

THE OIL PEDDLER AND THE COURTESAN
A TRANSLATION
OF
A TRADITIONAL CHINESE SHORT STORY

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Introduction

"Mai-yu-lang tu-chan Hua-k'uei" (賣油郎獨占花魁 The Oil Peddler and the Courtesan) is the third story in the traditional Chinese short story collection Hsing-shih t'ung-yen (醒世恆言,) edited by Feng Meng-lung (馮夢龍) in the late Ming Dynasty.

Hsing-shih t'ung-yen is itself one of the three collections compiled and edited by Feng Meng-lung, collectively known as the San-yen (三言.)

San-yen is important in the history of Chinese literature in that the stories included exemplifies the hua-pen genre. It includes stories of Sung, Yuan, Ming origin as well as Feng's own creations.

There are four available translations of "Mai-yu-lang tu-chan Hua-k'uei," namely two in English, one in French and one in German:

Yang, Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang. "The Oil Vendor and the Courtesan." The Courtesan's Jewel Box. Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1957.

Wang, Chi-chen. "The Oil Peddler and the Queen of Flowers." Traditional Chinese Tales. New York: Greenwood Press, 1968.

Schlegel, G.. "Le Vendeur d'huile qui seul possède la reine-de-beauté ou splendeurs et misères des courtisanes chinoises." Paris, 1877.

Grisebach, E.. German translation of above. Chinesische Novellen.

Unfortunately, neither of the English translations aimed to achieve completeness, often with large segments left out at the translators' discretion. Therefore it is the hope of this translator to provide a rendition as complete and faithful as possible without sacrificing good English and good taste.

Youth loves to boast of their romantic adventures,
Yet how troublesome and complicated these conquests are.
Money without good looks cannot bring about mutual affection,
Good looks without money is just as futile.
Even with both good looks and money,
One still has to practise the art of attentiveness.
For an understanding, attentive, and handsome young man,
Can always excel in a round of amorous competition.

This poem, written to the tune of "Moon on the West River," embodies the most profound truth in matters concerning the arena of love. As the saying goes, "The courtesan loves a handsome face, but the madam loves money." That is why if a patron of the brothels has the looks of P'an An and the richness of T'eng T'ung,¹ he will naturally have no trouble in making everybody happy and becomes the lord of the brothels and the leader of amorous excursions. But more important than good looks and money are the two words "Pang Ch'en," or the art of attentiveness. It is to be like "Pang" which is the upper part of the shoes, and to be like "Ch'en" which is the lining of a garment. In other words, with the right kind of attention, the courtesan's loveliness can easily be increased tenfold. To be attentive is such as: trying to cover her faults, maintaining an attitude of humility towards her, fanning her in the heat and shielding her from the cold, going along with her likes and avoiding her dislikes, and returning her affection with affection. How then can a courtesan not be moved by such a patron? This is what is meant by "Pang Ch'en." In the arena of love, it is those skilled in the art of "Pang Ch'en" that usually get the upper hand in a competition and this art of attentiveness can

easily make up for their lack of good looks or money. Take Cheng Yüan-ho² for example, when he was a beggar at a poor-house, he was both empty of purse and haggard of appearance. But when Li Ya-hsien saw him on that snowy day, she took pity on him. She clothed him in fine silk, fed him with delicacies, and eventually married him. Could it have been due to her desire for his money or her admiration for his good looks? It was rather because Cheng was understanding and knew how to practise the art of "Pang Ch'en" when he had money before that she could not bear to abandon him later on. Just think of the time when Ya-hsien was sick and craved for horse-tripe soup, Cheng immediately killed his horse and made soup for her. Was this incident alone not enough to make her remember his love for her? Later on, Cheng came first in the imperial examinations and Ya-hsien was given the title of Lady Pien-kuo. The beggar songs turned out to be political proposals^{of perpetual value}, and the poor-house became mansions of marble. A sheet of fine brocade covered all, and the whole affair in fact became a fascinating anecdote in the arena of love. Truly:

When luck goes even gold loses its luster,

when luck comes even iron shines bright.

Let us now talk about the Sung Dynasty, as founded by Emperor T'ai-tsu. The throne was then passed on through T'ai-tsung, Chen-tsung, Jen-tsung, Ying-tsung, Shen-tsung, and Che-tsung -- altogether seven reigns. They all discouraged military activities and promoted culture and arts, and peace prevailed in the country. But when Hui-tsung, the emperor of Tao, ascended the throne, he trusted such ministers as Ts'ai Ching, Kao Chiu, Yang Chien, and Chu Mien,³ and a great deal of time and effort was spent on the building of royal palaces and the general enjoyment of

the court, while the affairs of the state was greatly neglected. All this caused a great deal of dissatisfaction among the people. The Chin Tartars took this chance to rise up, throwing this once prosperous and beautiful country into a great turmoil. It was until after the two emperors Hui-tsung and Ch'in-tsung were captured, and Kao-tsung had crossed the Yangtse River on a clay horse to re-establish the kingdom in the south,⁴ thus dividing the country into two, that peace was restored. During these few decades, the people suffered so much hardship that it was just like:

Surviving among bushes of armours and horses,
 Making a living among lines of swords and spears.
 Killing is but a game of play,
 Robbing is but a way of life.

Let us just cite one of these people as an example: his name was Hsin Shan and his wife's maiden name was Juan. They lived in Prosperity Village just outside the city of Pien-liang.⁵ The two of them owned a provision store; and even though their main line of good was rice, they also sold all kinds of other items such as wheat, peas, tea, wine oil, and salt. Their life was well off in a modest way. Although Hsin Shan was already more than forty, he had only one daughter by the name of Yao-ch'in. Even when she was a little girl, Yao-ch'in was both beautiful and very clever. When she was seven, her father sent her to the village school, and she could memorize a thousand lines of text a day. At the age of ten, she was already skilled in composing poems. She once wrote a poem entitled "Thoughts of a Young Girl" which was highly praised by many:

All is quiet here after the curtain was drawn,

The incense in the duck-shaped burner glows low in this chilly room.

Moving the pillow, I'm afraid to frighten the mandarin ducks huddling
together,

Trimming the candle light, I hate to see a pair of wicks standing side
by side.

By the time she was twelve, there was nothing which she did not know about music, chess, calligraphy, and painting. When it came to needlework, her skills often amazed many. Her talents were surely endowed by heaven and could hardly have been taught. Since Hsin Shan had no son, he was anxious to find a son-in-law who would be willing to live in with them and take care of them at their old age; yet because their daughter was so talented, there hardly seemed to be a suitable match for her. As a result, despite that there were quite a few suitors, none of them was granted with his proposal. Unfortunately, it was at that time the Chin Tartars laid siege on Pien-liang. Even though there were many armies in the empire which were loyal to the emperor, they were not allowed to engage in battles because the prime minister had already agreed to make peace with the invaders. The Chin Tartars thus became even more ferocious. They broke into the capital and captured the two emperors. All the people inside the city were scared out of their wits; carrying their young ones, helping their old ones, they abandoned their possessions and fled for their lives. Among them were Hsin Shan, his wife, and their twelve -year-old daughter.

Hurrying like dogs without a home,

Scuttling like fishes slipped out from a net.

Suffering thirst, hunger, and hardships,

Once gone, where will they find home?

Calling upon heaven and earth, and their ancestors,

To bless them so they won't run into the Tartars.

It's just that:

Rather be a dog in times of peace,

Than be a human in times of war and separation.

They did not run into the Tartars on the way, instead, they met with a group of defeated imperial troops. When the soldiers saw the bundles and bags which these refugees were carrying, they purposely cried out false alarms, "Tartars are coming!" and set fire along the way. It was just about evening and the refugees were so frightened that they scattered in confusion, each running for his own life. The soldiers took this chance to rob the people, killing those who were unwilling to yield. It was indeed multiplying confusion by confusion, and adding hardship upon hardship.

Let us go back to Hsin Yao-ch'in. She was knocked down in the onrush of the troops and when she got up again, she had lost sight of her father and mother. Not daring to call out for help, she hid herself among the graves by the road where she spent the night. At daybreak, she ventured out to take a look. All she saw was dust flying all over and corpses everywhere. All the other refugees were nowhere to be seen. Yao-ch'in missed her parents and cried bitterly. She wanted to go and look for them, but did not know the direction. She finally headed south, crying as she went. She walked about two li when she began to feel tired and hungry; so when she finally saw a thatched hut, she decided to go there and beg for some soup. By the time she reached it, she realized that the house was empty.

The people living in there had all fled. Yao-ch'in sat by the mud-wall and cried.

As the old saying goes, "No coincidences, no stories." It just happened that a man passed by at this very moment. His name was Pu Ch'iao and was a neighbor of Hsin Shan. He was a lazy and greedy man, often eating off others as a means of living. Everyone called him Big Pu. He had also been separated from the main group of refugees and ^{was} walking alone. When he heard someone crying, he hurried over to take a look. Yao-ch'in had known him since she was a child and now, at a time of trouble and without anyone to her help, she felt as if she had seen a relative when she saw this neighbor. She hurried to wipe away her tears and got up to greet him, "Uncle Pu, have you seen my father and mother?"

Pu Ch'iao thought to himself, "The soldiers have taken away all my belongings and I was just worrying that I don't have any money for traveling. Now heaven has sent me this invaluable object. This is indeed a precious piece of merchandise which I should invest in." So he lied, "Your father and mother were grief-stricken because they could not find you. Now they have went ahead, but they told me that if I ever get to see you, be sure to take you to them. They even promised me a big reward."

Even though Yao-ch'in was an extremely clever child, but at a helpless time like this, any straight man could be fooled easily, so she left with Pu Ch'iao without a doubt. It was just like:

If she had known the truth, she would not have kept him as a companion,

But in a desperate situation such as this, any companion is better
than no companion.

Pu Ch'iao gave her some of the food which he had on him and instructed her,

"Your parents did not stop for the night, so we might not catch up with them until we reach Chien-k'ang⁶ on the other side of the Yangtze River. So in the mean time, I'll call you daughter and you can call me father. Otherwise people will think that I'm taking in lost girls and this will be rather inconvenient."

Yao-ch'in consented readily and from then on, the two of them traveled together by land and by water, and under the guise of father and daughter. By the time they had reached Chien-k'ang, they heard that Wu-shu, the fourth prince of Chin,⁷ had led his troops across the river and was fast approaching Chien-k'ang. They had also heard that Prince K'ang had ascended to the throne, and had settled down at Hangchow, changing the name of the city to Lin-an. So they went by boat to Jun-chou, then passed through Soochow, Ch'ang-chou, Chia-ting, Hu-chou, and finally arrived at Lin-an and were temporarily put up in an inn.

