" "I did pay fifteen taels for it, not a candareen less," Chao Yuan said. "I never!" Chen-ko said. And turning to the cat, "How many mace did you pay for this?" Here Chao Chu broke in, "The master paid a whole large ingot for it." "What has come over you two that you insist on such tall tales?" Chen-ko said. "Don't tell me that we are taken in about the cat too," Chao Chu said. "Where did you ever see a bright red cat and one that can chant the name of Buddha?" "Not only red cats, but you can have them green or blue or purple or any other colour you like; all it takes is a little dye," Chen-ko said. "My obstinate mama," Chao Yuan said. "Don't talk such nonsense. Now wet your fingers and rub the cat and see if any colour comes off." "What ignorance!" Chen-ko said. "The colour won't come off if madder¹⁸ is used. Everyone knows that. Does the colour come off rugs and tassels?" "But how can you dye a live animal?"

"Why not? How about old men who dye their beards? They don't have to wait until they are dead. You remember the white cat we had, don't you? It was originally red, even redder than this one here."

"Then how did it become white?"

"It became white after it shed its hairs in the spring."

After a moment of silence, Chao Yuan turned to Chao Chu and said, "It looks as if we also have been taken in about the colour of the cat. But its ability to chant the name of Buddha is at least unusual."

"Let's hear it do that," Chen-ko said. Chao Yuan took the cat and scratched it under the chin and, when it began to purr, he said to Chen-ko, "Now listen to it. Isn't it chanting the name of Kuan-yin?" "Don't make me laugh," Chen-ko said. "If that's chanting the name of Buddha, then there is no cat that doesn't." Then turning to her maid, she said, "Go and fetch our Tortoise Shell." When the maid came back with Tortoise Shell, Chen-ko took it in her arms, stroked it under the chin, and soon it began to sing the name of Kuan-yin also. "Hear that?" Chen-ko said. "If that cat of yours is worth fifty taels, then Tortoise Shell should be worth sixty taels, for it chants even more loudly. The fact is that all cats purr like this; there is nothing especial about your cat. But Peking must have its share of fools like you if the swindlers are to make a living."

Chao Yuan had nothing to say to this; Chao Chu also felt foolish and withdrew discreetly. Finally Chao Yuan said, "Anyway, it's not our own money. I'll charge it to father and say that it will keep the rats away. We'll feed it as an ordinary cat and use it to catch rats." He told a maid to put some mung beans in the cage. When the parrot saw the beans, it flapped its wings and screeched the only line in its repertoire. Then Chao Yuan had the maid take the red lacquer table out of the cat cage, put a bowl of feed on it and return it to the cage. The cat began to eat, finishing only half of the bowl's contents.

¹⁸*Rubia cordifolia*, 茜草, a plant from which a dye known as alizarin is made.

Chapter 7



After the cat and the parrot had been taken away, the maids set up a small table on the *k'ang* and served dinner, in the midst of which a maid came to report that several rats had crawled into the cage of the red cat and were eating the food in its feed bowl. "Nonsense," Chao Yuan said. "What did the cat do?" "Nothing," the maid answered. "It just continued to purr with its eyes closed." "Apparently the cat doesn't mind rats under its paws and kills only those ten or more *li* away," Chen-ko laughed, and continued: "At first I also thought that the red colour of the cat I had was natural. Two years ago I was visiting Mr Chiang's house when that white cat of mine came into the room. It looked as red as blood in the sun, and I thought it was extraordinary. Mrs Chiang told me that it was a very rare breed that had been brought from some foreign land as tribute. I did not believe it, and later one of the concubines told me that it had been dyed with madder. She took me to the pavilion in the garden and showed me a flock of more than ten cats of various colours, all of a brilliant hue and looking very pretty in the sun. 'Let me have a red one,' I said to the concubine, and she said she would ask Mr. Chiang about it. Just then he came into the garden, and the concubine said to him, 'Chen-ko would like to have a red cat.' 'That cat is worth two thousand taels,' Mr Chiang said. 'It is not something that I would want to give away. She will have to perform twenty thousand plays for me before she can have it.' I said, 'All I need to turn a white cat into a red one is two candareens worth of madder.' Mr Chiang looked at the concubine and said, 'Did you tell her?' 'Yes, I did,' said she. 'She kept asking me if the colour was real.' Then she said to me, 'Go ahead and thank the master if you really want one.' So I kowtowed to Mr Chiang and walked out with the cat before he could say anything. All winter it was marvelled at by all those who came to our establishment. But the following spring it shed its hair and became all white. Later when Mr. Chiang visited me and asked about the cat, I said to him, 'I swapped it for a white one.'

"As for the parrot, I also had a similar experience. I bought it for three mace; it was a young bird and still had its red beak. I had its cage hung under the eaves. It soon learned the line, 'Maid, Sister wants hot water. Brother-in-law is staying for the night [*lit.* is going into the chamber]', and would say it whenever a client came into the compound. One day Liu Hai-chai came and was greeted by the parrot with its usual line. Liu Hai-chai was greatly tickled and begged me to let him have it. I refused, and he said, 'I'll give you my black donkey for it.' 'What else would you throw in?' I said. 'All right,' he said, 'I'll give you a bolt of silk in addition.' So we concluded the deal, and Liu Hai-chai took the parrot home and hung it outside his room. One day his brother-in-law came to visit him, and the parrot, seeing him, said, 'Maid, bring some hot water; Brother-in-law is staying for the night.' Mrs Liu was terribly embarrassed and shouted at it to stop, but the more she shouted at it the more it insisted, 'Maid, bring some hot water; Brother-in-law is staying for the night.' Liu Hai-chai sent the parrot back to me with the message that I could keep the silk but he wanted the donkey back. I told him that I had sold the donkey. So he never got it back."

"And what happened to the parrot?" Chao Yuan asked.

Chen-ko said, "I was away one day. No one took it in that night, and it froze to death. Yang Ku-yueh said it was still warm and might be saved. He took it home, fed it some warm potion and then left it on the *k'ang* and covered it with a towel. In the afternoon, he observed a movement under the towel and, after uncovering it, found that it had revived. He kept it for several months until it died from the fumes that came from the cauldron in which he was preparing a batch of medicated plaster."

Now the elder Chao had been expecting his son to come to T'ung-chou on the twenty-sixth. When the latter did not show up on the twenty-seventh, he said to his wife, "I wonder what Yuan-

erh is up to in the Capital. It is the twenty-seventh today, and there is no sign of him. I hope he has not gotten into some trouble."

Madame Chao said with a sigh, "I don't think he is in any trouble, but from the gossip among the servants I gather that he has taken an actress as a concubine in Wu-ch'eng. He has neglected Daughter-in-law and made her miserable. I overheard also that he has brought the actress to the Capital with him without letting us know."

"Who told you that?" the elder Chao asked.

"No one would tell me a thing like that. But that appears to be what has happened from the gossip I overheard."

"I doubt if that's true. Daughter-in-law is not one to put up with such things."

"It is true that Daughter-in-law is a pretty hard woman. But just as the emperor becomes quite powerless once the people rise up in rebellion, there is little that she could do if Yuan-erh decides to ignore her."

"If that is the case," the elder Chao said, "we might as well let him bring this actress to live here in the yamen. It does not make sense for him to maintain a separate establishment for her."

"Do what you think best," Madame Chao said. "But I am sure Daughter-in-law would not like it."

"That can't be helped," the elder Chao said. "So tell the servants to get a suite of rooms ready. I'll send word to Yuan-erh tomorrow."

The next day he sent Chao Feng with a letter to Chao Yuan, together with one hundred ounces of silver. The letter read:

"You are our only son. In our old age, nothing will give us greater happiness than to have you near us. At this time near the end of the year, what is it that keeps you in the Capital? It has been brought to my attention that you have brought with you a concubine. Why did you not let me know? I can see that you would feel uneasy to leave her alone in the Capital. So I am sending Chao Feng to bring you and your concubine here to live with us; I shall not rebuke you for having taken a concubine without my permission. Realizing that you may have expenses to meet, I am sending you with the letter one hundred ounces of silver. Send Chao Feng back immediately and let us know when you are coming. To Yuan-erh from Father."

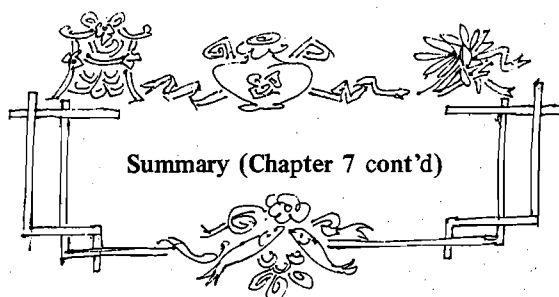
When Chao Feng arrived at Chao Yuan's residence in the Capital, he found the gate open, so he walked in and came upon Chen-ko playing shuttle-cock with Chao Chu's wife. Upon seeing Chao Feng, Chen-ko flew into her room. Just then Chao Yuan came into the yard from the rear of the house and said to Chao Feng, "I am just getting ready to go to T'ung-chou; what have you come for?" Chao Feng answered, "*Lao-yeh* is anxious to see *Ta-yeh* and has sent me to escort *Ta-yeh* and *Chen-yi* to T'ung-chou." Chao Yuan lowered his voice and asked, "How did *Lao-yeh* and *Nai-nai* come to know about *Chen-yi*? Who told them?"

Chao Feng answered, "I don't know how they learned about it. *Lao-yeh* told me to come here to ask *Ta-yeh* to go back with *Chen-yi* today. I am to return right away to report that his message has been delivered. Here is *Lao-yeh's* letter and the two packages of silver he sent."

Chao Yuan read his father's letter and could not help feeling a little ashamed of himself, for his father's anxiety was quite obvious. He ordered food and wine for Chao Feng, tipped him three hundred cash and sent him back to T'ung-chou with a letter to his father, which read:

"I did not dare let you know what I had done, because it was done without your permission. Since you have no objections, I shall come with my little wife to T'ung-chou and present her to you and mother. However, I do not want to live in the inner court; I prefer the rooms in the eastern compound. Please have them ready. The hundred ounces of silver have been duly received."

Chao Feng returned to T'ung-chou that evening and reported to the elder Chao and his wife on his mission. "Did you see the new mistress?" Madame Chao asked him, and when he answered that he had, she asked him what she looked like. "You have seen her yourself, Madam," Chao Feng said. "She is the actress who played the principal female role, named Chen-ko." "I don't remember who she is," Madame Chao said. "There were quite a few of them in the troupe." "She is the one who played Hung-niang at the farewell party given by Madame Chi," Chao Feng said. "Madam liked her singing and gave her two handkerchiefs and three mace of silver." "Ah, I remember now," Madame Chao said. "She was a lovely girl." However, the elder Chao said, "It is too bad that it turns out to be she." "I don't see why you say that," Madame Chao said. "She was a vivacious girl. You must have seen her yourself." "I have never seen her, but I have heard about her. A few years back the new Provincial Graduate of Wu-ch'eng was ruined because of her. The clerk, Fan, took a fancy to her and kept her on a steady basis. Because of this, the clerk's wife hanged herself. The case landed in court. I am afraid she is going to cause trouble."



In due course, Chao Yuan went to T'ung-chou with Chen-ko and presented the latter to his parents. It was apparent to Chen-ko that she did not make a good impression on Chao Yuan's parents and she felt unhappy about it. Then toward the end of the month (1449), the Tartars intensified their border raids and a state of emergency was declared for the Metropolitan area including T'ung-chou. Chao Yuan and his father were terrified. The elder Chao wanted to resign his post but his counsellor told him that it would not only be unseemly for him to seek retirement at such a critical time but that there was no chance of the request being granted. He would only bring upon his head a severe rebuke. The elder Chao then had his son compose his request for retirement and sent copies to various government agencies concerned. He drew severe reprimands and was told in no uncertain terms to remain at his post or face dire consequences. As for Chao Yuan, he did not want his father to resign his post for that would deprive him of a good income the advantage of which he himself had been enjoying. What he wished was that his father should remain at his post while he sought the comparative safety of Wu-

ch'eng a thousand *li* or so farther south.

To make things worse, a bribery case in which the elder Chao was involved during his term of office at Hua-t'ing came to light at this time and the former magistrate was in danger of being impeached. It occurred to Chao Yuan that Liang Sheng and Hu Tan, influential actors, might be able to help. Accordingly he went into Peking to see them.

CHAPTER 8. Arriving in the Capital, Chao Yuan found everything in a state of great confusion and tight security in force as a consequence of the T'u-mu disaster. For reasons of his own, the eunuch Wang Chen had persuaded the Emperor Ying Tsung to undertake a personal campaign against the Tartars. The imperial army was defeated, the emperor captured and carried off and Wang Chen and his two chief lieutenants (who were related to the two actors) were killed by the Tartar hordes. Hundreds of other officials who accompanied the emperor on the campaign also perished. When news of the disaster reached the capital, the regent gave orders to seek out and bring to justice the henchmen and supporters of Wang. Because of this, Liang Sheng and Hu Tan were in hiding and under disguise. However, Chao Yuan was able to locate them and they did prove useful in interceding for the elder Chao.

Then the author suddenly tells us that on the fifteenth (of the third month) a farewell feast was held for Chao Yuan for he was to set out for Wu-ch'eng. Earlier the author had hinted that Chao Yuan would like to abandon his parents but could not bring himself to come out with it. Then there is a casual sentence about a date for the departure of Chao Yuan being set for the sixteenth of the third month. But not a word to suggest what excuse Chao Yuan offered for abandoning his parents.

Before Chao Yuan's departure, Madame Chao called Chao Chu and his wife and gave them a long oral message to be delivered to Chi-shih. The burden of the message was that Chi-shih should not have consented to let Chao Yuan take a concubine in the first place and that since the rice had been cooked, there was nothing to do except for her to be patient and wait for the arrival of her father and mother-in-law. She also sent Chi-shih some money and presents. In the process she made some uncomplimentary remarks about Chen-ko.

On the journey back to Wu-ch'eng, Chao Yuan's party were detained by rain at Te-chow, not far from Wu-ch'eng. Being thrown together in the crowded inn and having time on their hands, Chao Chu's wife, who was a born gossip, began to relate to Chen-ko the message Madame Chao had given to her, enumerated the presents and the amount of gold and silver she was taking to Chi-shih and embroidered on the uncomplimentary remarks that Madame Chao had made about Chen-ko. "I would not have had anything to do with that stinking piece of worn goods for anything," she reported Madame as saying. "Not even if her pimp had offered her free of charge on his bended knees. I would have driven her away with a stick so that she would not soil my door step. Just imagine paying eight hundred taels of silver for her. Several times I was on the point of calling her to me, stripping her of her clothes, cutting off her hair, giving her a good beating and then presenting her to some beggar. But I could not do that in the yamen. So tell your *ta-nai-nai* to be patient; tell her that I'll take care of that woman after I get home."

Now, honoured readers, as an actress Chen-ko had had to put up with all kinds of abuse and humiliation. She was used to having people pull her hair, pinch her in the thigh, bite her nose, call her a nympho and so on without daring to protest. But now she had been so spoiled by Chao Yuan that she became as jumpy as a flea. She tore loose her hair, cursed Heaven and Earth, rolled on the ground, beat her head and carried on until a large crowd was gathered . . .

Chen-ko continued to fly into tantrums and to nag Chao Yuan all the way to Wu-ch'eng and did not quiet down even then. She demanded that Chao Yuan take from Chi-shih the presents which Madame Chao had given to her and turn them over to herself. Finally Chao Yuan lost patience and shut her up with an appropriate and well-deserved lecture.

A few months later an incident occurred which touched off another outburst from Chen-ko. A Taoist priestess named Hai Hui and a Buddhist nun named Kuo were seen coming out from Chi-shih's compound, whereupon Chen-ko went into a tirade against Chi-shih and accused her of having entertained a priest and a monk. Incomprehensible as it was, Chao Yuan was persuaded that his wife had indeed been having affairs with two men and took steps to divorce her. It was this false accusation and the threat of a divorce against her that caused Chi-shih to commit suicide, as mentioned in the brief summary in my Preface. But we must let the author tell the story in his own words, for the flash-back giving the background of the Taoist priestess is typical of the many long digressions which are interesting enough in their own right but which are not part of the main theme.

* * * * *

Chapter 8



ow the mother of Major Liu, commandant of the local garrison of Wu-ch'eng, had a maid by the name of Ch'ing-mei (Green Plum), who was then sixteen years old and suddenly became afflicted with a case of amenorrhea, a very serious disorder which kills eleven out of ten. Madame Liu did everything she could to have her cured, and she herself vowed that she would take vows and become a Taoist priestess if she should get well. It so happened that an itinerant medicine-monger stopped by and took shelter from the rain under the gate of the Liu house. The gatekeeper got into a conversation with him and in the course of it spoke of Ch'ing-mei's affliction, remarking on its high fatality rate.

"Actually there are two forms of the disease," the medicine-monger said. "If it is due to constitutional weakness, trying to cure it is like trying to get water to flow in a dry well—it does no good no matter how hard you try. But if it is due to some temporary functional disorder, the blockage can be relieved without difficulty."

The gatekeeper described Ch'ing-mei's condition to the monger and asked if he would prescribe something for her. "Let me take a look at her," the monger said. "I would not want to prescribe unless it is the curable type."

The gatekeeper reported the conversation to Madame Liu, and Ch'ing-mei was sent to the middle gate for the monger to look over. The latter took her pulse and observed that she was in good physical condition. "The disease is not serious," he said at last. "One dose of my medicine will start the menses again."

Hearing this, Madame Liu, who had been listening inside the gate, said: "The girl has no father. If you cure her, I'll give you a complete new outfit of clothes and one for your mate, if you have one, and have Ch'ing-mei honour you as a father." The medicine-monger was all smiles on hearing this and refused to accept the two hundred *cash* which Madame Liu offered him for the medicine, saying, "Since the little sister is going to be a daughter to me, how can I accept any

payment?" But Madame Liu said, "It is so little. You must accept it as a good luck token." The monger accepted the money only then. He took out from his chest a package of pills the size of mung beans, counted out seven and said that they should be taken with water spiced with saffron and the meat of peach stones. The broth was prepared and the pills taken. In about an hour's time, Ch'ing-mei began to feel a pain in the abdominal region, which grew worse until she passed several pints of dark urine with a strong odour. This was followed by a flow of healthy red blood. When this was reported to the medicine-monger, he said, "That means that the patient is cured. For a while she must refrain from drinking cold water and eating onion or garlic. She should take some good tonic until she has fully regained her strength."

Gradually Ch'ing-mei put on weight and colour as predicted by the medicine-monger, now her adopted father, and she began to pester Madame Liu to let her become a priestess, as she had vowed. Madame Liu, however, did not think it a good idea. "It is not an easy life to be a priestess," she said. "You know nothing about what it means and imagine that it would be full of advantages. Once you take the vows it would be difficult for you to return to the world, should you find the cloistered life not to your liking. The sensible thing for you is to get married after you have fully recovered."

Her mistress's advice was good, but Ch'ing-mei had her own reasons for her choice. She reasoned thus: I know I am not very pretty and have little chance of becoming a concubine of someone of rank and wealth. Even if I did, there is no assurance that I would win the favor of the master, or that the mistress would be kind. If luck should be against me, I'll suffer the rest of my life. So the life of a concubine is out. The life of a courtesan has its advantages—good clothes and fine cosmetics and a chance to pick and choose my men, a new man every night if I want. But it has its disadvantages too. Madame will beat you if you fail to attract clients, or if you can't keep them. Then you are looked down on by all and hated by women, who blame you for leading their husbands astray. Besides these two possibilities, there is the choice suggested by the mistress, to become the wife of a serving man or a peasant. That may be respectable, but you'll have no freedom whatever; you can't even step outside the gate without good reason, to say nothing of having a lover. Moreover, it will be nothing but work and work, leaving you too tired to have a real good night's sleep with your man. So it's no good to be the wife of a poor man. On the other hand, as a Taoist priestess, a woman can be as free as a bat, which when called upon by the Phoenix to pay homage to it can claim that it walks on four feet, and can claim that it flies on wings when the *ch'i-lin*, the king of the beasts, requires its allegiance. She is a free agent, who does not need to answer to anyone. As a nun I can have my pick of the young, handsome and powerful monks, sleep with whomever I wish, change partners every night if I wish, or keep the same one as long as he performs satisfactorily. However, a nun has to shave her head, which marks her from ordinary women and limits her field of operation among the monks. Moreover, she is regarded as an unlucky object and subjected to insults. A Taoist priestess does not have to shave off her hair. By changing her costume and hairdo she can pass for an ordinary woman and pick a lover from any walk of life, in addition to the Taoist priests. And she is welcome in the inner apartments of the best families. Good or bad, kind or cruel, jealous or otherwise—all women seem to like Taoist priestesses. She is asked to stay for dinner, given the warmest spot on the *k'ang* and urged to stay as long as she can. When she leaves, she is loaded with all sorts of presents, money, clothes, all kinds of delicacies, and religious objects. Sometimes she is entrusted with errands, which gives her a chance to get kickbacks. "I have thought over the matter very carefully," she concluded. "There is nothing I would rather do than become a Taoist priestess. If the mistress will not give me permission, there is only one other way out for me."

"And what is that?" her fellow maids asked.

"I'll kill myself," Ch'ing-mei said.

When this was reported to Madame Liu, she said: "I have never heard such nonsense. Supposing I let her become a Taoist priestess, and supposing she could have fun with the monks and

Taoist priests. Does she think she can get away with it? She will be arrested and have her fingers pressed until she soils her pants. We have had a number of nuns and priestesses visit us. Let Ch'ing-mei name one who has had affairs with monks or priests."

The maids said, "We did ask her the same question, but she said, 'Suppose you name one who hasn't.'"

At this Madame Liu exclaimed: "Aiya! The girl must have gone mad to make such slanderous, blasphemous accusations against the servants of Buddha and the gods. I wash my hands of her, I wash my hands of her. Let her do as she wishes."

The almanac was consulted, and the eighth of the fourth month was found to be an auspicious day and so on that day Madame Liu personally took Ch'ing-mei to the Convent of the White-Robed and gave her to the superior as the latter's disciple, together with many offerings appropriate to the occasions. Ch'ing-mei was given the religious name, Hai Hui, so that it corresponds with Hai Ch'ao, the name of the first disciple.

But it so happened that Hai Hui's star was unlucky, for the superior, who fell ill shortly after Hai Hui entered the convent, languished and died, leaving the two young priestesses in charge of the convent. It turned out that Hai Hui was right in her expectations. She soon established a large clientele and enjoyed visiting from one family to another quite as much as Confucius did in travelling from one state to another. Sometime later, there came to Wu-ch'eng a Buddhist nun name Kuo, tall of stature, plump and white of complexion. She put up at the Convent of the White-Robed and became quite friendly with Hai Hui, who often took her on her round of visits. She was a very clever woman, and would sail in whatever direction the wind blew. If the lady of the house were inclined to be loose in her morals, she would steer her on the path of wickedness. But if her patron happened to be a good woman, she would assume a pious mien quite worthy of the two Ch'eng brothers of Honan¹⁹ and speak of nothing but the mercy and the glory of Buddha. As a result, she became a great favorite with the womenfolk of Wu-ch'eng, whatever their inclinations; to the pious she seemed like a truly holy woman, who might at any moment achieve Buddhahood.