By then Pu Ch'iao, bringing Hsin Yao-ch'in with him for more than three thousand li, had already spent what little money he had. He had even given his outer clothes to pay the inn bill, and Hsin Yao-ch'in was the only merchandise left for him; so he decided to sell her. He found out that Wang Chiu-ma, the madam of a brothel near West Lake, was looking for a girl, so he brought Chiu-ma to the inn to take a look at Yao-ch'in and to bargain about the price. When Chiu-ma saw that Yao-ch'in was indeed a very pretty girl, she agreed to pay Pu Ch'iao fifty taels of silver for her. Pu Ch'iao took the silver and sent Yao-ch'in to Chiu-ma's house. It turned out that he was a rather cunning man: in front of Chiu-ma he only said, "Yao-ch'in is my daughter. It was most unfortunate that she has to enter such a business. I hope you'll be kind and gentle when you

teach her. I'm sure she'll obey you if you just be patient with her." Then in front of Yao-ch'in, he said something else, "Chiu-ma is a close relative of mine, and I'm going to put you in her care temporarily. I'll come back for you as soon as I've found out the whereabouts of your parents." Yao-ch'in believed everything and went happily.

What a pity that an extremely clever girl like her,
 has fallen into the snarl of the brothels.

After Chiu-ma had taken Yao-ch'in in, she gave her a complete change of clothing, and nuzzled her in a room in the depth of her house. Every day, she fed her with the best food and drink, and comforted her with kind words. At first Yao-ch'in settled down comfortably, but when there was no news from Pu Ch'iao after several days, she began to miss her parents and with tears streaming down her cheeks, she asked Chiu-ma, "Why hasn't Uncle Pu come to see me?"

"Which Uncle Pu?" asked Chiu-ma.

"The big Pu who had brought me to your house," replied Yao-ch'in.

"He said that he is your father," Chiu-ma said.

"But his family name is Pu and mine is Hsin!" and she proceeded to tell Chiu-ma in detail how she fled from Pien-liang and was separated from her parents; how she met Pu Ch'iao on the way, came to Lin-an with him and the things he had said to coax her.

"I see," Chiu-ma said. "So you are an orphan now, just like a crab without legs. I might as well tell you the truth. That man Pu Ch'iao has sold you to me for fifty taels of silver. This is a brothel and we all depend on the girls here receiving patrons for our living. There are several of them here but none of

them is of outstanding quality like you are. I'll treat you like my own daughter and when you grow up, I can guarantee that you will enjoy all the luxuries for the rest of your life."

When Yao-ch'in heard this, she realized that she had been tricked by Pu Ch'iao and she cried bitterly. Chiu-ma comforted her for a long time before she finally stopped crying. From then on, Chiu-ma changed her name to Wang Mei and everyone called her Mei-niang. She was taught to play different instruments, and to sing and dance, which she excelled in each and all. By the age of fourteen, she was already a stunning beauty, and was much sought after by the rich and noble young men of Lin-an, who came visiting with gifts in abundance. There were also others who admired genius in a woman, and when her literary accomplishments were known, came by her door everyday, asking for her poems and her calligraphy. Her name became more famous by the day, until they no longer called her Mei-niang, instead they called her "Queen of the Courtesans." The young men of West Lake composed a Kua-chu-erh song⁸ in praise of her:

Of all the courtesans,

Who is as beautiful as Wang Mei-niang.

She can write, she can paint, she can compose verses,

Playing musical instruments, singing and dancing are but simple
things to her.

People often compare West Lake to Hsi-tzu,⁹

But comparing Hsi-tzu to her is not quite good enough.

If only one is lucky enough to snug close to her,

Even death is a willing price to pay.

It was exactly because Mei-niang had gained herself such a high reputation, someone made an offer for her first night when she was only fourteen. But since she was unwilling, and since Chiu-ma regarded her like a potential money tree, naturally the latter took her refusal like a royal edict and did not force her. So another year passed and Mei-niang was fifteen. Actually there were rules and regulations in this profession regarding a girl's first night. Since it was too early at the age of thirteen, it was known as "trying out the flower," and was only done when the madam was greedy and did not consider the girl's suffering. The patron naturally could not enjoy himself to the fullest, but usually did it only to enhance his reputation. At the age of fourteen, it was known as "blossoming of the flower." By that time, the girl should already start to menstruate, so with a mutual giving and taking, it could already be done quite satisfactorily. At the age of fifteen, it was known as "picking the flower." Even though it was still thought to be rather young for ordinary girls, it was already considered past the right time for people in this business. Since Mei-niang had not yet been patronized, the young men of west Lake composed yet another Kua-chu-erh song:

Mei-niang is like a good looking gourd,

At fifteen, she has yet to give people a taste of her.

What is the use of having this blown-up reputation?

Even if she isn't a barren woman, she must be the mother of a bisexual.

If she still has that thing intact,

Even if she's very shy, how can she bear the itch.

Chiu-ma came to hear about all these and was afraid that it might give her

business a bad reputation, so she came to persuade Mei-niang to receive clients. Mei-niang refused flatly, "Unless I see my own parents and they consent to it, otherwise I won't receive anyone."

Chiu-ma was displeased by her reply but at the same time did not have the heart to force her. This dragged on for quite some time. Then by chance a rich man by the name of Chin was willing to pay Chiu-ma three hundred taels of silver for Mei-niang's first night. In face of such a large sum of money, Chiu-ma immediately came up with a scheme and briefed Chin on the when and hows to achieve his goal. Chin agreed readily. On the fifteenth of the eighth month, he invited Mei-niang to his boat under the pretext of watching the tides on the lake. Along with three or four accomplices, they drank and played the finger-guessing game, urging and persuading Mei-niang to drink until she was dead drunk. She was completely unconscious when they helped her back to Chiu-ma's house and lay her out on the bed. At the time, the weather was quite warm so she did not have that many layers of clothing on and Chiu-ma personally took care of them. Chin's weapon was no fantastic instrument, he gingerly wedged open Mei-niang's rumps, then applying a little saliva, he pushed it in. Mei-niang was awakened by the pain, but Chin had already achieved his goal. She wanted to struggle, but there was no strength left in her limbs. Chin was able to do all that he wanted, and the went ran its full course. It was:

The petal has just blossomed amidst the rain,

But already the beauty in the mirror is not like before.

At the fifth watch, Mei-niang woke up from her drunkenness and realized that she had been tricked by Chiu-ma and had lost her virginity. She could only lament

at her sad fate for meeting such brutality. She got up to go to the bathroom and put back on her clothes. Then she laid down on a rattan cot by the bed, turned her face towards the wall and wept silently. When Chin came over and tried to embrace her, she did not hesitate to claw him in the face, leaving several bloody trails on his cheeks. Chin was naturally put off, so as soon as day broke, he told Chiu-ma that he was leaving. Chiu-ma tried to make him stay but he left in a huff.

Ordinarily, after the first night of a courtesan, the madam would be the first one to go into the room in the morning after and congratulate her. Then courtesans from the other brothels would all come to congratulate her and there would ^{be} several days of feasting. The patron would stay on for one to two months, at least a couple of weeks to twenty days. The way Chin left early the next morning had never happened before. Chiu-ma was extremely puzzled, so she got dressed and went upstairs to take a look. She saw Mei-niang lying on the cot with a tear-stained face. Because Chiu-ma wanted to coax her to accept more patrons, she kept apologizing for what had happened. Mei-niang kept silent so eventually Chiu-ma had to go back downstairs. Mei-niang cried all day and did not drink or eat anything. From that day on, she pleaded sickness and refused to go downstairs or receive any visitors.

Chiu-ma was growing impatient by the day, but she dared not torture Mei-niang for fear of driving her to more desperate actions. She could let Mei-niang alone, but then she had brought her up for the sole purpose of earning money, so if Mei-niang did not receive patrons, there would be no use in her even if she stayed there for a hundred years. Chiu-ma hesitated for several days with no result; then one day she suddenly remembered her sworn sister and confidante Liu

Ssu-ma, "She certainly has a very clever tongue, so she might be able to persuade Mei-niang. Why not ask her over and let her try? If Mei-niang changes her mind, we certainly won't be short of business from now on."

Right away, she sent Pao-erh to invite Liu Ssu-ma over and told her all about her troubles. Liu Ssu-ma said, "I'm a woman Sui Ho and a female Lu Chia.¹⁰ I can talk an ^(Buddhist saint) arhat into falling in love, and I can persuade the Goddess of the Moon into considering marriage. You can count on me."

"If that's the case, I'll gladly kowtow to you even though I'm your elder sister," Chiu-ma said. "Drink another cup of tea, so you won't be thirsty later."

"This mouth of mine can fill an ocean, I won't get thirsty even if I talk till tomorrow," Liu Ssu-ma replied.

She drank a few more cups of tea and then went to Mei-niang's room at the back of the house. The door was tightly shut so Ssu-ma knocked softly, calling, "Niece."

Mei-niang heard that it was Ssu-ma so she came to open the door. After the usual exchange of greetings, Ssu-ma sat down by the table and Mei-niang sat down next to her. Ssu-ma saw that there was a scroll of fine silk spread out on top of the table with a woman's face sketched out on it though not yet colored.

"What a fine picture!" Ssu-ma praised. "How clever you are! How lucky Sister Chiu is to have such a clever daughter like you, so beautiful and so talented. Even with a cartload of gold, I don't think anyone can find a comparable girl in this entire Lin-an city."

"Don't make fun of me, auntie," Mei-niang said. "What wind has brought you over here?"

"I have often wanted to come and visit you," Ssu-ma answered. "But I'm always so busy with my own house work. Now that I've heard that you have just received your ^{first} patron, I have especially taken the time to come and congratulate Sister Chiu."

Mei-niang blushed when she heard the mention of her shameful experience, she bowed her head and said nothing. Ssu-ma knew that she was shy, so she moved her chair a little closer and taking Mei-niang's hand in hers, she said, "My child, a courtesan cannot afford to be as tender-skinned as a soft-shelled egg. You can never earn big money if you are so shy!"

"What do I want money for?" Mei-niang retorted.

"My child, even if you don't want money, think of your mother who has brought you up. She would at least like to have her investment back. As the saying goes: live by the mountain, live off the mountain; live by the sea, live off the sea. Of all the girls here in Sister Chiu's house, who can compare with you? In her orchards, you are the only melon upon which she can depend for some seeds. That's why she treats you quite differently from the others. You are a clever girl, so should know how to weigh and differentiate between things. I've heard that ever since that night, you have refused to receive any clients. What is the meaning of that? If everyone of the girls is like you, who is going to provide this whole household of silkworms with mulberry leaves? Your mother has been kind to you so you should try to deserve her kindness. Don't let the other girls have something to criticize you for."

"Let them talk. I'm not afraid of them!" Mei-niang argued.

"My, my! Criticizing is a small thing, but do you know about the workings

of our business?" Ssu-ma asked.

"What workings?"

"In this business, we depend entirely on our daughters for our living. If we are lucky enough to take in a promising girl, it is just like a large family acquiring a plot of fertile land or some form of profitable property. When she is young, we even hope that the wind blowing at her can make her grow faster. Her first night in receiving a patron is to us what the harvest is to the farmers. After that we expect to get the returns of our investment: welcoming new customers at the front door, seeing old customers out at the back door; Chang bringing rice, Li sending firewood, and all the hassle and bussels of coming and going. This is what we would call a successful brothel."

"How embarrassing! I don't want to do such things!" Mei-niang said.

Ssu-ma covered her mouth and cackled, "You don't want to do such things! Do you think you're going to have your way? In the brothel, the madam is the boss. If a girl does not listen to her, she can beat her black and blue any time she wants to, and the latter will surely end up doing what she says. Sister Chiu has always let you have your ways because she knows that you are a clever and pretty girl, and so pampered and spoiled since you're young. She always wants to leave you some self-respect and tries to give you face. But just then, she told me a lot of things, she said that you are ungrateful, and you don't know that goose feathers are light and millstones heavy. She's very displeased and has asked me to speak to you. If you insist on being so stubborn, she might get really mad, pull down her face and give you a sound scolding and beating. Can you fly? Once she gets started, there will be no end to it, and sooner or later you'll have to

yield to her wishes. But by then, your reputation would have already been ruined and you might even become the laughing stalk among your sisters. Why don't you listen to me: since the bucket has already fell into the well, you cannot pull it back up again. So why not go happily into your mother's arms and enjoy her favor while you can?"

"I come from a respectable family and it was only by some misfortune that I fell into this place. If you can suggest to my mother and get me out of here, you will be doing a greater good than building a nine-storied pagoda for Buddha. But if you want me to submit to this life of shame, I would rather die than to do what you've said," pleaded Mei-niang.

"My child, getting out is an admirable thing. Of course I'm in favor of it too," said Ssu-ma. "But there are different kinds of getting-out."

"What are the differences among them?" Mei-niang asked.

"There are the real getting-out and the false getting-out; the bitter getting-out and the happy getting-out; the getting-out through a good chance and the getting-out through forced circumstances; the permanent getting-out and the temporary getting-out. Let me explain them to you one by one. What is the real getting-out? If a talented young man marries a beautiful girl, and a beautiful girl weds a talented young man, then this is a good match. But perfect unions are often barred by many obstacles and are hard to attain. If by luck the two meet, he loves her while she loves him and each cannot live without the other. He is willing to take her and she is willing to follow him -- they are just like a pair of moths, inseparable even in death. This is the real getting-out. What is the false getting-out? The patron loves the courtesan but the courtesan does not

love the patron. She does not want to marry him but uses "marriage" to lure him into lavishing more money on her, and at the crucial moment, she backs out under some sort of pretext. There is also another kind of madly infatuated man who knows perfectly well that the courtesan does not love him, yet insists on marrying her. He spends a large sum of money to buy off the madam so there is no room left for the courtesan to object. She is therefore forced into marrying him, but bears the grudge secretly. After the marriage, she would purposely disobey the family regulations, ranging from throwing tantrums to openly having affairs with other men, until the family can no longer tolerate her and has to let her go back only after six months to a year. She becomes a courtesan again and goes right back to her old business. "Getting-out" to her is but another way of making money. This is the false getting-out. What is the bitter getting-out? Similarly, the patron loves the courtesan while the courtesan does not love the patron, but she is under his power. The madam is afraid to cause trouble and has consented readily. The courtesan can do nothing except to go with tears in her eyes. Once she's married into the rich family with its imposing hierarchy, she finds the family regulations so severe that she has neither status nor freedom. She is like half a concubine and half a slave, suffering and surviving from day to day. This is the bitter getting-out. What is the happy getting-out? The courtesan is just in search for someone when she meets a patron of amiable character and comes from a rich family. His wife is kind but has no children, so he looks forward to marrying her ^{having} and ^{her} bear him a son, which will obtain for her the position of the family heir's mother. In such a marriage, she can hope for a comfortable life and good prospects. This is the happy getting-out. What is the getting-out through a good chance? The

courtesan, after enjoying a long time of popularity, feels that she has had enough. She decides to choose a suitable man and marry while she is still popular and has many suitors, thus beating a speedy retreat before it's too late and not having to suffer the neglect of others in her inevitable downhill days. This is the getting-out through a good chance. What is the getting-out through forced circumstances? The courtesan has no thoughts of getting-out, but under circumstances such as: being forced by some government officials, or having been bullied or cheated, or having too many debts which she is unable to pay off, she decides to marry the first available man just to buy some peace and hide herself for good. This is the getting-out through forced circumstances. What is the permanent getting-out? The courtesan is already in her later years and has experienced all kinds of tumult^{tu}ous experiences. By chance she meets a mature patron, and finds that both have about the same temperament and future plan. So wrapping up businesses, they live happily through their old age. This is the permanent getting-out. What is the temporary getting-out? He loves her and she loves him, but this red-hot affair is only a momentary up-shot of passion and has no long term planning. Either the family elders do not allow such an union; or the man's wife is jealous and after several squabbles, the courtesan is sent to the brothels and the original payment demanded back; or his family is very poor and she cannot stand the hardship, so returns to her old profession. This is the temporary getting-out."

"I would like to get out now, so what should I do?" asked Mei-niang.

"My child, let me teach you a fool-proof way," Ssu-ma said.

"I'll never forget your kindness if you do," Mei-niang hastened to say.

"As for the matter of getting out, you will be considered clean once you are married into a family. Anyway you have already done it with someone, so even if you get married tonight, you cannot call yourself a virgin," Ssu-ma explained.

"You can only blame your fate for bringing you into such a place. Your mother has already spent a lot of time and effort on you, if you don't help her for a few years and earn some money for her, she won't let you go that easily. There's also another thing: even if you want to get out of here, you'll have to choose a desirable match first. Of course you don't want to follow any ugly or vulgar fellow, but now you won't even receive one single patron, how would you know who to follow and who not to? If you insist on refusing, your mother might be forced to sell you to someone who is looking for a concubine. This is one way of getting-out too, you know! Your husband may be old, or ugly, or illiterate like a country bumpkin. Won't you be throwing your whole life away then? It'll be better if you fall into the river, for there might be someone nearby who would comment 'What a pity!' when he hears the noise. Listen to me, why not obey your mother and let her pick some clients for you. With your beauty and talent, I'm sure the ordinary patrons won't even dare to approach you. Your patrons will all be rich men or noble lords and they will surely do justice to your beauty. Enjoy all you can while you're still young. Besides, you can also earn your mother a fortune and save yourself some money so you don't have to ask for others' help later on. After five or ten years, pick out someone you like, someone who understands you, then I'll personally be your matchmaker. You can be married off properly and your mother won't stop you then. Wouldn't that be profitable to the both of you?"

When Mei-niang heard that, she smiled and said nothing. Ssu-ma knew that

she was beginning to be moved by her persuasion, so she continued, "What I've said is all for your own good. Listen to me now and you'll be ever so thankful later." After she said that, she got up to leave.

Chiu-ma, who was standing outside the door, had already heard everything. When Mei-niang saw Ssu-ma out of her room, she bumped right into Chiu-ma. Mei-niang blushed and withdrew into her room hastily. Chiu-ma followed Ssu-ma back to the front of the house and they sat down again.

"My niece is very stubborn," Ssu-ma said. "But I've talked and talked that I think this piece of hard iron has finally melted down. So you just go ahead and look for a patron, I'm sure she'll be willing. I'll come again to congratulate you then."

Chiu-ma thanked Ssu-ma profusely and made her stay for dinner, parting only when both were stuffed and drunk.

Later, the young men of West Lake made up another Kua-chu-erh song to describe this episode:

Liu Ssu-ma, what a sharp tongue you've got.

Even a lady Sui Ho, a female Lu Chia, don't have such fantastic abilities.

Lengthy discourses, succinct advices, never a slip of tongue.

Even those in drunken slumber, you can wake them up.

Even those smart ones, you can stupify them.

What a stubborn girl, and you managed to change her mind.

Let us now go back to Mei-niang. Upon listening to Ssu-ma's advices, she thought them over carefully and found them quite resonable. So from then on, she

received those who called on her quite willingly , and they, sure enough, followed each other in an incessant flow until she could hardly have a moment to herself. Her fame grew by the day, and at ten taels of silver a night, the patrons still fought eagerly for their turns. Chiu-ma was simply overjoyed at this sudden flow of income, while Mei-niang only had her heart set on looking for someone who could help her get out. But unfortunately this was not something that could be done in a hurry. It was simply that:

Priceless objects are easy to acquire,

But loved ones are hard to find.

Let us now go over to the other end of the story. There was a certain oil shop owner by the name of Chu Shih-lao who lived outside the Clear Ripple Gate. He had adopted a young lad three years before. The boy's name was Ch'in Ch'ung and he was a refugee from Pien-liang. His mother died when he was still young; and his father Ch'in Liang sold him when he was thirteen while the old man himself went to work as an attendant at the Upper T'ien-chu Temple. Chu Shih-lao was old and childless, and his wife had died recently, so he treated Ch'in Ch'ung like his own son. He changed the boy's name to Chu Ch'ung and made him work in the oil shop to learn about the business. The two of them managed very well until Chu Shih-lao got a kidney disease which forced him to hire an assistant by the name of Hsing Chuan to help out in the shop.

Time passed by in a flash and some four years went by. Chu Ch'ung had grown into a handsome young man of seventeen, and though of age, he was still unmarried. Chu Shih-lao had a maid called Orchid who was already over twenty. She had her eyes set on Chu Ch'ung for some time, and on several occasions, had tried to

seduce him. Chu Ch'ung was a good and honest youth, and furthermore he found Orchid distasteful and ugly, so even though one side had the intention, the other was not willing. When Orchid saw that she had failed to entice Chu Ch'ung, she looked for another target and found the worker Hsing Chuan. Hsing Chuan was an unmarried man close to forty, so she succeeded without any difficulty, and they often met secretly. They soon found that Chu Ch'ung was often in their ways, so they decided to think of a way to get rid of him. Orchid went to Chu Shih-lao and accused Chu Ch'ung, "Young master has often made advances at me. He is very dishonest."

Chu Shih-lao had also had an affair with Orchid before so he could not help feeling a little sour. Hsing Chuan, on his part, hid some of the money in the shop and then went and told Chu Shih-lao, "Young master has been gambling and losing money. The cash in the shop has been short several times. He must have stolen them."

At first Chu Shih-lao did not believe them, but being old and irresolute, he was finally swayed by the repeated accusations. He called Chu Ch'ung to him and gave him a severe scolding. Chu Ch'ung was smart enough to realize that it must have been Hsing Chuan and Orchid's doings. He wanted to explain, but on second thought he decided that it would only make himself look bad if the old man chose not to believe him. Then he thought of a solution and suggested it to Chu Shih-lao, "Since business has been light in the shop, and there is really no need for two men to stay there, why not let Hsing Chuan take care of the shop while I go and peddle oil in the streets. I'll report all the sales to you everyday. Won't that make it a two-fold business?"

Chu Shih-lao was about to consent when Hsing Chuan said to him, "He doesn't really want to peddle oil in the streets! He has been stealing quite a bit of money from your shop in the last few years, so he has some saving with him now. He is also angry at you for not arranging his marriage. Thus he's unwilling to help out here any longer and is just using this as an excuse to get out, to pick himself a wife and to set up his own household."

Chu Shih-lao sighed, "I treated him like my own son, and he has such ill intentions towards me. Heaven does not bless me! Forget it! After all he's not my own flesh and blood and he'll never be on my side. There is nothing I can do except to let him go his own way."