Now Chi-shih, like most women in Wu-ch'eng, was a patroness of Hai Hui and the nun Kuo. Though she was no exemplary woman, she was by no means a wicked one. Her only fault was that she was not as obedient and yielding a wife as she might have been. But as to being unfaithful to Chao Yuan, the thought never entered her mind. So although she received the nun Kuo in her compound, the latter was unable to corrupt her in the least.

Though Chen-ko quietened down for the moment, after Chao Yuan had chided her for her unreasonable jealousy of Chi-shih, she was like a bagful of corn—ready to pop and explode. On the sixth of the sixth month, she was in the yard watching the maids hanging up clothes to air in the sun when Hai Hui and the nun Kuo emerged from Chi-shih's compound and walked toward the gate. Thereupon Chen-ko said in a loud voice, "A respectable family indeed and a young lady of fine background! Look at that strapping, well-built Taoist priest and the stout, fair-skinned Buddhist monk, coming out of her room one after the other. Although I came from a lowly family and was an actress and prostitute before my marriage, I would never stop so low as to have anything to do with such stinking ox noses and bald asses. I'd rather be without men for ten thousand years than lie with such creatures as these." Chao Yuan, who was taking a nap in the pavilion to the west, was awakened by the outcry and sauntered over to see what it was about. Chen-ko repeated her accusations and called Chao Yuan a turtle and a cuckold a hundred times over. "It is too bad your mother is not here to see the carryings-on of her fine daughter-in-law," she said. "If I had done the same thing, I am sure she would be true to her threat, have my hair cut

¹⁹The two Ch'eng brothers were Ch'eng Hao known Neo-Confucianists. (1032-1085) and Ch'eng I (1033-1107), both well-

off and marry me off to a beggar." "What are you talking about?" Chao Yuan said. "How could it be that a monk and a priest should come out from there at high noon?" "What a stupid cuckold you are," Chen-ko raved. "The servants have been here hanging up clothes, and they all saw it. I am not the only one."

When Chao Yuan asked the maids, some kept silent, some said it did look as if a monk and a priest had come out from Chi-shih's compound, but one maid, who had recognized Hai Hui, said, "One was Hai Hui, formerly the maid in Major Liu's house. It was definitely no man priest." "That's right," Chao Yuan said. "Ch'ing-mei is a tall, severe-looking woman and could be easily mistaken for a man, but how about the monk?" The maid answered, "I don't know who he is, but since he is in the company of Ch'ing-mei, the chances are that it was a nun that we saw." "Nonsense," Chen-ko said. "I have never seen a nun so big and fat and with such large features!" "Ch'ing-mei often acts as a pander," Chao Yuan said. "She might have brought a monk, pretending that it was a nun. Have the gatekeeper come in, and I'll question him."

The man on duty as gatekeeper that day was Ch'ü Chiu-chou, and to Chao Yuan's question, he answered, "They were no monk and priest, but Ch'ing-mei and a nun. They went inside about lunch-time and just came out. How could I have let them in if they were monk and priest?" "We all know that the priestess is Ch'ing-mei," Chao Yuan said, "but who was the nun? I imagine you must know all the baldheaded females in Wu-ch'eng. Which one of them has been here?" Ch'ü Chiu-chou thought for a moment and answered, "I don't know who she is; I have never seen her before." Thereupon Chen-ko spat in disgust and said, "Since you don't know, how can you tell whether it was monk or nun? Are you trying to protect someone?" "I have never seen a monk so fair-skinned and plump," the servant said. "She wouldn't want a skinny one with a dark skin!" Chen-ko sneered.

At this Chao Yuan stamped his feet and shook his fists and cried, "I can put up with a lot, but I won't be a cuckold. Someone go and ask old Chi and his son to come here. Tell them that Chi-shih wants to see them." In a short while, Chi Tu and his son arrived. After they were seated in the guest hall, old Chi said, "I wanted to call after hearing of your return, but I had refrained because I was not sure that I would be welcome. I understand that my daughter wants to see me, so I shall now go to her compound." "Actually it is I who want to see you," Chao Yuan said. "There is something I want you to know." "What is it that you want me to know?" old Chi said, and added with sarcasm, "Could it be that my daughter has been keeping a man around and earned you the name of a cuckold?" "That's exactly it," Chao Yuan said. "You are very good at guessing, indeed!" He told old Chi what he thought had happened and concluded thus: "Your daughter is jealous and quarrelsome and has many other faults. I have held my nose and said nothing, because they are common to most women. But now this. Although I have taken an actress, she has maintained the dignity of her new position and did nothing to bring shame on me. Your daughter is my proper wife, and yet she has done this unspeakable thing. So I have asked you to come; I want to tell you that I have had enough of her. You can take her away quietly, or we can settle the matter in court. It is up to you."

Old Chi was not flustered in the least at the accusation. He said quietly, "Do not be hasty, Chao *Ta-kuan*, and say things that you cannot prove. This morning Ch'ing-mei and the nun named Kuo from Ching-chou visited my nephew's family. I saw them come out and head in this direction. It must be they that you saw. She wore a robe of dark green, right? Don't tell me that the nun is a two-header and has a prick besides her usual thing. Since you have made the charge, let us settle it once and for all. During all these years, she has never asked you for any new clothes, and the food she consumed is more than covered by what is produced by the land that I gave her as part of her dowry. So I suggest that you retract while you can. If you want to take the matter to court, I am quite ready to oblige and argue the matter before the magistrate." "There is no use trying to reason with a man without conscience such as he," said Chao Yuan's brother-in-law. "He has deliberately made this monstrous accusation. If we oppose him, there is no telling what

he might do to Sister. So let him divorce my sister. We are not so poor that we cannot feed another mouth. We'll wait until his parents come back and speak to them about it. As for bringing the matter before the magistrate, what good does that do nowadays, when there is no such thing as justice at all? All he has to do is pay a few hundred taels of silver to the magistrate for a judgment against us and thus make the false appear true on the official records." Then turning to Chao Yuan, he continued, "Do what you like, Chao *Ta-kuan*. If you want to divorce my sister, write a bill of divorce. We'll go home and get a room ready for her and take her back to us. There is no problem at all. You gentry family with influence threaten to go to the magistrate on the least provocation; you don't realize that we poor people are so scared of facing him that we wet our pants at the very thought of it." "Come on," old Chi said, agreeing with his son. "Let us go inside and see what your sister has to say."

In the meantime, Chi-shih was not aware of the hubbub that had been going on in the outer compound. When her father told her of what had happened, she was dumbfounded and could not speak for a long time. Finally she said, "Yes, I have been keeping a monk! If it is all right for him to take a whore then there is nothing wrong in my keeping a monk. Besides, why did he not seize the monk as evidence? If he can't prove it, then not only can I keep one monk, I can keep ten if I want to, and there is nothing he can do about it. But I have no more use of him. If he wants a divorce, let him write me a bill of divorce. I'll go as soon as I get it. I'd be a shameless woman if I tarried a moment." After this outburst, she turned to her father and brother and asked them to come for her on the following day.

Outside old Chi and his son ran into Yü Ming-wu standing before his gate across the street and buying plums from a vender. Said the latter, "How are you, Uncle Chi? Have you been visiting Chao *Ta-ko*?" Old Chi, breathless with anger, told him everything, whereupon Yü Ming-wu said, "He must be seeing things! Just a minute ago I saw Hai Hui and the nun Kuo. They came right to me and greeted me. I suggested to them that they should not stay out in the midday sun, especially the nun, since her head was shaven and had no protection from the sun, as Hai Hui did. I asked them to come in and have lunch. By that time it would have cooled off enough for them to venture out. They accepted the invitation and are now inside having their lunch. What has come over Chao *Ta-ko* that he should listen to such nonsense?" Here Yang T'ai-hsuan, an attendant at the court, who was standing by, interposed, "His Honour seems to be displeased with Chao *Ta-kuan*." When asked why, he said: "According to custom, members of the National Academy who gain admission by virtue of their licentiate's degree are entitled to use ordinary calling cards when they pay their respects to the magistrate. Those who get their membership through purchase, however, must use a *shou-pen*. Yesterday, Chao *Ta-kuan* used a regular card when he presented his respects. His Honour only grunted, said nothing and refused to accept his presents."

Just then Chi-shih was seen just inside the gate, her hair dishevelled, brandishing a knife in her hand. "Come on out, you cuckold, you whore, and let us tell our stories to the neighbours," she shouted in the direction of Chao Yuan's compound, and to the neighbours gathered on the street she said, "We have moved here only recently, so you neighbours know nothing of the past. But it is now over a year since the cuckold took the whore to T'ung-chou. Whether or not I have kept a monk or a priest cannot be concealed from the neighbours. Just a while ago, Hai Hui and the nun Kuo happened to visit me, and that cuckold accused me of keeping a monk and a priest and wants to divorce me. Now, neighbours, who in this city doesn't know Hai Hui and the nun Kuo? Who has not received visits from them? I don't care whether it is proper or respectable. I want all the neighbours to know the truth so that after I die they can bear witness for my poor old father and my brother. Come on out now, you thieving, cowardly cuckold, and tell the neighbours how you caught me with a monk and a priest, so that in their eyes you will be justified in divorcing me. You can't just hide in there. I won't demean myself by matching my life with that whore's, but let the cuckold come out if he dares. I'll match my life with his."

As she thus aired her grievances, Chi-shih edged forward toward the street but was pre-

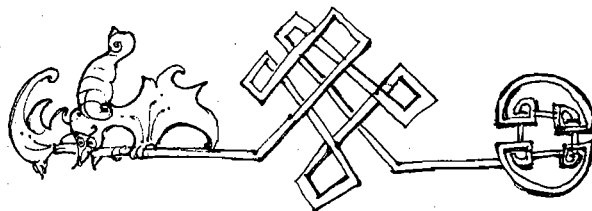
vented from going through the gate by Ch'ü Chiu-chou, who knelt before her, kowtowed and spread out his arms to block her. Chen-ko was now really scared. She shut the gate to her compound, bolted it tight and dared not utter a single sound. Chao Yuan, standing behind the door of the middle gate, shouted to Ch'ü Chiu-chou to make sure that she did not run out on the street. The sight of a young woman carrying on in so unseemly a manner inside the gate of what was obviously the house of the gentry attracted the attention of the passers-by and soon drew a crowd of almost ten thousand people. They took Chi-shih for a stranger, and were curious to know what grievance she held against the people in the house. Little did they know that it was the daughter-in-law of the family.

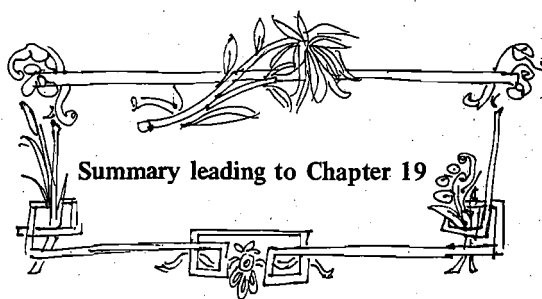
Across the street, Yü Ming-wu, who had been observing the spectacle, said to Chi Tu, "Uncle Chi, Friend Yang here and I cannot go up to her and urge her to go inside. You must do it. Surely families like yours cannot permit such a disgraceful thing to happen before a crowd of strangers." Chi Tu, however, refused to intervene. On learning that they themselves had been the cause of the commotion, Hai Hui and the nun quietly slipped away through the backdoor of Yü Ming-wu's house.

Yü Ming-wu then ran to Sister Kao's house and said to her, "It is none of our business if Chao *Ta-sao* carries on inside the house, but she is now shouting and cursing at the gate for all to hear and even threatens to go out on the street. It is not proper for us men to go to her, so you must come along and try to pacify her."

"I wanted to go out to see what was up," Kao Ssu-sao said, "but I was winding silk filaments on my hands and could not drop it." So saying, she went out, approached Chi-shih, curtsied, and said: "We women must stand on firm ground and leave no room for criticism. Now if Chao *Ta-kuan-jen* has done something wrong, you can curse and fight him until the sky falls, and no one can say anything about it, but only if you did that inside the walls of the compound. Men are shameless creatures, but we women must observe the proprieties. So listen to me, come along inside and tell me all about it. I'll make him apologize and kowtow to you a hundred times. If I let him get away with only ninety-nine times, my name is not Kao. So please go inside, my good aunt. The magistrate often passes by here. If he should see you carrying on like this and inquire into its cause, the chances are that he will side with Chao *Ta-kuan-jen* against you, for he sees no evidence that Chao *Ta-kuan-jen* has done anything wrong, while there is no question that you are making a disturbance in public. He will not do anything to you or to Chao *Ta-kuan-jen* because of your father-in-law's position, but he may take it out on your father for not having properly brought you up. You do not want that to happen, do you, my good aunt?"

Although she would not admit it, Chi-shih realized that it was wrong of her to create a scene on the street. So she allowed herself to be hustled inside to her own compound, where she told all her grievances to Kao Ssu-sao. "He is clearly in the wrong," Kao Ssu-sao said after hearing Chi-shih out, "but you mustn't weaken your case by anything improper on your part." Then she whispered into Chi-shih's ear, "Frankly, to create a scene in public as you have done is ground enough for divorce." So saying she got up, curtsied, bade Chi-shih be patient, and left.





The suicide of Chi-shih, the trial of Chao Yuan and Chen-ko, the sentencing of Chen-ko to die by strangulation, and her long imprisonment while awaiting execution, are told in Chapters 9-14 and have been summarized in the Preface. I shall give here only a brief account of the events that led to Chao Yuan's taking up temporary residence on his farm at Yung-shan.

After Chen-ko was comfortably settled in the new quarters especially constructed for her, Chao Yuan received a summons from his father and went to T'ung-chou, where Liang Sheng and Hu Tan were still living in hiding in his father's yamen. Both Chao Yuan and his father had given refuge to the fugitives only because they found that they still had influential friends who might be useful to them, as they indeed proved to be. But after they had served their purpose, the elder Chao wanted to get rid of them and was prevented from doing so by his wife (who had abruptly become a paragon of virtue) and his counsellor Hsing. Upon his arrival at T'ung-chou, Chao Yuan immediately allied himself with his father and proceeded to devise a foul plot to get rid of the two actors. He told them that their hiding place had become known to the authorities and that they were in imminent danger of arrest. He suggested that they go to the Hsiang-yen Temple nearby, enter the priesthood and place themselves under the protection of the abbot. Under the pretext that he needed money for an emergency he wangled out of them all the silver they had and then hustled them out of the yamen with nothing but the clothes on their backs. He sent two of his trusted servants to escort them to the Hsiang-yen Temple, with secret instructions to abandon them the first chance they had.

Here we might give another example of the false note often struck by the author. The abbot is described in the following stereotype:

*In age he was not quite fifty years old,
 In bulk he weighed about 400 catties.
 He pants and snores like an ox of Wu,
 And struts and swaggers like a tiger of Shu,
 With a belly as big and layered as that of An Lu-shan.
 In outer appearance he looks like the Mi-t'o Buddha
 But inside his intestines are as crooked as those of Tung Cho,
 His sexual appetite as insatiable as that of the Prince of Hai Ling.*

This is followed with the observation that the two actors were both very handsome and that Hu Tan, especially, was as seductive as a girl. This immediately leads the reader to expect some juicy passages about the abbot's attempt to corrupt the actors, but nothing of the sort happens. In fact they all turn out to be good Buddhists and Hu Tan (under the religious name of Wu-yi) is toward the end of the novel depicted as a priest with preternatural powers.

Madame Chao knew nothing of what her son had done. When she did find out she sent a trusted servant to the two actors with funds and provided well for them. In this way, the author foreshadows the later death and reincarnation of Liang Sheng as her legal son and heir.

The elder Chao, who had tried unsuccessfully to resign his post when the Capital was threatened by the Tartar incursions, was impeached for various crimes and misdemeanors but was able to buy his way out with no worse consequence than a reprimand and dismissal from office. Thus he was able to return to Wu-ch'eng with his family and the fortune he had accumulated during six or seven years in office.

In Chapter 18, Chao Yuan plans to abandon Chen-ko and take as his new wife the pretty young daughter of wealthy Councillor Chin from Lin-ch'ing; while the elder Chao, at the age of sixty-three, get the notion of taking Oriole, one of his bondmaids then about sixteen years old, "into his chamber" as a concubine. This was done on the second day of the second month. On the eleventh day of the month following, he caught a cold and died ten days later, with assistance from the quack Yang Ku-yueh. On the sixth day of the intercalary fourth month he was buried. It was after the post-burial rites, which were concluded on the third of the eighth month, that Chao Yuan went to Yung-shan to supervise the harvests and there met his death as related in Chapters 19 and 20.

* * * * *

Chapter 19



fter the funeral Chao Yuan went to his farm at Yung-shan to supervise the wheat harvest. He had planned to return to the city immediately afterwards and thence to Lin-ch'ing to conclude marriage arrangements with the Chin family. He had no desire to stay any longer than necessary, because the farmhouse was not a particularly attractive place in which to live, after the ravages of the fire caused by the spirit of the fox. However, he soon found reason to change his mind, for the farm had acquired a new tenant since his last visit, and this new tenant had a pretty wife. The man was a cobbler by trade, about twenty-five years old and of more than average height; he had a prominent nose, big round eyes and heavy brows. No one called him by his real name; he was simply known by his childhood name, Little Duck. Besides plying his trade in the nearby towns, he made regular calls at the villages and was a familiar figure in the area, known for his good workmanship and trustworthiness. He had previously lived back in the hills, but in the preceding fall his house was washed away in the flood, and he had to find a new place to live. One day he mentioned this to a man by the name of Keng, for whom he was doing some work, and the latter said to him, "The Chaos to the east of us have vacant rooms. I'll take you over after you are through. If the vacancies have not been filled, you can move there. It will be more convenient for you than in the hills."

So after Little Duck had finished, Keng took him over to Chao Yuan's house, found the steward, Chi Chun-chiang, and said to him, "Little Duck wants to rent some rooms." To this Chi said, "Why do you want to rent rooms here, when you have a nice little house of your own? There was nothing wrong with it the last time I took some shoes over for you to put soles on." Little Duck said, "But it was washed away in the last rain. If I had not managed to climb up a tall aspen with my wife, I would have drowned." "I did not realize that you have had such bad luck," Chi

Material not available due to copyright restrictions.

A cobbler by trade

Chun-chiang said. "I have plenty of rooms, because I would not rent them to people whose background I did not know. It would be good to have you here. It won't be necessary to send the shoes to you, and you can help us in keeping an eye on things at night. When times are busy, your wife can help out in the kitchen. So go and pick out what you like and put a padlock on it. You can pick a lucky day and move in." "I don't believe in lucky days," Little Duck said. "I'll move in tomorrow." So he left the tools of his trade with Chi Chun-chiang at the end of the day and went home. The next morning he returned with his wife and his few belongings and took up residence in his new quarters.

Little Duck's wife, Tang-shih, was just twenty years old. Her father was also a cobbler. Chi Chun-chiang had expected to see a typical country wench, but he found that she was quite a wildflower, though not quite as beautiful as a peony, as fragrant as a plum, or as elegant as a lotus. "How could such a woman live in the hills without causing trouble?" Chi Chun-chiang thought to himself. "If her husband were not such a strong, husky fellow, someone would have made a cuckold of him long ago. I hate to think what will happen when the young master lays his eyes on her. But it is too late to do anything about it now." Fortunately nothing happened during the year or so that followed. Little Duck was more than ordinarily jealous, and Tang-shih behaved herself well. None of the men in the compound dared to make passes at her. Chi Chun-chiang was relieved.

When Chao Yuan first appeared on the scene, Tang-shih tried to keep out of sight as much as she could. But she was, after all, a poor woman without servants. She had to go to the well herself to draw water and to the mill-shed to grind corn, and before long Chao Yuan had several

encounters with her. He decided to stay on and see if he could have a taste of the nice morsel she presented. He loitered in the courtyard and kept looking out for her. When he found her at the well or the mill-shed, he tried to pick up a conversation with her. At first Tang-shih kept her head down and paid no attention to him. If she had been as firm in her heart as she tried to appear on the surface, she would have been safe from Chao Yuan, not only one, but even ten of them. If she had really wanted to avoid Chao Yuan, she could have kept to her room and attended to her sewing and similar chores. Chao Yuan could hardly have invaded her room and molested her in full view of the other tenants in the compound. Instead of this, she would slip into the kitchen and help the wives of Chao Chu and Li Cheng-ming with the cooking, chatting and laughing with them. They would give her pancakes and rolls by the dozen, more than she and Little Duck could eat. At first Little Duck questioned her about these unaccustomed delicacies, and she answered that they had been given her by the two women because she helped them with the sewing and the cooking. "Does the young master know anything about it?" Little Duck asked. "Though I am poor, I want no part of anything that does not come honestly." "In a rich family such as this, they do not keep track of everything. Those in charge of the kitchen are free to give away anything they want to. The young master has no time for such trifles."

On the first day of the harvest it was the custom to provide special fare for the tenant farmers and labourers, with meat and wheat rolls. It happened that Little Duck had to stay at home to work on two pairs of shoes that had been sent to him, and Tang-shih, who had to twist hempen threads needed for sewing on the soles, did not go into the kitchen. Presently Chao Chu's wife came hurriedly into their room with a basketful of steaming white rolls and a large plateful of boiled pork and complained, "Have you broken your back or something that you cannot come to the kitchen and I have to bring these to you?" Then seeing Little Duck working on the shoes and Tang-shih twisting thread, she said, "No wonder you did not show up in the kitchen; so you can't tear yourself away from brother-in-law." After exchanging a few pleasantries, Chao Chu's wife left, whereupon Little Duck turned to his wife and asked, "Whom does she mean by 'brother-in-law'?" "She means you, of course," Tang-shih answered. "How come I am her brother-in-law? Is she one of your relatives?" Little Duck asked. In answer Tang-shih said, "She, I and Li Cheng-ming's wife are now sworn sisters." Little Duck grunted, "You women would go in for such nonsense as adopting aunts and sisters." "What's wrong with that?" Tang-shih retorted. "They can hardly be a disgrace to the likes of you."