So he gave Chu Ch'ung three taels of silver and told him to leave. He was kind enough to let Chu Ch'ung take all his clothes and beddings. Chu Ch'ung knew that it was no use for him to argue, so he kowtowed four times to Chu Shih-lao and left, crying bitterly. It was simply that:

Hsiao-chi killed himself because of slanders,

Shen-sheng¹¹ lost his life because of gossips.

Even one's own son is treated thus,

No wonder that an adopted son has to suffer false accusations.

It turned out that Ch'in Liang had never told his son that he was going to work at the Upper T'ien-chu Temple, so after Chu Ch'ung had left Chu Shih-lao's house, he rented a small room by the All Peace Bridge where he put down all his belongings. Then he locked his door and went from place to place inquiring about his father. He walked around for several days and found nothing, so he had to put the matter aside for the time being. During those years with Chu Shih-lao, he had

always been faithful and honest, and therefore had not a single penny of private saving. The three taels of silver which he had gotten when he left was not enough for capital. What kind of business could he do? He thought about it for a long time and finally decided that selling oil was the only kind of business he was familiar with. Besides, the oil dealers all knew him well, therefore it would probably be safest for him to become an oil peddler. He bought himself the necessary equipments and gave the remaining money all to one of the oil dealers for oil. The owner there had known Chu Ch'ung to be an honest man. He also remembered how at a very young age Chu Ch'ung used to take care of the oil shop for Chu Shih-lao but now had to become a peddler because he was slandered by the other worker and was forced out of the shop consequently. He sympathized with the injustice done to Chu Ch'ung and had set his mind on helping him. He gave him the best quality oil, measuring it out for him generously. Chu Ch'ung, in turn, was able to treat his customers in the same way, so his oil usually got sold much faster than the other oil peddlers. He lived frugally and with a careful budget. Very soon, he was able to save up some money to buy himself everyday necessities and clothes. The one thing which still preoccupied his thoughts was his father. He thought, "Everyone knows me as Chu Ch'ung so who would know that my real name is Ch'in Ch'ung. If my father happens to come and look for me, he won't even have a clue."

Thereupon he changed his family name back to Ch'in. This storyteller has this to say: when a man of position and importance wants to resume his original family name, he presents a petition to the court, or notify the Board of Rites, the imperial colleges, and other appropriate authorities so that his action

becomes a matter of public record. But what can an oil peddler do so as to let the others know that he wants to resume his original family name? Ch'in thought of a way: on one side of the oil buckets, he painted a big character "Ch'in" and on the other side, he painted the characters "Pien-liang" in order that everyone could see at a glance who he was. From then on, the people in Lin-an came to know his original name and all referred to him as Oil Peddler Ch'in.

At the time, the early spring weather was neither too cold nor too hot. Ch'in heard that the monks at the Monastery of Manifest Blessings were going to hold a nine day service and he thought that they would probably need a large quantity of oil, so he went there with his oil load. The monks had heard of him as a peddler whose price was reasonable and whose oil was of the finest quality, and they all bought oil from him. Therefore, for nine days, Ch'in did his business only at this monastery. It was simply that:

Being sharp won't bring you profit,

Being generous won't cause you loss of capital.

On the ninth day, Ch'in Ch'ung left the monastery after having sold all his oil. The weather was extremely good on that day and there were many sightseers strolling around. Walking along the bank of the lake, Ch'in Ch'ung saw the Ten View Pond in the distance with its red peach blossoms and green willows. There were also many decorated boats with musical bands playing on the lake. In all and all, there were much to admire and enjoy all along the way. Ch'in Ch'ung felt tired after walking for a while, so he went back to an open space to the right of the monastery of Manifest Blessings. Putting down his load, he sat down to rest on a piece of rock. There was a house nearby, facing the lake. Its

fence was painted and inside the red hedges, there were bushes of fine bamboo which hid the inner chambers; but even so, the courtyard already gave an appearance of tidiness. Ch'in Ch'ung saw several men dressed in fine clothes coming out from the inside followed by a young girl. At the door, they bade each other goodbye and then the girl walked back inside. Throughout all this time, Ch'in Ch'ung was unable to take his eyes off the girl, because he had never seen such beauty and such grace before in his life. He found himself paralysed with an intoxicating sensation. But Ch'in Ch'ung was an innocent youth and did not know that the place was actually a brothel. As he was wondering to himself, a middle-aged woman and a young maid came out and stood by the door, gazing idly around. When the woman saw the oil load, she said, "Ah, we are just going to send for some oil, and here is an oil peddler. Why not buy some from him?"

The maid took an oil bottle from the house and approached Ch'in, but he did not notice her until she called to him, "Oil peddler."

"I have no more oil today," Ch'in replied. "But I'll bring some over tomorrow if you want it."

The maid could read a little and when she saw the character "Ch'in" on the oil bucket, she said to the woman, "The oil peddler's name is Ch'in."

The madam had also heard the others talk about a certain Oil Peddler Ch'in and what an honest man he was. So she told Ch'in, "We need oil everyday. If you're willing to carry it over, we'll be your regular customers."

"Thank you, I'll bring it over promptly everyday," Ch'in promised.

After the woman and the maid had gone back inside, Ch'in thought to himself, "I wonder who this woman is to the young girl? Now that I'm going to deliver oil

to them everyday, I shall at least get to see her, whether I make money or not. what luck!"

Just when he was about to put the load back on his shoulder and start out again, he saw two men carrying a sedan-chair with blue silk curtains approaching with speed, followed by two pages. They stopped in front of the house, the two men put down the sedan-chair while the pages went inside. Ch'in Ch'ung thought, "I wonder what's happening? Who are they waiting for?"

A little while later, he saw two maids coming out, one carrying a scarlet cushion and the other carrying an inlaid bamboo box which they handed to the sedan-chair bearers to put under the seat. Then the young girl whom he had seen earlier came out, followed by the two pages, one carrying a lute case and the other carrying several scrolls and had a flute dangling from his wrist. She boarded the sedan-chair and the bearers carried it along the way which they had come while the maids and the pages all followed on foot. With this second and closer look, Ch'in Ch'ung was even more puzzled. Carrying his oil load, he walked away slowly.

After a few steps, he saw a tavern by the river, Ch'in Ch'ung did not have the habit of drinking, but after seeing this young girl, he felt both happy and troubled; so he put down his load and went into the tavern. He picked a small table and sat down. The waiter asked him, "Are you expecting company or are you drinking alone?"

"I'm drinking alone," Ch'in Ch'ung replied. "Bring me some good wine and a few dishes of fresh fruits, but no meat."

When the waiter was pouring the wine, Ch'in Ch'ung asked him, "Who lives in

that house with the gilded gates?"

"This is the villa of young Lord Ch'i, but is now occupied by a woman by the name of wang Chiu-ma."

"I've just seen a young lady going off in a sedan-chair. Who is she?"

"She is the famous courtesan wang Mei-niang, but everybody calls her "Queen of the Courtesans." She comes from Pien-liang but was stranded here as a refugee. Whether it's music, singing, dancing, chess, calligraphy or painting, she is skilled in every one of them. All her clients are rich and well-known, and she asks ten taels of silver for staying over night. Ordinary fellows cannot possibly hope to get near her. The place they used to live in outside the Rush Gold Gate was too small, so young Lord Ch'i, one of her intimates, lent this house to them about half a year ago."

When Ch'in Ch'ung heard that she was also a native of Pien-liang, it aroused his homesickness, but at the same time it made him feel even more drawn towards her. He drank a few more cups and paid the waiter. As he was walking home, he thought to himself, "What a beautiful girl, and what a pity that she should fall into a brothel." Then he laughed to himself, "How would I have seen her if she has not fallen into a brothel!" The more he thought, the more infatuated he became. "Man has but one life, grass sees but one autumn. If I could hold her in my arms for one night, I would die without any regret." Then he rebuked himself, "Bah! I carry this load all day long and I only make a few pennies. How can I think of such out-of-reach things. It will be just like a toad inside a ditch, wanting to eat the flesh of the swan. How can he get his bite? All of her clients are either rich or noble lords, I don't think she'll receive an oil peddler like

me even if I have the money." But a new thought occurred to him, "I've heard that the madams care only about money, and they're willing to take a beggar as long as he can pay the price. Moreover, I'm in a respectable trade, so why shouldn't she receive me if I have the money. But where can I find the money?"

He day-dreamed and mumbled to himself all the way home. It makes one wonder that how could there be such a foolish man? A peddler with only three taels of silver for his capital, and yet he was thinking of spending ten taels for a night with a famous courtesan. What a dream! But as the saying goes: if there's a will, there's a way. After wrecking his brain, he finally figured out a way, "From tomorrow on, I shall take out the capital and save up the rest everyday. If I save one penny a day, I shall have three taels sixty cents at the end of one year. So I shall have enough money in three years' time. If I save two pennies a day, it'll only take me one and a half year. If I save even more, about one year will be sufficient."

As he was thinking, he had already reached home. He unlocked the door and went inside; but because of all the thoughts that had occupied his mind on his way home, he found the otherwise same room sad and lonely. Without eating his dinner, he climbed into bed where he tossed and turned all night long, couldn't quite forget the beautiful girl.

Because she is fair as the flowers and the moon.

His admiration and passion are greatly aroused.

The next morning, he got up at dawn, filled his oil buckets, ate his breakfast and headed straight for Chiu-ma's house. He went in through the front door but dare not venture any further. He stuck out his head and looked around. Chiu-ma

had just gotten up and her hair was still all dishevelled. Ch'in recognised her voice telling Pao-erh what to buy in the market so he called out to her. Chiu-ma looked outside and saw Oil Peddler Ch'in, she smiled and said, "What an honest man! You kept your words."

She asked him to bring the oil in and weighed out a bottle of about five catties. When she named the price, Ch'in Ch'ung did not haggle at all so she was very pleased, "This bottle of oil can last us two days. If you will come every other day from now on, I won't buy oil from someone else."

Ch'in Ch'ung promised and left, only regretting that he did not see the Queen of the Courtesans, "Anyway, I'm glad that they are my regular customers now. If I don't see her the first time, I may see her the second time; if I don't see her the second time, I may see her the third time. There's only one thing though, if I have to come all this way just to sell one bottle of oil, certainly this is no way to do business. Monastery of Manifest Blessing is on the same way, even though they're not holding services today, they probably need oil just the same. Why don't I go over to take a look? If I can get some more customers there, I can sell all my oil along this route."

It turned out that the monks were just hoping that he would call, and all bought oil from him. Ch'in Ch'ung made agreements with each of them to deliver oil there every other day. That day was an even-numbered day, so from then on, Ch'in Ch'ung did his business in other places on odd-numbered days and only call on the Ch'ien-t'ang Gate route on even-numbered days. Once outside of Ch'ien-t'ang Gate, he always headed for Chiu-ma's house first, hoping to see the Queen of the Courtesans. He saw her once in a while. When he did not see her, he felt

that his longing was in vain; but when he did see her, his longing became all the more intense. It was:

Heaven and earth may end one day,

But this passion will never die.

With Ch'in Ch'ung calling at Chiu-ma's house every other day, everyone in the house soon got to know him. Time passed quickly and soon more than a year went by. In the mean time, Ch'in Ch'ung picked out the purer bits of silver from his sales everyday, whether it was thirty cents, twenty cents, or at least ten cents, and saved them up. Every time he had accumulated a certain amount, he would have them changed into larger pieces. Saving like this, he had eventually put aside a large bag of silver which he himself had lost count of the amount. One rainy odd-numbered day, he decided not to do business. Since he was rather pleased with his savings, he thought, "I have nothing better to do today, why don't I weigh them and find out exactly how much I have?"

So he took out his umbrella and went over to the silversmith's shop to borrow a scale. The silversmith was a snobbish man and thought to himself, "A mere oil peddler and he wants to borrow a scale to weigh his silver. Even if I give him a five tael weight, I don't think the scale will tip!"

When Ch'in Ch'ung opened his bag and showed the large number of titbits of silver, even though there were only a few large pieces, it was an impressive sight. The silversmith being a shallow man, immediately changed his opinion and attitude towards Ch'in Ch'ung. He thought, "One really cannot judge a man by his appearance, just as one cannot measure the sea with bushel barrels."

The silversmith hurried to set up the scale and took out a bunch of weights

in various sizes. The silver in the bag came to exactly sixteen taels, tipping at the one catty mark. Ch'in Ch'ung thought to himself, "Take away the three taels of capital, there is still more than enough for a night at the brothel." Then he thought of something else, "How can I pay with all these titbits of silver? People will look down on me if I do. Since it is so convenient here, why don't I make them into larger pieces. It'll certainly look more presentable."

So he had the silversmith make for him one large ingot of ten taels and one small ingot of one tael eighty cents. With the remaining four tael eighty cents, he paid the silversmith and also bought a new hat, a pair of new shoes and socks for himself. When he returned home, he washed and starched his clothes, then perfumed them over and over again with Persian incense. On the first bright and sunny day, he got up early and dressed himself up.

Even though he is no rich and noble lord,

He is certainly a romantic young lad.

After Ch'in Ch'ung had groomed himself carefully, he put the silver in his sleeves, locked the door and headed straight for Wang Chiu-ma's house. He was in high spirit all the way, but by the time he reached their front door, his sense of shame caught up with him, and he thought, "I've always come here as the oil peddler. and today I've come here as a patron. How can I approach them?"

Just when he was pondering, the door opened with a creak and Chiu-ma came out. When she saw Ch'in, she said, "Master Ch'in, why are you not doing business today? And you are all dressed up! Where are you going?"

Since it was already too late for Ch'in to retreat, he had to brace himself and went ahead to greet her. Chiu-ma returned his bow.

"I've come to pay you a visit, Auntie," Ch'in Ch'ung said.

Chiu-ma was an old hand at the game, and also a good judge of the human heart, so she immediately guessed what his real intentions were, "He must have taken a fancy to one of my girls and wants to meet her or even stay for the night. Though he is no big spender, but as the saying goes, 'Whatever is in the basket is good for food.' We can make enough out of him to buy a bunch of scallions. Why not earn his money, his silver is certainly as good as any other man's."

So she put on a big smile and said, "Thank you, Master Ch'in. But I'm sure there must be something that you want to see me about."

"I have an impudent request which I'm too embarrassed to mention," ventured Ch'in Ch'ung.

"Why not say it out?" encouraged Chiu-ma. "Please come inside, we can talk about it."

Even though Ch'in Ch'ung had come to Chiu-ma's house for more than a hundred times before as an oil peddler, these chairs reserved for the guests had just then made acquaintances with his butt. Chiu-ma invited him into the reception room, made him sit in the place of honor, and called the servants to bring tea.¹² Soon, a maid brought the tea out. She recognized that the guest was Oil Peddler Ch'in, yet she could not figure out why Chiu-ma was treating him so cordially. With bowed head, she could not help giggling to herself. Chiu-ma saw it and scolded, "What's so funny? Where are your manners?"

The maid stopped her laughing and went inside after collecting the tea cups. Then Chiu-ma questioned Ch'in, "Master Ch'in, what is it that you want to tell me?"

"Nothing of great importance," Ch'in replied. "I would like to invite one of the girls in your house for a cup of wine."

"Just for a cup of wine? Of course you would want to stay the night too. I've known you to be a steady young man, what has aroused such romantic interests in you?"

"I've had this wish for a long time now," replied Ch'in.

"You know all my girls, which one do you like?" Chiu-ma asked.

"I don't want anyone else. I just want to spent one night with the Queen of the Courtesans."

Chiu-ma thought that he was making fun of her, and her courtenance changed immediately, "What an outrageous request! Are you trying to insult me?"

"I am an honest man, and my wishes are only sincere," Ch'in Ch'ung hurried to say.

"Even the manure buckets have two ears. Don't you know the price of my Meiniang? You can't afford to spent half a night with her even if you empty all of your oil buckets. Why don't you choose someone else?"

Ch'in Ch'ung shrugged and made a face, "Wow! May I ask how many thousands of taels of silver do you ask?"

This remark convinced Chiu-ma that he was only joking, so she smiled and said, "Not much, only ten taels of silver, that is not including food and other expenses."

"If that is all, I think I can afford it," he took out the biggest ingot and handed it to Chiu-ma, "This one weighs ten taels and is of the standard purity and weight. Please accept it, Auntie." Then he took out another smaller ingot and also handed it to Chiu-ma, saying, "This smaller one weighs two taels which I hope will cover the food and the other miscellaneous expenses. If you can grant

this small request of mine, I shall never forget you and will repay you whenever I can."

Chiu-ma was overwhelmed by the sight of the shiny ingots and could not bear to see them leave her hands again. Still a little worried that Ch'in had done this in an impulse, and would later regret losing his capital, she decided to make sure, "It's not easy for a small businessman like you to save up so much money. Why don't you think it over carefully."

"I have made up my mind. Please don't worry about it," Ch'in Ch'ung assured her.

Chiu-ma put the silver into her sleeves and said, "Alright, but there are some difficulties."

"Auntie, you are the boss of the family. What problems can there be?" asked Ch'in Ch'ung.

"The people whom my Mei-niang frequents with are all rich and noble. It's really 'Prominent scholars are among her companions, while illiterate men have no place in her circle.' She will recognize you as Oil Peddler Ch'in and may not want to entertain you."

"Surely you can bring her around with your skillful persuasion," Ch'in Ch'ung pleaded. "I will never forget your kindness if you would help to make my wish come true."

Seeing that he was quite determined, an idea suddenly struck Chiu-ma, so she grinned and said, "I have thought of a way to help you, so now it all depends on your own luck. If you succeed, don't be overjoyed; if you don't, don't blame me. Mei-niang had gone to a dinner party at Scholar Li's house yesterday and has not

returned yet. Today, young Lord Huang has already made an appointment with her to tour the lake. Tomorrow, Hermit Chang and some of the other scholars have invited her to a gathering of their poetry society. As for the day after tomorrow, the son of Minister Han has already arranged for a party to be held here several days ago. Why don't you come back three days from now. Oh yes, don't deliver oil here these few days. Leave yourself some face. And one more thing, you don't look like a high class patron wearing these cotton clothes, wear a silk robe next time so the maids won't recognize you as Master Ch'in. It'll make it easier for me to cover up for you." Ch'in promised to follow all her instructions and left.

He rested for three days and did not go to peddle oil. Instead, he bought a half-new silk robe from a pawn shop and after putting it on, strolled idly around the streets and practised on acting like a man of class and distinction. It was simply that:

Before learning the ways of the brothels,

First practise the etiquettes of the Confucians.

Let us go right on to the fourth day. On that day, Ch'in woke up at dawn and went to Chiu-ma's house, but he found the door still closed, because of the extremely early hour. He thought about taking a walk before coming back again, but he was afraid that the monks at the Monastery of Manifest Blessings would ridicule him if they saw him in such unusual attires. So he strolled around the Ten View Pond instead and went back only after a long time. The door of Chiu-ma's house was opened, but a horse-carriage was parked before it and many servants were sitting idly inside the gate. Even though Ch'in Ch'ung was a simple-minded man, he understood the situation and did not venture inside right away. Instead,

he asked the carriage-driver, "Whose horse-carriage is this?"

"We're from the Han Estate, waiting for our young master," the man replied.

Ch'in realized that young Master Han had stayed overnight and had not left yet. So he turned back again and went into a restaurant for some food. He sat there for as long as he could before going back to Chiu-ma's house. This time the horse-carriage was gone, but he was greeted by Chiu-ma when he was walking in, "My apologies, Master Ch'in. I'm afraid we can't make it today. Young Lord Han has dragged her off to view the early plum blossoms at East Village. He is a steady customer so I couldn't say no. I heard that they're going to the Hidden Truth Temple tomorrow, to visit a chess master for a few games with him. Then young Lord Ch'i has also sent over several invitations, and since he is the owner of this house, I can't very well refuse him. When he comes, he may stay for three to five days, I can't say for sure. Master Ch'in, if you really want to meet Mei-niang, why don't you wait patiently for another few days. Otherwise, I'll gladly give you back your money."

"I'm only afraid that you won't help me," said Ch'in. "Better late than never! As long as I can get my wish, I'm willing to wait even if it takes ten thousand years."

"If that is the case, I'm sure I can help you," Chiu-ma said.

Ch'in bid her goodbye and was getting up to leave when Chiu-ma said to him, "Master Ch'in, there's another thing which I would like to remind you. Don't come too early next time, late afternoon will be about right. By then, I can tell you for sure if she'll be free or not. Actually, the later you come, the better it will be. I have my good reasons, so just have faith in me and I won't let you down."

"Of course, of course," Ch'in agreed repeatedly.

Ch'in Ch'ung did not do any business that day. Starting from the next morning, he peddled oil in some other places without passing the Ch'ien-t'ang Gate area; and when he finished with his business each day, he got all dressed up and went to Chiu-ma's house around evening for news. For more than a month, he had no luck.

On the fifteenth of the twelfth month, the snow storm had just cleared up and the west wind had just blown over. The fallen snow had turned to ice and it was very cold, but the ground was dry. Ch'in tended to his business for most part of the day and then got dressed up as usual to go to Chiu-ma's house. Chiu-ma greeted him with a big smile and said, "You're in luck, ninety-nine out of a hundred you're going to succeed."

"What is still missing?" Ch'in asked.

"Mei-niang is not yet home."

"Will she be back?"

"Today Grand Marshal Yü has invited her to view snow on his boat in the lake. He is an old man of seventy and already has no part in those amorous matters. He has said earlier that he'll send her home before dark," Chiu-ma assured him. "So why don't you go into the bridal chamber and drink a few cups of wine to keep yourself warm while waiting for her return?"