They fell to eating the snow-white rolls and devouring the pork, much to the envy of their fellow tenants in the compound. Then Little Duck said to his wife, "Listen, woman. You may have your sworn sisters, and you may lend them a hand in the kitchen, but you may not lend anyone that to which only I am entitled. Don't you ever think that a couple of rolls will stop my mouth. If anything should reach my ear, this knife of mine will be stained with blood." Tang-shih gave Little Duck a hard look and said with a blush, "What makes you say that? If you are so afraid that someone will try to make your wife, why don't you move to some place where there is no one around for miles?" "What matters is the kind of woman you are," Little Duck retorted, "not whether there are any men around. The most you can do with a good woman is steal a glance or two at her, even if she stands in the midst of a crowd. But even with no man in sight, a bad woman would manage to straddle something and rub herself against it." "You must have been a woman like that in your previous incarnation," Tang-shih countered.

After finishing what he was doing, Little Duck left in search of more work, and Tang-shih locked her door and walked over to the kitchen in Chao Yuan's compound. "There is some nice steamed rice," Li Cheng-ming's wife said to her. "Help yourself to it." Tang-shih accepted the invitation and ate three bowls, "helped down" with garlic green and pickled cucumber, tossed in sesame oil. Having observed Tang-shih coming in, Chao Yuan strolled over and asked, "Who is this?" "She is Little Duck's wife; they live in the compound in front," said Li Cheng-ming's wife. Chao Yuan then said, "Why don't you find something nice for her to eat? Cucumber and garlic

greens are hardly fit for guests." "She is no guest," Li Cheng-ming's wife said. "She is here every day to give us a hand."

After Chao Yuan had walked away, Tang-shih said, "I had no idea the young master was so nice and kind." "He is all right as long as he is in a good mood," Li Cheng-ming's wife said. "But he can be very difficult if crossed in any way. He is so nice to us now because the young mistress is no longer living and Chen-ko is away in prison." "I was told that Chen-ko cost eight hundred ounces of silver," Tang-shih said. "what could she be like to be worth so much? Why, that's enough metal to make a life-sized statue." Li Cheng-ming's wife said, "How silly you are. What is a hard, lifeless statue good for? What a man wants is a nice, soft, live woman!" "What a beautiful woman she must be to be worth so much silver," Tang-shih continued. "Piffle," Chao Chu's wife said. "She is still a woman, eight hundred taels or ten thousand. A mouth on the face and another opening between the legs and two milkers on the chest. Let me describe her for you: she is the same height as you, a little lighter in complexion, but her nose is not quite as nice as yours. She has bright laughing eyes just like yours. And I am sure you can get into her shoes without any trouble." "But, this little sister of ours can't sing as she does," Li Cheng-ming's wife put in. "No wonder," Tang-shih said. "I didn't realize that she could sing."

Just then Chao Yuan appeared again at the kitchen door, and said, "Don't keep on yakking. It is time to get supper ready." "Don't worry," Chao Chu's wife said. "We have Little Duck's wife to help us." "I am surprised that you have the heart to make her work on a hot day like this," Chao Yuan said, leering at Tang-shih. "Why not?" Chao Chu's wife grunted. "It is not as if we are going to lower her upside down into the well shaft to clean it." "You may have the heart to see her work so hard, but not I," Chao Yuan insisted.

From that day on Tang-shih gradually lost her shyness. She no longer dodged him and even chimed in on the conversation between Chao Yuan and the two maid-servants. Several times Chao Yuan was on the verge of proceeding to do what he wanted with her, but he was always frustrated by the wives of Chao Chu and Li Cheng-ming, who kept a sharp eye on him, and made sure that he was never alone with Tang-shih. However, Tang-shih was like a bit of honey that had been smeared on the tip of his nose; he would not give up hope of licking it with his tongue.

He thought no more of Chen-ko, being sure that Chao Chu would take good care of her.²⁰ And strangely enough, Chao Chu, for his part, never gave a thought to his wife and never came to Yung-shan to see how she was getting on. Nor did Chen-ko ever wonder why Chao Yuan had not come to visit her in prison. That these men and women of the Chao household should act as carefree as if they had no mates is really past understanding.

As the fifth month²¹ approached, Chao Yuan said to the two wives, "The Dragon Boat festival will be here soon. Since Little Duck's wife has been so helpful in the kitchen, I think we should give her a couple of bolts of linen so that she can make herself some new clothes. It is only right that we should do something for her." Chao Chu's wife²² said: "Let us have the linen and make some clothes for ourselves. It is not necessary to give anything to her. Give up any designs

²⁰It has been brought out before that Chao Chu was Chen-ko's lover when Chao Yuan was out of the way. At the time events in the present Chapter took place, Chao Chu, together with some maids, was assigned to wait upon Chen-ko in the prison where she was living in style.

²¹In the previous chapter Chao Yuan is said to have gone to Yung-shan to supervise the "wheat harvests", after the last of the post-funeral rites of his father on the third of the eighth month. This is obviously wrong, since the wheat harvest takes place

much earlier in the year. Here the correct time sequence is given; he went to Yung-shan shortly after his father's funeral in the intercalary fourth month.

²²In the original it is "The two women said," but from the context it has to be Chao Chu's wife who acted as spokeswoman, and I have changed the text accordingly. This and similar obvious inconsistencies and slips abound in *Hsing-shih Yin-yuan*; they may be overlooked by the average novel-reader, but present problems to the translator.

that you may have on her. I am not sure that we'll give you up even if you should marry another mistress. To tell the truth, I don't like the idea of sharing you with Li Cheng-ming's wife any more than she likes the idea of sharing you with me. So forget any designs that you may have on her." "Listen to the unlicensed whore!" Chao Yuan said, trying to brazen it out. "She talks as if she were the guardian of our morals."

There were quite a number of tenants who shared the compound in which Little Duck and his wife lived, and so Chao Yuan was in much the same situation as an elephant given only melon seeds to crack—enough to feast his eyes on but not to satisfy his hunger. One day, it was discovered that more than twenty sheafs of wheat had disappeared from the threshing ground. Chi Chun-chiang decided to make a thorough search of the tenants' rooms for them. As a result of the search, all the tenants were caught red-handed, some with two or three sheafs, some with four or five. That is, all except Little Duck. He was away most of the time and was above such petty thievery. Besides, Tang-shih got more than they could consume from her friends in the kitchen and had no need of stealing. When this reached Chao Yuan's ears, he was overjoyed. "This is a heaven-sent opportunity," he said to himself. He threatened to turn the culprits over to the authorities but was persuaded to allow them to go free after signing confessions of guilt. This gave him an excuse to evict them all.

After the compound had been cleared of all tenants except Little Duck and his wife, Chao Yuan decided to proceed with his next move. With a pair of uppers and soles as a pretext, he approached the cobbler's room and, in a loud voice, asked for Little Duck. "He is not home; he left early this morning," the wife answered. "When is he coming back? I need these shoes right away." "He is at the fair today," Tang-shih answered. "If you must have them right away, you will have to send them to him at the market." "I had better leave them with you," Chao Yuan said. "Who knows where to find him." So saying, he stepped into the room and found that Tang-shih was indeed alone. He proceeded to do thus and so to Tang-shih, and she, not being unwilling, obliged by doing this and that. And so it happened that Chao Yuan, who had come to Yung-shan for the wheat harvest, reaped a harvest of quite another kind.

From then on Chao Yuan refused to rent rooms to anyone, on one pretext or another. When Little Duck was home, he never showed himself in the compound. If he happened to run into Tang-shih, he did not even glance her way. Even when she went into his compound to see the wives of Chao Chu and Li Cheng-ming, he avoided intruding upon them. "It is a good thing that you told him off the other day," Li Cheng-ming's wife said to Chao Chu's wife. "He seems to have taken the hint." "Yes," said the latter. "He is one of those to whom you have to talk plainly."

The sixteenth of the fifth month was market day at Liu-pu-chieh, a distance of about twenty-five *li*. Little Duck ordinarily stayed there overnight so that he could attend the Liu-hung market on the following day. On this occasion, Little Duck told his wife, as usual, not to expect him. After he left, Tang-shih went into the kitchen and made a sign to Chao Yuan. After supper, Li Cheng-ming's wife went out to spend the night with her husband. After doing what was expected of him, Chao Yuan sent Chao Chu's wife to her own room on the plea that he was tired and must have his rest. Then, figuring that she must have fallen asleep, he got up and tiptoed out to Tang-shih's room. He coughed lightly as agreed, and Tang-shih immediately opened the door and let him in. Soon afterwards a strange creaking was heard from the room, caused by no one knows what.

It so happened that Little Duck never got to Liu-pu-chieh that day. He was hailed by a customer who was preparing his daughter's trousseau. He was unable to finish his job by the end of the day and was invited to stay overnight, so that he could continue the next morning without losing any time. Little Duck declined, however. "I am not far from home," he said. "The moon is out and it is a cool night. I'll go home and come back early tomorrow morning."

It was past the first watch when he got back to Chao Yuan's house, and the gate had been closed long since. "Please open the gate, Uncle Chi," he called, but Chi Chun-chiang did not hear

Material not available due to copyright restrictions.

Little Duck managed to climb over the wall . . .

him. Not wishing to wake up everyone in the house, Little Duck managed to climb over the wall. He walked quietly to his room and pushed on the door.

In the meantime, Tang-shih and Chao Yuan had heard Little Duck calling. For a moment they were paralysed with fear, for they heard Little Duck's footstep, and there was no time for Chao Yuan to escape. Then Tang-shih said, "Don't be afraid. You hide behind the door and I'll take care of everything." She pulled on her trousers, went to the door and shut it.

"Who is it?" she asked, as Little Duck pushed against the door.

"It's me," Little Duck answered.

"I am glad you are back," she said, as she opened the door. "There is a scorpion crawling on the bed. I am scared, but I am afraid to go out to get a fire. Now you go and get the fire, so that we can light the lamp and get rid of the scorpion and get some sleep." So saying, she opened the door and passed a stick of punk to her husband. Though the room was lit up by the moon, Little Duck was unable to see Chao Yuan hidden behind the door. He took the punk and went to have it lit from the stove in the kitchen. It did not take him long, but it was long enough for Chao Yuan to slip out and dash back to his own compound. It also gave Tang-shih time to clean out her sewer so that Little Duck would find nothing amiss in case he wanted to explore it.

Little Duck came back with the lighted punk and lit the lamp. But of course there was no scorpion to be found. They did manage to catch a few fleas. Then they found a lizard on the wall. "That's the beast that gave you trouble," Little Duck said, as he took a shoe and was about to give it a whack. Tang-shih, however, held his arm back, saying, "Don't kill it. It does no harm." "I had to look for fire on account of it," Little Duck said. "That's nothing," said Tang-shih. "It is not as if it were a cold night. Now we can sleep in peace. I was very sleepy but dared not fall asleep. Now that we are the only family in this compound, I am even more scared about going out at night. From now on you must not stay away overnight." "Market is held on 'Six' days at Liu-

pu²³ and on 'Seven' days at Liu-hung," Little Duck said. "The two towns are only six *li* apart. Do you want me to come back home just to exercise my legs?" "Are you going to Liu-hung tomorrow?" Tang-shih asked. "No," Little Duck answered. "The customer has lots more work for me. It will take me two more days." So the couple chatted and indulged in some action before they went to sleep. They next morning, Little Duck ate a few pancakes, washed down with hot water, and left. "Be sure to come back early tonight," his wife urged him.

"Did you burp up any bitter liquid?" Tang-shih asked Chao Yuan when she saw him. "What bitter liquid?" he asked. "I was afraid that your gall bladder burst from the scare last night," she giggled.