Ch'in Ch'ung agreed happily. Chiu-ma led him through many twists and turns and finally came to the place. It was an one-storied structure with three rooms, which was both bright and airy. The room on the left was an empty one for the maids, with the usual furnitures and beddings prepared for the guests. The room

on the right was the bedroom of the Queen of the Courtesans, and was locked. There were other side-chambers attached to the sitting room in the center. Above the guest seats in the middle of the sitting room, there hung a landscape painting by a well-known artist. Wisps of fragrance were rising from the incense burner on the high stool. Several pieces of antiques decorated the tables on both sides; and many sheets of poetry were pasted on the walls. Ch'in was ashamed that he was no accomplished scholar and dared not inspect them any closer. He thought to himself, "Even this sitting room is so elegant, the layout of Mei-niang's room must be even more elaborate and luxurious. I can enjoy all these to my heart's content tonight, so ten taels for one night isn't really too much."

Chiu-ma invited Ch'in Ch'ung to sit on one of the guest seats, while she herself assumed the hostess' position to keep him company. A little later, the maid brought in the lamp; then the table was set with six bowls of fruits in season and one large plate of assorted delicacies whose inviting aroma was attacking his nostrils even before he had touched anything. Chiu-ma held the wine bottle and urged him, "All my girls have guests today, so I'm afraid I'm the only one left to keep you company. Please enjoy yourself and drink to you fill."

Ch'in was unaccustomed to drinking and since he had something more important in mind, he only drank very little and refused to drink any more.

"Master Ch'in must be hungry, please eat something before we'll drink some more," Chiu-ma suggested.

The maid brought out two bowls of rice, one of them for seconds, and placed them in front of Ch'in Ch'ung along with a bowl of soup. The madam was of course used to drinking, so she kept him company by having more wine. Ch'in Ch'ung put

down his chopsticks after finishing only one bowl, and Chiu-ma said, "The night is long, eat some more."

Ch'in Ch'ung ate another half a bowl. The maid came in with a lantern and said, "The bath water is ready. Will the guest please come with me."

Ch'in Ch'ung had bathed before he came out but did not think it polite to refuse; so he went to the bathroom to wash thoroughly with soap and to scent himself again. When he came back, Chiu-ma ordered the delicacies to be taken away and used a hot-pot to warm the wine. By then, it was already completely dark outside and the Monastery of Manifest Blessings had also sounded its evening bells, but Mei-niang still had not returned.

Lovely lady, where are you dallying,

Your lover is waiting impatiently.

As the saying goes: it's the one who waits that is impatient. Seeing that the girl had not yet returned, Ch'in Ch'ung was both anxious and bored. He was stuck with the madam, yacking about this and that to him and making him drink more and more. Soon another watch passed. Suddenly, there was a great commotion on the outside, and the maids came in to announce that Mei-niang had returned. Chiu-ma and Ch'in Ch'ung both got up to receive her. Mei-niang was drunk and was helped by the maids into the room. At the door, she saw hazily that the room was brightly lit and that the remnants of a feast spread all over the table. She stopped and asked, "Who's been drinking here?"

"My child, it's the Master Ch'in I've been telling you about," Chiu-ma explained. "He admires you and has constantly sent presents over. We've kept him waiting for more than a month already because you didn't have the time. Luckily

you're free tonight, so I have asked him to keep you company."

"I've never heard of a Master Ch'in here in Lin-an city. I don't want to meet him!" and Mei-niang turned around to go.

Chiu-ma stretched her arms to stop her, saying, "He's a very nice man, I'm telling you the truth."

So Mei-niang had to turn back into the room. When she saw Ch'in Ch'ung, she found him rather familiar, but because she was drunk, she could not quite remember who he was at the moment, so she said, "Mother, I know this man. He's a nobody. The others will laugh at me if I receive him."

"My child, this is Master Ch'in who owns a silk shop at Rush Gold Gate. I think you've met him before when we used to live there. That's why you find him so familiar," Chiu-ma insisted. "Don't mistake him for someone else. I saw that he is very sincere so I have promised him already. Please don't make me break my words. For my sake, let him stay for the night. I know I'm in the wrong, I'll make it up to you tomorrow." She pushed Mei-niang gently towards Ch'in Ch'ung as she spoke, so Mei-niang could do nothing except go into the room and meet him. It was just that:

You cannot outtalk the procuress even if you have a thousand tongues,
You cannot riggle free from the procuress even if you have ten thousand
arms.

So even if you have a thousand tongues and ten thousand arms,
It is better just to let the procuress lead you by the nose.

Ch'in Ch'ung heard every word that was said but pretended that he heard nothing. Mei-niang greeted him and sat on one side. The more she looked at him, the

more suspicious she became. Feeling displeased, she said nothing to him; instead, she asked the maids to bring some wine and poured it into a large cup. Chiu-ma thought that she was going to offer it to Ch'in Ch'ung, but she finished it herself in a single gulp. Chiu-ma tried to stop her, "My child, you're drunk. Don't drink any more."

But Mei-niang would not listen to her. Insisting that she was not drunk, she drank more than ten cups. Since she was already quite drunk to begin with, naturally she soon became too dizzy even to sit upright. She told the maid to open up the bedroom and light the lamps. Then without letting down her hair, she just kicked off her shoes and slumped onto the bed with all of her clothes on. Chiu-ma was rather apologetic when she saw her daughter behaving thus, and said to Ch'in Ch'ung, "My daughter is rather spoiled and is given to having her ways. Something is bothering her today. It has nothing to do with you, so please don't be offended."

"Of course not," Ch'in Ch'ung assured her.

Then Chiu-ma persuaded Ch'in Ch'ung to drink some more, but he refused firmly; so she sent him into the bedroom and whispered by his ear, "She's drunk, please make allowances." Then she called out to Mei-niang, "Get up, my child, and take off your clothes. You can sleep better that way."

Mei-niang was already fast asleep and did not answer, so Chiu-ma had to leave. The maids cleared away the table and said to Ch'in Ch'ung, "Master Ch'in, please sleep now."

"I would like to have a pot of hot tea if possible," Ch'in Ch'ung asked.

The maid brewed a pot of strong tea and brought it into the room; then closing the door behind her, she went to rest in her own room. Ch'in Ch'ung turned to

look at Mei-niang, and found her sound asleep with ^{her} face towards the wall, lying on top of her quilt. He was afraid that she might catch cold, especially being drunk, but he did not want to wake her up. Suddenly, he saw a red silk quilt on the bedstead, so he took it down and gently covered Mei-niang. Then he made the lamp as bright as possible, took off his shoes and went to bed with the pot of hot tea. Sliding beside Mei-niang, he laid down with his left hand cuddling the tea pot and his right hand on Mei-niang. He dared not even close his eyes for a minute. It was:

Even though he did not fonder the cloud and held the rain,

He did embrace the fragrance and cuddle the jade.

Mei-niang woke up around midnight and felt the wine acting up. A sweltering in her chest made her sit up in bed, retching. Ch'in Ch'ung hurried to sit up too, and knowing that she was about to vomit, he put down the tea pot and stroked her back gently. After a long while, the nausea suddenly overcame Mei-niang and faster done then said, she threw up. Ch'in Ch'ung was afraid that she might dirty the beddings, and immediately used the sleeves of his robe to cover her mouth. Mei-niang was not aware of that and vomited without reserve. When she had finished, she asked for some tea to rinse her mouth, still with her eyes closed. Ch'in Ch'ung got down from the bed, took off his robe quietly and put it on the floor. Feeling that the tea pot was still warm, he poured a cup of strong tea and handed it to Mei-niang. Mei-niang drank two cups in a row. Although she still felt a little stuffy inside her, she was so tired that she fell back to sleep again. Ch'in Ch'ung took off his robe, rolled it up and put it by the bed.¹³ Then he climbed back into bed and embraced Mei-niang as before.

Mei-niang did not wake up again until daybreak. When she turned around and found Ch'in Ch'ung lying beside her, she asked, "Who are you?"

"I'm Ch'in Ch'ung," he answered.

Mei-niang thought about last night but could only vaguely recall what had happened. She asked, "I must have been drunk last night."

"No, not very."

"Did I throw up?" she asked again.

"No," Ch'in Ch'ung denied.

"That is better." But on second thought, she said, "I remember having vomited and also drinking tea. Was I dreaming then?"

Ch'in Ch'ung then told her, "Yes, you did throw up. I thought you might vomit so I was prepared for it. I cuddled the tea to keep it warm and when you did throw up and asked for tea, I pour you some. I'm glad you did not refuse and drank two cups."

Mei-niang was shocked, "Such filthy things. Where did I throw up?"

"I was afraid that you might dirty the beddings, so I held it with my sleeves."

"Where is your robe now?"

"I rolled everything up inside the robe. It's over there."

"What a pity that your robe is ruined."

"I'm only too glad that my robe could be of some service to you."

When Mei-niang heard that, she thought to herself, "What a thoughtful man!" and already liked him quite a bit.

By then, it was already bright daylight, Mei-niang got up to go to the

bathroom. As she looked at Ch'in Ch'ung, she suddenly recognized him as Oil Peddler Ch'in, so she said, "Tell me frankly. Who are you? And why were you here last night?"

"I'm happy that you bother to ask me. Of course I'll tell the truth. I'm actually Ch'in Ch'ung who comes to your house to deliver oil quite often." Then he proceeded to tell her in detail how he first saw her sending the guests out and later boarding the sedan-chair; how much he admired her ever since and how he had saved up the money just to spend the night with her. "How fortunate I am to have spent a whole night being so close to you. I'm very happy and more than contented."

Mei-niang was more moved than ever when she heard. She said, "I was drunk last night and did not take care of you. Don't you regret that you've wasted your money for nothing?"

"You are like a goddess from heaven. I consider myself lucky that you do not scold me for not serving you better. How would I dare to have other out-of-reach desires."

"A small business like you should save up your money to support your family. You really should not come to these places."

"I'm single and I have no family," Ch'in Ch'ung explained.

Mei-niang thought for a while and asked, "Will you be back again?"

"Being so close to you for one night will sustain me for the rest of my life, I would not dare to hope for more."

"Where can I find such a good man," Mei-niang thought. "So honest, so kind, and above all so understanding, covering my weaknesses and praising my merits. I

don't think it is possible to find another like him in a hundred thousand. what a pity that he's a mere peddler, otherwise I wouldn't hesitate to marry him."

As she was pondering, the maids brought in water for them to wash their faces, and also two bowls of ginger soup. Ch'in Ch'ung washed his face, and since he did not undo his hair last night, he did not have to comb it. He took a few sips of the ginger soup and asked to leave. Mei-niang said, "Why don't you stay a while longer, I still have something to say to you."

"Since I admire you so much, nothing will make me happier than to stay with you for as long as I can. But one must know one's position. It was already impudent of me to have come here last night, putting your reputation in jeopardy. It's best that I leave as soon as possible."

Mei-niang nodded and told the maids to leave the room, then she opened her make-up box, took out twenty taels of silver and handed them to Ch'in Ch'ung, saying, "I'm sorry to have caused you all the trouble last night. These money is to help you with your business. Don't tell anybody though!"

Ch'in Ch'ung would not take them, so Mei-niang added, "I get these money quite easily. They're to thank you for your kindness last night. Please don't be stubborn and do take them. If you lack capital, I can help you more in the future. As for the dirty robe, I'll ask the maid to wash it and then return it to you."