The only way to prevent people from knowing is to refrain from doing, as the saying goes. This applies to Tang-shih as to everyone else. Since she began her affair with Chao Yuan, she showed it in various ways. Her eyes were brighter and her spirit high. She combed and brushed her hair until it shone like satin, and she wound the bandages around her feet as tightly as she could, to make them look even smaller and more slender. Though she wore cotton as before, her clothes looked neater from more frequent washings. Chao Yuan would have liked to give her clothes and jewelry but did not dare for fear of arousing Little Duck's suspicions. Then an idea occurred to him. He gave her seven or eight ounces of silver and then let it be known that he had lost it somewhere. He beat his pages and scolded his servants, searched the rooms of renters and questioned the labourers that had been around. He made such a fuss about it until everyone in the neighbourhood knew.

Then Tang-shih whispered to her husband that she had found the missing silver. It was wrapped up in an embroidered handkerchief. "Why didn't you return it to the young master?" Little Duck said. "You can't keep things that you pick up. How am I, a poor cobbler, to explain how I got so much silver? If we were ever found out, we'd lose everything we own, besides having to give up the silver." So without further ado, he went to Chao Yuan and returned the parcel to him, saying that his wife had picked it up. "I was wondering how I could have lost it," Chao Yuan pretended innocence. "I only went as far as the gate and watched the cattle for a while. I am sorry that I have unjustly suspected people. You are a very honest man to return it to me. To show my appreciation I would like to give you half of it."

Little Duck refused the offer curtly. "Why should I accept half when I could have kept the whole thing? Though I am but a poor cobbler, I don't want that kind of money." With this, he turned around and walked away. However, he was persuaded to accept a bolt each of white and blue linen, four bolts of blue cotton and two bolts of blue flannel, which Chao Yuan sent over to him the next day.

Thus it came about that Tang-shih was able to deck herself out in brand new clothes of fine material, without having to worry about what her husband would think. Nor did Chao Yuan give it another thought. But the wives of Chao Chu and Li Cheng-ming were not deceived; they had even sharper eyes and noses than the detectives in the magistrate's yamen in Wu-ch'eng. Now they kept even a sharper eye out for Tang-shih. One rainy day not long afterwards, Tang-shih slipped into Chao Yuan's room after her husband had left. Coming out of the milling-shed, Li Cheng-ming's wife noticed her wet footprints on the ground leading directly to Chao Yuan's room. She lifted up the door screen and caught Chao Yuan and Tang-shih in the midst of an acrobatic performance. Chao Yuan acted quite nonchalantly; Tang-shih, however, was greatly disconcerted. Soon Chao Chu's wife arrived on the scene also and said to Tang-shih, "I did not ask you to come in for this kind of help. You just wait until I spill the whole thing to Little Duck when he comes home."

"If you tell on me, I'll tell my two brothers-in-law also about what you two have been up to. We'll all lose."

²³That is, days in which the numeral 6 occurs, as on the 6th, 16th, or 26th.

"Our men are not in a position to butt into our business. It's no great crime for the wives of servants to have affairs with their master. Your position is not the same as ours."

"If you are not afraid of my telling your husbands," Tang-shih said, "then I'll tell mine that you two have been responsible for bringing me and the younger master together, that you have helped him to seduce me. I am quite willing to risk death to bring murder charges upon your heads."

"Well, well," said Chao Chu's wife. "I never thought I'd live to see a curfew violator turn on a policeman and arrest him!"

"Now listen to me, you three women. Make up and be friends." Chao Yuan intervened. So saying, he seized Chao Chu's wife and laid her on the bed and gave her the treatment. Li Cheng-ming's tried to run away, but Tang-shih held onto her at Chao Yuan's command. She was likewise taken care of by Chao Yuan, after he had finished with the other woman.

"It's your turn now, wicked one," the two other women said to Tang-shih. One held her firmly while the other stripped her stark naked. Then they made Chao Yuan give her a real lesson. Chao Yuan obliged and did give her a lesson such as she never had before in her life. After this the four of them became one big happy family. The wheat had long since been harvested and stored away, but Chao Yuan gave no thought to going back to the city; he gave no thought to his mother in Wu-ch'eng nor to Chen-ko in prison. He could not bear the thought of tearing himself away from the three women. Whenever Little Duck had to stay away overnight on market days, Tang-shih was sure to be found in the rear compound making merry with Chao Yuan and Chao Chu's wife. Since Li Cheng-ming's wife had to go back to her husband in their compound, she took no part in the late night festivities. Gradually Little Duck began to suspect things and tried to catch her by returning home unexpectedly. But luck was against him. On such unexpected returns, he always found Tang-shih sitting quietly alone in their own room.

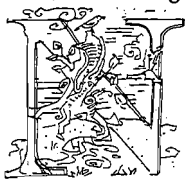
Things went on like this until the thirteenth of the sixth month, the birthday of Little Duck's elder sister. She had married a man who lived in the back country behind the hills some thirty *li* away. Little Duck bought four dried fish, two large lotus roots and a bottle of spirits as birthday presents for his sister. He got up at the crack of dawn and set out for her home, telling Tang-shih that he would not come back until the following morning. The woman informed Chao Yuan and Chao Chu's wife of this and made plans for an all-night party that was to have included Li Cheng-ming's wife. But that evening Li Cheng-ming was stung by a scorpion and was in great pain, so she had to go back and attend to him.

After eating and drinking for a while, Chao Yuan and the women began their play in earnest right under the moon and the stars, disregarding completely the taboo against revealing their nakedness to the Three Sources of Light. Presently Chao Chu's wife felt a wetness between her thighs and realized that the menses were upon her. She went back to her room, cleaned herself up and was soon sound asleep. Chao Yuan and Tang-shih moved inside and continued their engagement, until after the second watch. They rested, had something to eat and drink and resumed until they were thoroughly played out, when they fell sound asleep in each other's arms, oblivious to everything.

In the meantime, Little Duck had offered his presents to his sister and celebrated with her and her family. As the sun began to set, he insisted on going home, in spite of the pleas of his sister and his brother-in-law and his niece that he stay overnight. He walked briskly in long strides and was before the locked gate of Chao Yuan's house shortly after midnight. He hesitated to wake up Chi Chun-chiang. Moreover, he did not want to betray his presence to Tang-shih. He had wondered what really happened that night when she sent him to fetch fire. So he decided to get inside without making any noise. With his pole he vaulted onto the wall and let himself down gently on the other side. The dog let out a bark, but wagged its tail and snuggled against him when it recognized his voice. He walked up to his own door and found by touch that it was locked from the outside. He realized at once that she had gone to the inner compound. He knew that Li Cheng-

ming's wife was with her husband in their own compound. Perhaps his wife was really afraid of being alone in her room and had gone to sleep with Chao Chu's wife. He must find out for sure. So thinking, he unlocked his door, went inside and took a sharp cobbler's knife with a round edge from his tool chest, and stuck it under his belt. Then he vaulted up the wall and dropped himself into Chao Yuan's compound. The moon was as bright as day. He went to the east building and found Chao Chu's wife sound asleep with nothing but a piece of cloth between her legs. On turning around, he saw Tang-shih standing outside the door. On seeing him, she turned and went into the north building. It is strange that she should be still up at this hour, Little Duck thought to himself; stranger still that she should walk away without a word. He followed her into the room, but Tang-shih had vanished. He only saw two naked figures lying on the bed apparently sound asleep. He stooped down and took a careful look. They were Chao Yuan and his wife. To make doubly sure, he lit the lamp from the stove for heating wine and held it above the sleeping figures. It was the two of them all right, and Tang-shih was holding in her hand that thing of Chao Yuan's. Little Duck took out his knife and said to himself, "I'll kill the adulteress first and then wake up the beast so that he'll know the terror of death. It is too good for him to die in his sleep." Accordingly he cut off the woman's head and then, untying Chao Yuan's hair, he wound it around his hand and gave it a couple of jerks, saying, "Wake up, Chao Yuan, and give me your head." When Chao Yuan saw who it was, all he could say was, "Spare my life. I am ready to give you ten thousand taels!" "Who wants your stinking silver. It is your head that I want." He had cut off Chao Yuan's head before he could utter "Help!" a second time. Then he untied Tang-shih's hair also, tied the two heads together and slung them over his shoulder. He replaced the knife under his belt, picked up his pole, vaulted up and out and made his way toward Wu-ch'eng to give himself up.

Chapter 20



ow let us turn to Chao Chu's wife. She had slept straight through the night and, on waking up at dawn, her first thought was that she must clean up the menstrual mess she had left on the floor of the master's room, before it could be observed in the daylight. She bolted out of bed, pulled on her trousers and, without bothering to put on her jacket, she went into the kitchen, filled a dustpan with ash and went to the master's room to sweep up the blood. As she stepped into the room, she said, "Still in bed, eh? Are you awake?" But one look at the bed was enough for her. She dashed back to her room, threw on a jacket and stumbled out into the outer compound to inform Chi Chun-chiang, crying, "Terrible, terrible! The young master and Little Duck's wife have been murdered." Chi Chun-chiang was staggered by the news and hurried inside. There he saw the headless bodies of a man and a woman lying naked side by side on the bed. The heads were nowhere to be seen, and there was a pool of blood. The headman and the constable were summoned and, after taking in the scene, they immediately realized that it was a case of justifiable homicide committed by an aggrieved husband. But Little Duck was at his sister's for her birthday and did not come home that night. The gates were secured and bolted. So the headman turned to Chao Chu's wife and said, "You are the only one inside the compound, and should know what happened. It looks as if you have done this out of jealousy." Chao Chu's wife said, "I went to bed early in my own room. How should I know what happened in the master's room?" Chi Chun-chiang said, "How did you know that the body was that of Little

Duck's wife, since the head had been cut off?" Chao Chu's wife said, "Although the body is headless, it is easy enough to identify the feet. No other woman in this village has such small feet as hers." It was agreed that it was useless to speculate on who had committed the murder and that the first thing to do was to make an official report to the magistrate. This was done accordingly and Chao Chu's wife was placed in the custody of Chi Chun-chiang. A blanket was thrown over the bodies, and the crowd dispersed.

In the meantime, Madame Chao had had a terrifying dream, in which Chao Yuan appeared before her and cried that he had been murdered by Little Duck and that the latter had been led to him by the spirit of the fox. He was naked and covered with blood. Madame Chao awoke in a cold sweat, shaking with fear. She had the lamp lit, summoned Chao Feng and gave him instructions to go to the farm and tell Chao Yuan that she had had a fearful dream and that he should come back to the city as soon as possible. The servants and maids tried to make light of her dream, saying: "You have had this terrible dream because you are worried about the young master; there has been so much talk about the spirit of the fox. Besides, an evil dream portends something lucky, as the saying goes." Presently Chao Feng had his mule ready and said to Madame Chao through the window: "I shall go to the city gate and wait. I shall head for the farm as soon as the gate is opened."

So he went and, when the gate was opened, a man was seen coming in with two heads slung over his shoulder. When questioned by the gatekeeper, the man said that he had come from Yung-shan and that the heads were those of an adulteress and her paramour. When asked who the man was, he said that it was Chao Yuan. Chao Feng immediately recognized the head and said: "It is my young master all right. But where did you catch them and kill them?" "In his own room," Little Duck answered. "You'll find their bodies there side by side."

There was of course now no need for Chao Feng to go to the farm. He flew back and said, "The young master has been murdered!" "Who, who, who told you that?" Madame Chao stuttered. "I saw the man with two heads on his way to give himself up!" "Why two heads?" Madame Chao asked. "One was his wife's," Chao Feng answered. On hearing this, Madame Chao fainted. When she was brought to, she wept, saying: "Oh, my son! You would do such wicked things instead of what is good and proper. I knew you would come to a bad end, but I had hoped that I would die before you, so that you would give me a proper funeral. Who'd have known that you would die before me. It would have been much better if I had died from the hanging at T'ung-chou, instead of being rescued and revived.²⁴ Now I am left to die alone without anyone to give me a proper funeral. How grievous it is! How cruel you are, my son." As she thus cried until even a statue hewn out of stone or cast in iron could not have helped shedding tears, a messenger from the farm came to report, still ignorant of the true circumstances and still thinking that Chao Chu's wife might have committed the murder out of jealousy.