"Please don't bother with this cheap dress. I can wash it myself. It's only that I really shouldn't take your money," said Ch'in Ch'ung.

"Don't mention it," Mei-niang stuffed the silver into Ch'in Ch'ung's sleeves and pushed him out. Ch'in Ch'ung realized that it would be impossible to refuse, so he bowed deeply, rolled up the dirty robe and left the room.

A maid saw him when he passed Chiu-ma's room and called to her, "Madam, Mister Ch'in is leaving."

Chiu-ma was just inside the bathroom, so she called out, "Master Ch'in, why are you leaving so early?"

"I have some personal matter to attend to. I shall come back to thank you some other day," Ch'in Ch'ung called back.

We won't talk about Ch'in Ch'ung's leaving but will mention that Mei-niang, even though nothing happened ^{between} Ch'in Ch'ung and her, felt quite uneasy about his sincerity. She called off all her engagements that day and rested at home because she was still rather weak and tired from the previous night. Instead of thinking of any of the ten thousand other patrons she had, she actually spent the whole day thinking about Ch'in Ch'ung alone. There is another Kua-chu-erh song to prove it:

My handsome lover,

Even though you're no rich man's son,

And you're only a small businessman,

Let you alone know how to treat me gently, how to talk to me tenderly,

You alone know my heart.

I think you're not one of those temperamental ones,

I think you're not one of those unfaithful ones.

Several times I've tried to put down thoughts of you,

Only to have them come right back again and again.

Let us now go back to the other end of the story. At Chu Shih-lao's house, Hsing Chaun and the maid Orchid carried on their affair quite openly, completely

ignoring the old man who was sick in bed. Chu Shih-lao blew up several times, so the two of them came up with a plan. They waited until the dead of night, took all the money in the shop and ran away together. Chu Shih-lao did not find out until the next morning. The neighborhood was alerted and a list of losses was made out. They looked around for several days without any result. It was then that Chu Shih-lao regretted deeply listening to Hsing Chuan earlier and drove away Chu Ch'ung. Time had proven who was faithful and who was not. He had heard that Chu Ch'ung was living by All Peace Bridge and peddled oil for a living. He thought of asking him back so he could have someone to look after him in his old age, but he was afraid that Chu Ch'ung might bear a grudge against him. Hence, he asked his neighbors to speak to Chu Ch'ung, asking him to "remember the good and forget the bad," and come back to him. When Ch'ing Ch'ung heard that, he immediately packed his belongings and moved back to Chu Shih-lao's house. Both cried bitterly when they met. The old man took out all his money and handed them over to Ch'in Ch'ung. Adding in the twenty some taels which he had, Ch'in Ch'ung rennovated the oil shop and again took charge of the business there. Since he had returned to Chu Shih-lao's house, he again took the name of Chu Ch'ung.

Within a month, Chu Shih-lao's illness worsened and soon died. Chu Ch'ung was grief-stricken and made the funeral preparations just as if Chu Shih-lao was his own father. The ancestral graves of the Chu family was outside of Clear Ripple Gate. There, Chu Ch'ung again performed all the burial ceremonies with due respect and was greatly praised by his neighbors for his loyalty towards Chu Shih-lao. After all these were settled, Chu Ch'ung reopened the shop. This oil shop was one of long standing and the business had always been good. It was only until Hsing Chuan ran

the shop with his dishonesty and stingy dealings that many of the customers left. Now when they saw that young Master Chu was in charge again, they were more than willing to resume business with him, and the shop prospered by the day.

Since Chu Ch'ung had to handle all the business single-handed, he was anxious to find someone familiar with the trade to help him. One day, a middleman by the name of Chin Chung brought a fifty-odd year old man over. He turned out to be no other than Hsin Shan, the man who used to live in Prosperity Village outside of Pien-liang City, and the one who had lost his daughter Yao-ch'in during the onrush of the government troops. The couple was left in a pitiful state, running from one place to another and thus passed a few tumultuous years. They had heard about Lin-an's prosperity and how more than half of the refugees who had crossed the river had settled there. They thought that their daughter might have been stranded there too and had come especially to look for her. They found no news, but had spent all the money they had. They also owed the inn some money and was being chased after everyday. It was in this helpless situation when they accidentally heard Chin Chung mentioned that Chu Chung's oil shop was looking for a helper. Hsin Shan himself once owned a provision store and was quite familiar with the oil trade. Moreover, this Master Chu was from Pien-liang too, which made them fellow villagers. So he pleaded Chin Chung to recommend him. Chu Ch'ung asked Hsin Shan a few questions and was moved when he heard that the latter was also from Pien-liang, so he said, "Since you have nowhere else to go, why don't the two of you move over to my place. I shall treat you as my own relatives, and you can take your time to look for your daughter."

He gave Hsin Shan two strings of cash to pay off his inn bills. Hsin Shan's

wife was also brought over to meet Chu Ch'ung, who cleaned up one room for the old couple to live in. From then on, the two of them also did their best to help Chu Ch'ung in the shop as well as in the house, so Chu Ch'ung was very happy about the arrangement.

Time flashed by and more than a year passed. Many people, seeing that a dependable and well-off young man like Chu Ch'ung was still unmarried, were more than willing to give him their daughters. But Chu Ch'ung had already seen the beauty of the Queen of the Courtesans, the ordinary girls could hardly catch his fancy. He was determined to find a girl with outstanding qualities before settling down. This matter was thus delayed day after day. It was:

You cannot talk about water to those who have seen the sea,

Nor about clouds to those who have seen the mist over Mount Wu.

We shall now go back to Wang Mei-niang. Her reputation grew steadily and the way she was enjoying from dawn to dusk made her tired of delicacies and fine clothes. Yet when she was moody, when a drunken patron threw tantrums at her, when rivalling patrons ^{quarrelled} over her, or when she woke up in the middle of the night feeling sick and nauseated, without anyone to comfort her and to take care of her, she could not help thinking of Ch'in Ch'ung and his thoughtfulness, and longed for another chance to meet him. About a year later, her luck turned and a misfortune fell on her.

There lived in Lin-an a young man named Wu, the eighth son of the Governor of Foochow, Wu Yao. He had returned from Foochow with a lot of money and had been squandering it in gambling, drinking and visiting places of pleasure. He had heard of the Queen of the Courtesans but had not had the chance to meet her. He had sent

over several invitations but Mei-niang had heard that he had a bad sort of character and therefore did not want to receive him. So she had refused him with all sorts of excuses. Wu himself had also been to Chiu-ma's house more than once with his friends but still failed to meet her. One day around the Ch'ing Ming Festival when every family went to visit their ancestors' graves, and everywhere there were people enjoying the spring scene. Mei-niang was tired by the consecutive days of spring excursions; furthermore, she had many poetry and painting promised to others which she had not finished. So she told the household, "I'm not going to receive any guest today."

She closed the door, lit up some fine incense, set the stationery in order, and was just about to start painting when she heard a commotion outside. It was Wu, bringing with him a dozen insolent servants to get Mei-niang for a boat party. When Chiu-ma made excuses for Mei-niang, he became angry and proceeded to vent his displeasure by breaking furniture and household utensils as he made his way to Mei-niang's room where he found the door locked. Actually, the brothels had a way of turning away unwanted guests: the courtesan would hide inside the room and the door would be locked from the outside, then the guest would be told that she was not in. The innocent ones would be tricked, but Wu was an old hand at the game and naturally was not deceived by it. He ordered his servants to break the lock while he himself kicked open the door. Mei-niang did not have time to hide and was caught. Without further ado, Wu told two servants to drag her, one by each arm, from the room, as he himself stood there swearing and cursing. Chiu-ma wanted to go and pacify him, but seeing that the situation was getting out of hand, she decided to slip aside; the entire household promptly disappeared without a trace. The insolent servants

dragged Mei-niang out of Chiu-ma's house and ran down the streets with no consideration whatsoever for her small bound feet. Wu followed behind, thoroughly enjoying himself. They went all the way to West Lake and hitched Mei-niang onto the boat before letting go of her.

Ever since she had entered Chiu-ma's house at the age of twelve, Mei-niang had always been brought up among silks and brocades, and was looked upon as a gem and a jewel. Never in her life had she suffered such humiliation and maltreatment. Once on the boat, she turned away by herself and started to wail. When Wu saw that, his countenance fell, not unlike Kuan Yu¹⁴ in charging single-handedly into the gathering. Sitting on an armchair facing the lake with his servants flanking him, Wu ordered to start the boat amidst curses and insults, "Bitch! Prostitute! Unappreciative whore! If you cry any more, you're asking for the beating."

Mei-niang of course was not afraid of him and refused to stop crying. The boat soon reached the pavilion in the middle of the lake. Wu told the servants to set up the food in the pavilion and went ahead first himself, telling the servants, "Ask the little bitch to come and keep me company."

But Mei-niang held on to the railing and refused to go, wailing loudly. By then, Wu had also lost his interest, so he ordered returning to the boat after drinking only a few cups by himself. He himself came to drag Mei-niang, but it only made her cry even louder. Wu was furious and ordered the servants to take away Mei-niang's hairpins. With her hair all disshevelled, Mei-niang ran to the bow and would have jumped into the water if she had not been stopped by the pages. Wu said, "I'm not afraid of your tantrums. Even if you kill yourself, I probably only have to waste a few taels to pacify the matter! But what a pity if you have to lose

your life this way. I'll let you go if you stop crying, and I won't give you any more trouble."

When Mei-niang heard that he was willing to let her go, she immediately stopped crying. Wu told the boat to sail to a deserted spot outside of Clear Ripple Gate, there he ordered his servants to strip off Mei-niang's shoes and foot-bindings, thus exposing a pair of feet like two strands of jade bamboo shoots, and to help her ashore.

"Little bitch, see if you can walk home by yourself. I have no time to see you home!" he scolded. Then the boat was poled away and sailed into the lake. It was simply that:

There are many who would burn a harp and cook a crane,

But there are few who would appreciate the beautiful and the tender.

Barefooted, Mei-niang could hardly move a single inch. She thought, "I have both the beauty and the talents, yet I have to endure such humiliation because I have fallen into this racket through some misfortune. I have known all these numerous noblemen and high-class guests in vain. None of them comes in handy when I need them. Being put to shame like this, how can I live with it even if I do manage to get back? I think I will be better off if I'm dead; yet I'll be dying over such a worthless incident and would have bore my fair name in vain. At a time like this, I think even the village women are far better off than me. It's all because of that sharp tongue of Liu Ssu-ma, coaxing me into this deep pit that I am in such trouble today. Ever since times of old, beautiful girls have always had sad lives, but I don't think they were ever as pitiful as I am now."

The more she thought, the sadder she felt and she bursted into a wail again.

What a coincidence that Chu Ch'ung had gone outside Clear Ripple Gate to visit Chu Shih-lao's grave on this very day. After sweeping the grave, he had sent the sacrificial materials back by boat while he himself returned on foot. He heard someone crying while passing through and had gone over to take a look. Even though Mei-niang's hair was dishevelled and her face was soiled, her beauty was still unchanged, so how could Chu Ch'ung not recognize her? He was shocked and hurried to ask her, "Mei-niang, what happened to you?"