After making arrangements with her married daughter to come and take charge of the house and instructing Chao Feng to go to the magistrate's yamen to get the heads and bring them to Yung-shan, Madame Chao set out for the farm with a retinue of servants, arriving there mid-morning. Needless to say, she cried again on seeing her son's body. She sent servants out to buy boards for making coffins and cloth for mourning clothes and made other necessary arrangements. "I don't suppose that we need to worry about a coffin for the woman," Chi Chun-chiang said. "Let her own husband take care of that." But Madame Chao said, "He can hardly be expected to act like a husband to her after he has killed her. If it is left to him, he probably would drag the body out and throw it in a ditch for the dogs to feed upon. He has wronged my son, but my son has wronged him also. And since my son has died on account of her, let us make a coffin for her too and have her properly buried."

²⁴In Chapter 16 Madame Chao attempted to hang her son, but was rescued. herself, after discovering the many wicked deeds of

It was then the middle of the sixth month, and the weather was burning hot. As a consequence, the bodies had gradually become swollen. They had a time of it in putting burial clothes on them. Then they waited impatiently for Chao Feng to come back with the heads.

A crowd had gathered as Little Duck waited in front of the yamen for the court to open. The heads were placed on the ground in front of him. Not one in the crowd had a kind word for Chao Yuan, not one regretted his death. They spoke only of his cruelty and ruthlessness, and each contributed examples of his wicked deeds, of which there were so many that they would make a three-inch book, were they all to be written down. And they said that Little Duck was a hero and an honest man. If it had been someone else, he'd have no difficulty in extorting several thousand ounces of silver from Chao Yuan. "He did offer me ten thousand taels," Little Duck said. "But I didn't want his money."

Presently the magistrate entered the hall of justice and took his seat, and Little Duck and the constable were brought before him. In the meantime, the original report, in which Chao Chu's wife had been charged with the crime, had been altered to fit the circumstances which had since become known. After reading the report, the magistrate asked Little Duck, "When did the illicit relations begin?"

"I do not know when they began exactly," Little Duck answered. "However, I have suspected it for some time and have tried several times to catch them. But I did not catch them in the act until last night."

Turning to the constable, the magistrate asked, "Where did you find the bodies?"

The constable answered, "They were found on the bed in the north room. On the bed there was a red felt mattress. On top of that there was a cotton mattress covered with satin, and on top of that a mat of woven rattan fibre. A silken sheet and a pillow made of rattan had fallen to the floor. The woman's body was found lying on the bed, but the man's body was partly on the bed and partly off it. There was quite a bit of blood on the bed, and also some but not quite so much on the floor in front of the bed."

Turning to Little Duck, the magistrate asked, "How did you kill them?"

"When I went into the room, the two were sound asleep. I could tell by the moonlight who they were, but I wanted to make sure. So I got some fire from the stove by the door and lit the lamp. There was no mistake about it. The woman was still holding that thing of his in her hand. I killed her in her sleep. The man was still asleep, but I decided that it would be too easy a death for him, so I grasped his hair and pulled him up a few times. Only then did he awake, and I shouted to him, 'Let me have your dirty head!' When he saw who I was, he begged for his life and said that he would give me ten thousand taels if I spared him. But I cut off his head without further ado."

"How did you get inside the compound?"

"By climbing over the wall."

"Who else was in the compound?"

"There was a woman, the wife of one of the servants, in the east room."

"How did you know?"

"I went into the east room first. I went to the north room only after I found that she was not the one I was looking for."

Then the magistrate asked, indicating Chao Feng, "Who is this man?" Thereupon Chao Feng answered, "I represent the family of the deceased here to receive the heads."

The magistrate ordered: "Let him have the heads to be buried. Let Little Duck be awarded ten taels so that he can get another wife. He is now dismissed and may go after he signs a receipt."

"I don't care about the silver. I have no title to it, and I do not want it."

"It's ten taels. With it you can start a little business. So take it and sign a receipt for it."

"If I am forced to accept it, I shall only throw it away. I don't want to take this kind of money."

"I was only testing you," the magistrate said. "Now you may retire to the jail and wait for orders." Then turning to the constable, he asked, "Who was the woman in the other room?"

"It is Chao-shih."

The magistrate issued a summons ordering her to appear at the afternoon session. A runner took the summons and went off with Chao Feng, who had wrapped up the heads and carried them with him. They soon reached Yung-shan, where Chao Chu's wife was handed over to the runner and taken to the city, accompanied by Chao Chu himself. The heads were stitched back on and the bodies placed in coffins. Tang-shih's coffin was placed in a nearby temple, while that of Chao Yuan was placed in the room where he died. Both were buried in due time, needless to narrate.

After Chao Chu's wife was brought before him, the magistrate said to her, "Now tell me all that has happened from beginning to end. All I want to know are the facts of the case. You will not be held responsible if you tell the truth. Otherwise, I shall have you put into the press, and in the end you will have to tell." To show that he meant what he said, he had the torture instruments brought into court.

Now Chao Chu's wife had been a witness at the trial of Chao Yuan and Chen-ko and knew the meaning of torture. So she readily told everything she knew, without holding back anything. That is how the details narrated in the previous chapter came to light. Otherwise how could it have become known? "Shameless woman," the magistrate said. "I should have you flogged. However, since you have made a clean breast of it, I shall spare you that." However, he had her fingers squeezed. Then he asked who was there to take her away. When told that her husband was waiting outside, he had him brought in and said to him, "Shameless scoundrel! To let your wife carry on like that right under your nose. I'll teach you a lesson." So saying, he pulled out four counters, each for five strokes of the bamboo. He was then dismissed, taking his wife with him. Little Duck was brought in next and also given twenty strokes and dismissed. Little Duck returned to Yung-shan, gathered up his tools and went away without bothering about his wife's body. Later he was seen plying his trade around T'ai-an, which, however, does not concern us here.

Now let us return to the Chao family. Chao Yuan's father, Chao Ssu-hsiao, had no near kin and not too many distant ones. Because they were poor and uneducated, they did not associate with their richer relatives. Among them there were two wicked rascals, one a younger "brother" to Chao Ssu-hsiao and the other a grand-nephew,²⁴ both of them known for their evil deeds. As for the rest, they were all useless good-for-nothings. After Chao Yuan's death, these men, under the leadership of the aforesaid rascals, decided that Madame Chao was now without an heir and could be taken advantage of. They thought nothing of the fact that Oriole, the concubine whom the elder Chao had recently taken, was in the fifth month of pregnancy when he died. Though no one could tell whether the unborn child was going to be a boy or a girl, yet there was always the possibility that she might give birth to a male heir. So they began to think of Chao Ssu-hsiao's legacy as if it had nothing to do with Madame Chao and to regard all that the elder Chao had left behind as if it rightfully belonged to them. So they banded together, and each contributed one candareen of silver. With this they bought a pig's head, a chicken, a fish and a stack of paper money (for the dead) and went to Yung-shan to pay their respects to the dead. The group was, naturally, headed by the aforementioned rascals, Chao Ssu-ts'ai, the younger brother, and Chao Wu-yen,²⁵ the grand-nephew. After making their offering and going through the pretense of crying, Chao Ssu-ts'ai said to Madame Chao: "It is said that a woman leans on her husband when he is alive and on her son after her husband is dead. Now your son is no more. How is it that we

²⁵ These two were actually distant cousins, but since they were not of the same rank or level in the genealogical tree, one was called "brother" according to Chinese custom and the other "grand-nephew".

²⁶ The names homonymously mean "Want Money" and "Greedy".

have not been notified of his passing? Does it mean that you look down on us as if you still had a mandarin for a husband and a licentiate for a son?"

Madame Chao answered, "It is now forty-four or -five years since I married into the Chao family. In all this time I have never seen any member of the clan come to call or attend the sacrifices at the ancestral temple at the Winter Solstice or the New Year. I am surprised that so many members of the clan have suddenly appeared to complain about my lack of manners. I do not know which of you are above me in the family tree and which are below, but I do know that I should show respect to all those who come to condole with me on the death of my son and ask them to dinner. But it seems that you have come not so much to offer your sympathies as to find fault with me. I have nothing to offer such as you, nor do I dare to accept your gifts."

Thereupon Chao Wu-yen tried to make amends, saying, "I am your grand-nephew, and you are properly Granny to me. He who has just spoken is a grand-uncle to me and should address you as Elder sister-in-law. He, the venerable one, is in the habit of blurting things out without thought. We came to pay our respects to my late uncle. We mean well, but he has said things which offend Granny. He doesn't really mean to say that he is offended because he had not been notified; what he means is that he is afraid that people will laugh at him because he, the senior male member of the clan, doesn't even know that a member of the clan has passed away."

Madame Chao said, "None of you showed your face at the funeral of my husband or that of my daughter-in-law. Why weren't you afraid of being laughed at then?"

Chao Ssu-ts'ai said, "How could you blame us for not showing up when you never sent us notices? I was so ashamed because I never received a single measure of cloth for mourning clothes. That's why I have come, though I have not been invited."

"I am glad to know that you have come to pay respects to the dead," Madame Chao said, somewhat mollified. "Since that is the case, please go out to the guest hall and take your place at the banquet table. You will be served."

After they had taken their seats at the table, they sent word to Madame Chao, asking her to provide them with mourning clothes. She rejected their request, saying that since they wore no mourning for her husband, it was hardly necessary for them to do so for her son. "I suppose she did not have mourning clothes for us since she did not know that we were coming," Chao Ssu-ts'ai said. "Tell her that we shall be back when the services are held and that we expect to be supplied with the proper clothes. We'll bring our womenfolk too, and they should also be taken care of."

It rained hard on the day of the services, preventing Chao Ssu-ts'ai and his pack from returning to Yung-shan. They made plans to go on the nineteenth, the first "Seventh Day" after Chao Yuan's death, but they were again frustrated because Chao Ssu-ts'ai's wife became very sick. When he was finally able to lead his pack, together with their wives, on the expedition, he found on reaching their destination that Madame Chao had returned to the city. Chi Chun-chiang did his best to entertain them and take care of their mounts, but they found fault in everything and made themselves obnoxious. After they had eaten their fill, they demanded that Chi Chun-chiang let them have the wheat that had been just harvested. Chi Chun-chiang said, "The wheat is there all right, but I dare not give away a single grain without orders from the mistress." Before Chao Ssu-ts'ai could speak, Chao Wu-yen shouted, "Don't you fart like a dog. Do you think your mistress can hold onto things now that she has lost her son? The estate belongs to us now. If we feel kindly disposed toward her, we'll give her a place to live in and a few piculs of grain to eat. If we don't, we'll throw her out."

"I am surprised to hear such talk coming from the mouth of a native of Wu-ch'eng," Chi Chun-chiang said. "You talk like a barbarian from outside the Great Wall. Let us say nothing of the fact that she has a daughter, or that the master's concubine is advanced in pregnancy. Even if my mistress were entirely alone, she is still entitled to enjoy the wealth that her husband had accumulated. You may threaten all you want to, but I don't see by what right you can drive her

out. It makes me sick to hear such talk."

Without warning, Chao Ssu-ts'ai walked up to Chi Chun-chiang and slapped him in the face, saying, "Supposing it does make you sick, now what can you do about it, you dog?" At this Chi Chun-chiang lowered his head, butted right into Chao Ssu-ts'ai's stomach, and sent him sprawling on the ground. Now Chao Wu-yen closed in on Chi, soon joined by Chao Ssu-ts'ai, his wife and Chao Wu-yen's wife. The others pretended to separate the combatants, while in reality they tried to keep Chi Chun-chiang's hands tied. Chi Chun-chiang was a fairly good boxer, but he was no match for the dozen or more hands that struck out at him. Seeing that her husband was getting the worst of it, Chi's wife ran out on the street, beating the brass basin she had seized and shouting for help. When the neighbours and the constable went inside the compound, they found that Chi Chun-chiang was being pummelled on all sides and bleeding profusely from the face. The greedy wives were scooping up wheat and pouring it into improvised containers. Some were flattening pewter candlesticks and putting them away under their coats, while others tore off the curtains before Chao Yuan's coffin. The constable shouted at them, "How dare you commit assault and robbery in broad daylight!" He threatened to arrest them all and take them to the magistrate. Only then did the two ringleaders let Chi Chun-chiang go, saying lamely, "It is a family affair. We are trying to divide the property between us. It is no concern of outsiders."

"That is something for Madame Chao to decide," the constable said. "You are committing robbery. The present magistrate is very strict. You are very foolish if you think you can get away with things as you used to." He threatened to draw up an official complaint, but was persuaded by the neighbours to let the evil doers go, after they had signed a statement that they would be held accountable should anything happen to Chi Chun-chiang from the injuries he received. Madame Chao was naturally angered when she received the news, but there was nothing she could do about it.

The two wicked men, Chao Ssu-ts'ai and Chao Wu-yen, were not satisfied. They called a meeting of the clan and said to them, "We must take action before it is too late. We must not give her time to send all the valuables to her daughter. That would be like covering up the anus after the fart has been let out. So let us all move into her house and keep a close watch over the old woman. After we have divided among us all the silver she has, we as your leaders shall pick out the houses we want and leave the rest to you all." The men agreed and immediately broke into the Chao residence; each occupied rooms they liked, helped themselves to table and chairs, trunks and cabinet, and food, abused and beat up the servants and maids until their cries were heard all over the neighborhood. Madame Chao, being fearful that Oriole should be frightened and have a miscarriage, hid her in the watchtower, locked the trap door and put away the ladder. A huge crowd gathered outside the gate to watch the outrage.

Now if the Lord of Heaven would allow such wickedness to go unpunished, there would indeed be no such thing as Retribution. But it so happened that an imperial commissioner was passing through Wu-ch'eng and the Magistrate Hsu had gone out of the city to greet him. On his way back, he passed by the Chao house and was surprised at the commotion and the crowd that had gathered. One of his attendants thus informed him, "The commotion is caused by members of the Chao clan who, with the death of Chao Yuan, are trying to seize the property of the late Mandarin Chao."

"Is there no one else in the family?"

"Yes, Your Honour. The widow of the Mandarin is still living."

The magistrate ordered the way cleared. He descended from his sedan chair at the gate, went inside and ordered the gate closed.

"Is there a gate in the rear?" he asked.

"Yes, there is."

He gave orders that a man should be stationed there and that no one be allowed to leave. Just then a man came running out, his hair loose and his face covered with blood. His body was

covered with bruises, blue, red, purple, black—all the colours needed for opening a dyer's shop. He knelt before the magistrate and kowtowed. The magistrate recognized him and said, "Aren't you the one who appeared at the yamen for the heads? How does it happen that you are here to loot?"

"I am a servant of the Chao family," Chao Feng answered. "I have been beaten and injured."

"I see," the magistrate said. "Where is your mistress now?"

"She is being held prisoner and badly mistreated."

"Has she been awarded a title?"

"Yes, Your Honour. She has the title of *Yi-jen*.²⁷" "Ask the *Yi-jen* to please come out."

"They have surrounded her and would not let her go anywhere," Chao Feng said. The magistrate ordered a detective to go with Chao Feng.

When they went into the inner court, they found that Madame Chao was indeed completely surrounded by unkempt and fierce-looking women. The detective dispersed the crowd and delivered his message. Madame Chao changed into her mourning clothes, tied a hemp cord around her waist, and went out supported by two maids. She wept bitterly as she knelt and kowtowed to the magistrate, who returned the courtesy. Then he said to her, "Would the *Yi-jen* compose herself and tell me all that has happened."

Madame Chao answered, "We have no near kin. These people are all from distant branches of the clan. I have never seen them in my forty-odd years in the family. They never showed up at the funerals of my father-in-law and mother-in-law, or at that of my late husband. But they suddenly appeared after my son died and demanded that I hand over everything I own to them. The other day they went to our farm and carried off everything, including the sacrificial vessels and mourning curtains. And they beat our steward almost to death. Now they have occupied the rooms and want to drive me out. They even searched my person for fear that I might have valuables concealed thereon. Even with Your Honour here, they have kept me prisoner and would not let me go, as your own detective would testify."

"How many of them are there?" the magistrate asked.

"Eight men and fourteen or fifteen women."

"They must have leaders. What are their names?"

"One is called Chao Ssu-ts'ai and the other Chao Wu-yen."

"Where are they now?"

"They are all inside, every last one of them."

"Seize the men, put them in chains and bring them to me," the magistrate ordered.

The detectives marched in and soon returned with six, with two unaccounted for.

"How did the two escape?" the magistrate asked.

"The walls are too high to be scaled," Madame Chao said. "They must be still hidden somewhere inside."

The magistrate ordered the detectives to search again, but they said that they had looked everywhere except the watchtower, whose door was locked and there was no ladder around. Thereupon Madame Chao spoke up: "There is no one up there except a pregnant concubine. I sent her up there for fear that these bandits might do violence to her and injure the unborn child."

"Whose concubine is this pregnant woman?" the magistrate asked.

"She is the concubine of my late husband."

"How many months has she been pregnant?"

"It is now five months."

²⁷ 宜人, an appropriate title with which to address the wife of an official. Cf. *Fu-jen* 夫人, the honorific title reserved for the wife of a mandarin of higher rank.

"Since there is a pregnant concubine, there is always the possibility of her giving birth to a son," the magistrate remarked and ordered the search continued. The detectives did so and found one hidden in a shrine. There was now only Chao Wu-yen unaccounted for. Then one of the maids said, "I saw a man going into the mistress's room." With the maid leading the way, one of the detectives went into the room. There was no sign of the missing man. Then it occurred to the detective that the culprit might be hidden under the pile of quilts on the bed. He poked into it and found his quarry hidden underneath. As the detective put the chain around his neck, Chao Wu-yen knelt down, pulled a large package from under his coat and offered it to the detective, saying, "Have pity on me and spare me." His wife also knelt down and begged for mercy, saying, "Spare us and we'll give you anything you want." "I don't mind sparing you, but I am afraid that His Honour would not spare me," the detective said and dragged him out.

"Where did he hide that it took you so long to find him," the magistrate asked. The detective told him and mentioned the fact that the prisoner was caught with a package on him which he had offered as a bribe. "This is all the more outrageous!" the magistrate said in disgust. "What happened to the package?"

"He passed it to his wife."

The magistrate then ordered the arrest of the women also. When the latter learned of this, they tried to hide, begging the women servants and maids to help them. Some hid under the bed, others under the table, some pretended to be servants busy in the kitchen or sweeping the courtyard. Some even crawled under bed covers and pretended to be sick. But they forgot that they had abused the servants and maids and could expect no help from them. One by one they were pointed out to the detectives and were soon rounded up, every last navel of them.

"Are they all here now?" the magistrate asked Madame Chao.

"Yes, there are altogether fourteen of them."

The magistrate then summoned the female servants and ordered them to search the women prisoners. All sorts of things were found on them, rings, bracelets, hairpins, necklaces, and so on. They were returned to Madame Chao. The magistrate then ordered that a midwife be brought to him. Thereupon the women prisoners looked at one another in consternation, for they could think of no other reason for the presence of the midwife except that she was to probe into that part of their anatomy for which midwives are best qualified.

"Are you an obstetrician?" the magistrate asked the midwife. The old woman stared in bewilderment, for she did not understand the word.

"His Honour wants to know if you are a midwife," an attendant explained. "Yes," the old woman answered. Thereupon the magistrate turned to Madame Chao and said, "Please have the pregnant woman brought here." Madame Chao gave the key to Chao Shu's wife, and the latter soon returned with Oriole. The magistrate ordered the midwife to go to some secluded place and there examine Oriole in the presence of the women of the Chao clan and to determine if she was indeed pregnant. The inner room to the west of the hall was suggested. There the midwife felt the woman's belly carefully and then took her pulse. Then she reappeared and reported, "The indication of pregnancy is very strong. She is about in her fifth month. The pulse indicates a male child."

"Did all the Chao women see you examine the pregnant woman?" the magistrate asked.

"Yes."

The magistrate turned to Madame Chao and said, "I congratulate the *Yi-jen*. I knew that a virtuous woman would not be allowed to be without heir. About what time is she due?"

"The latter part of the eleventh month or the early part of the twelfth," she answered.

"When did the late Mandarin Chao pass away?"

"He took the woman as his concubine on the second day of the second month and passed away on the twenty-first of the third."

The magistrate did some mental calculations and confirmed the estimate. He then said to all

those assembled, "These men and women of the Chao clan are a wicked and detestable lot. If I had not, as the magistrate of this district, clearly established the fact that the concubine of the late Mandarin Chao is pregnant, they would be bound to spread slander and suspicion in the future." Turning to Madame Chao, he continued, "Inform my office when her time comes, and employ this same midwife for the delivery." With this he bid Madame Chao to retire to her own compound. He gave orders that Chao Ssu-ts'ai and Chao Wu-yen be taken to the yamen to await his pleasure. Then, taking a seat outside the gate, he ordered thirty strokes of the heavy bamboo for the other six men. They were dismissed after the punishment was administered. When the same punishment was ordered for the women, Madame Chao sent Chao Feng to intercede for them, saying they had acted the way they did only at the instigation of the men. The magistrate refused to grant the request at first, but relented when she sent Chao Shu again to intercede. Actually, he had no intention of flogging the women; he threatened to do so only to give Madame Chao a chance to intercede for them, as he knew she would, and thus earn the gratitude of the women.

The headman and the constable were next summoned and each given twenty strokes for permitting such lawlessness to go on. Back in the yamen, Chao Ssu-ts'ai and Chao Wu-yen, the chief culprits, were brought before him and each given forty strokes of the heavy bamboo, after which their legs were put between the press, Chao Ssu-ts'ai receiving a hundred turns of the press, while Chao Wu-yen received two hundred for trying to bribe the detective. They were both given one month in prison to recover from their wounds.

Now this is a clear case of the operation of the justice of heaven. It was the gods that caused the magistrate to pass by the Chao mansion on that day; it was the gods that caused Chao Ssu-ts'ai and his cohorts to raise such a commotion as to attract a street crowd and the attention of the magistrate, with the result that the latter saw with his own eyes their lawlessness and was able to hand out justice on the spot. If not for the work of the gods, Madame Chao would have found it difficult to bring her grievances to the attention of the magistrate and even more difficult to prove the justness of her cause. Now the residents of the neighborhood were unanimous in praising the wisdom of the magistrate. Ten thousand mouths spoke as one. The magistrate was a real father of the people, and he treated the people like his own children. In the present case he not only gave immediate relief to old Madame Chao in her distress, but also took steps to prevent trouble in the days to come. It is hoped that Oriole will indeed give birth to a son so as not to disappoint the magistrate. But that remains to be seen.