Mei-niang was crying bitterly when she heard a familiar voice. She stopped her sobbing, looked up and found that it was the very understanding Master Ch'in. At a time like that, she felt as if she had seen a relative, so she poured out her heart to him. Chu Ch'ung was pained to see her suffer like this and dropped tears of sympathy. He took out a long white silk handkerchief, tore it into two halves and bound up Mei-niang's feet. Then he wiped away her tears, helped her to straighten her hair and comforted her with many kind words. When Mei-niang had finally stopped crying, he went and called a sedan-chair for her, while he himself walked all the way to escort her home.

Chiu-ma was in a flurry looking everywhere for some news of her daughter when she saw Master Ch'in taking her home. It was just like returning a precious mother-of-pearl to her, so naturally she was overjoyed. Besides, she had not seen Ch'in Ch'ung bring his oil over for quite some time, and had heard that he had inherited Chu Shih-lao's business. Since he had more money to work with and was in a much more respectable position than before, naturally she received him with a new deference. Seeing her daughter in such a state, she asked Mei-niang for the reasons and learned that she had suffered a great deal, and that it was only thanks to Master Ch'in that

she was saved. Chiu-ma thanked him profusely and a feast was prepared in his honor. Since it was getting late, Ch'in Ch'ung only drank a few cups and got up to leave. Mei-niang of course would not hear of it, she said, "I have always had an eye for you, and have often regretted not being able to see you again. I simply will not let you go away empty-handed today."

Chiu-ma also got up to detain him. Ch'in Ch'ung was overjoyed at his unexpected good fortune and accepted gladly. That night, Mei-niang played various musical instruments, sang and danced -- displaying every one of her skills to the fullest so as to please Ch'in Ch'ung. Ch'in Ch'ung was as if in a dream rendez-vousing with a goddess. They feasted into the night and then the two of them retired to bed in each other's embrace. Naturally, the perfect bliss of their union was beyond doubt:

He is a young man at his prime,

She is a young girl experienced in the art of love.

He relates how the three years of longing has taxed his dreams and soul,

She tells him the year of yearning, and now is only too glad to be so
close to him.

She thanks him for his past patronage, on top of saving her this time,

He thanks her for granting him this night, more loving than the last.

The courtesan upsets her powder box staining the silk handkerchief,

The oil peddler spills over his oil jar wetting the beddings.

What a laugh that this village boy who once squandered his capital,

Yet eventually fulfills his desires.

When it was over, Mei-niang said, "I have something to say to you from the

bottom of my heart. Please do not make excuses and refuse me."

"If there is anything I can do for you, I will never refuse even if it means going through boiling water and raging fire. Why should I make excuses to you," Ch'in Ch'ung assured her.

"I want to marry you!"

Ch'in Ch'ung laughed and said, "You will marry ten thousand times before you'll even think of me. Please don't make fun of me, it is well beyond my status."

"I speak from the bottom of my heart. What do you mean by 'making fun?' Ever since I was tricked by my mother into losing my virginity, I've always wanted to get out of this racket. But since I did not have much experience in dealing with men at that time, and couldn't really distinguish the good from the bad, I dared not make a hasty decision and thereby ruining my whole life. Later on, even though I have met a lot of men, they were either filthy rich sorts or pleasure-seekers. They only ^{cared}_A about their momentary enjoyment, and hardly had any real sincerity or consideration for my welfare. After looking for so long, you're the only sincere and dependable man I've found. I've heard that you're still single, so if you don't look down on my shameful past, I'm willing to marry you and serve you with the rest of my life. But if you refuse me, I shall hang myself with three feet of white silk right here in front of you to prove my sincerity. It will certainly be better than dying so worthlessly in the hands of that vulgar creature yesterday, which will only make me a laughing stalk among the others." Having finished, she started to cry.

"Mei-niang, please don't feel so sad," Ch'in Ch'ung comforted her. "I'm more than honored to have you bestow your love upon me, for this is more than anything

I can ask for. But you are a courtesan of great fame and worth, while I'm a poor and powerless peddler. I'm afraid I might not be able to gather enough money no matter how I try."

"This is unimportant. To tell you the truth, I have started long time ago to save up valuables and have put them at other places for this very purpose. You don't have to bother about the problem of money."

"Even if you redeem yourself, you are so used to living in luxuries, so I'm afraid you will find life unbearable in my poor house."

"I am ready to wear cotton clothes and eat coarse food without a word of dissatisfaction."

"Even if you are willing, I'm afraid that Auntie will not consent to it."

"I have my ways. I shall do..." The two of them talked about this and that until daybreak.

Mei-niang had in fact stored away many trunks and boxes of valuables with several of her intimates, such as the sons of Academician Huang, Prime Minister Han, and Grand Marshal Ch'i. Now under the pretext that she needed them, she gradually took them back and had Ch'in Ch'ung secretly move over to his house. This done, she boarded a sedan-chair to see Liu Ssu-ma, and told Ssu-ma about her plan to get out of the business.

"I did mention about it before, but you're still young now and I don't know who do you want to get married to," Ssu-ma said.

"Auntie, never mind who he is. Anyway, I've followed everything you said so it'll be a real getting-out, a permanent getting-out, and it won't be a half-true half-false, temporary or unfinished thing. I'm sure mother won't object if you

go and talk to her. I have nothing to offer Auntie to show my gratitude except this ten taels of gold. Auntie can use ^{them} _^ to make some small hairpins. Please try your best to convince mother. There will be additional matchmaker presents if the matter is successful."

As soon as Ssu-ma saw the pieces of gold, she was smiling with her eyes in just two tiny slits. She said, "You're like my own daughter, and this is a nice thing, so how can I take anything for it. I'll keep it for you for the time being. I shall take care of the whole thing for you. But since your mother thinks that you're her money tree, I don't think she'll let you go that easily. She might ask more than a thousand taels of silver. Is your man willing to pay that much? May be I should meet him and talk things over with him," Ssu-ma offered.

"You don't have to worry about these details. Just consider that I'm buying my own freedom."

"Does your mother know you're here?" Ssu-ma asked.

"No."

"Why don't you stay here for lunch while I go over to your house and talk to your mother. I'll let you know the outcome afterwards."

Ssu-ma hired a sedan-chair and went over to Chiu-ma's house. Chiu-ma welcomed her inside, and when Ssu-ma inquired about the incident with young Master Wu, Chiu-ma told her about the entire story.

"For us who are engaged in this kind of business," said Ssu-ma, "It is better to have daughters of average beauty and talent, for they can make money for us and will not cause us any trouble. They can receive any kind of guests and have steady business everyday. But my niece is so famous that she's just like a piece of dried

fish that has dropped on the ground, which even the ants will not leave alone. It may appear like good business, but actually it is by no means easy business. Even though you can charge a high fee for the night, she brings you only an empty name. Every time those noble young lords come, they inevitably bring along with them several followers and the whole party usually stay the whole night long. What a nuisance! And you have to play up to every single one of them. Any slip or slack and they'll come up with all sorts of foul language, or even break the things around the house. You can't even tell their masters. What a bother! Furthermore, there are all those scholars and poets with their poetry societies and chess clubs, and those government officials which you must entertain several times each month. Finally, your rich young clients are always fighting over Mei-niang. If you promise her to Chang, you inevitably offend Li. If one side is happy, the other side is naturally begrudged. Take this incident with young Master Wu, what a close shave! One careless slip and you may even lose your capital. You can't bring a lawsuit against these noble lords, so what can you do except to swallow down your anger and forget about the whole thing! You're lucky that this bolt of lightning has passed overhead and no one was hurt. If something does happen, it'll be too late to regret afterwards. I've heard that Wu's anger has not yet died down, and he wants to make more trouble for you. So long as my niece has such a bad temper and refuses to play up to the patrons, this will always be the source of trouble."

"This is exactly what I've been worried about," agreed Chiu-ma. "Actually this fellow Wu is a man of some importance and is by no means a nobody, yet that girl absolutely refused to meet him and therefore brought all this trouble upon herself. She used to listen to me a little when she was younger, but now that

she's famous, with all those rich young men flattering her, spoiling her, indulging her, she has become so proud and so stubborn in getting her ways. When guests call, she'll only receive those she wants to; while those that she doesn't want to receive, not even a team of nine cows can turn her around."

"All the courtesans are like this once they have some sort of reputation," sympathized Ssu-ma.

"I want to discuss something with you. If someone is willing to buy her, do you think I should sell her? It'll save me all the trouble and I don't have to be on edges all day long."

"What an excellent idea," exclaimed Ssu-ma. "If you sell her, you can buy five or six others with the money you get, and may be even ten if you happen to bump into some inexpensive ones."

"I have thought about it quite thoroughly. As a rule, those rich and powerful ones usually don't want to spend much, they only want to use their position and rip us off; as for those who are willing to spend the money, my daughter always manages to find ^{faults} _^ with them, putting on all sorts of airs and refusing with all sorts of excuses. If there's someone ideal, I hope you can be the middleman and make the match. Also, if that girl refuses, you must talk to her for me, for she listens to you more than she does to me."

Ssu-ma laughed heartily and said, "Actually, I've come here today exactly with someone in mind for Mei-niang. How much do you want before you'll let her go?"

"Well, you know how things are. In our profession, we always try to buy cheap and sell high. Furthermore, Mei-niang has been famous for some years now here in Lin-an, who doesn't know the name 'Queen of the Courtesans'? How can I let her go

at a mere three or four hundred taels. I must have at least one thousand taels."

"Let me go and talk it over with the client. If he's willing to pay the price, I'll be back to let you know; if not, I won't bother to come back." Before she left, she asked on purpose, "Where is my niece today?"

"Don't mention it," Chiu-ma sighed. "Ever since the day she was bullied by the fellow Wu, she was afraid that he might be back for more and has been visiting all her intimates, telling them about the incident. The day before last, she was at Grand Marshal Ch'i's, yesterday she was at Academician Huang's, and I don't know where she is today."

"You are the boss as long as you put your foot down. I'm sure Mei-niang will give in. But in case she refuses, I'll be responsible for persuading her. Just don't put on all sorts of airs when I do bring you the client."

"I give you my words," Chiu-ma promised.

Chiu-ma saw her to the front door where Ssu-ma hastily bid goodbye and boarded the sedan-chair. That is what you would call:

This woman Lu Chia can turn black into yellow,

This female Sui Ho can turn short into long.

If everything is like the mouth of a procuress,

A foot of water can stir up a three thousand foot wave.

When Ssu-ma arrived home, she told Mei-niang how she had persuaded Chiu-ma, and added, "Your mother has already given her consent, so as soon as the money passes hands, everything will be settled."

"The money has already been prepared. Can Auntie please come to my house tomorrow so we can finish off this matter. Let's strike the iron while it's still

hot, so we don't have to start all over again another day."

Ssu-ma promised, "It's all arranged, of course I'll come."

Mei-niang bid Ssu-ma goodbye and went home. She did not say a word about the matter to anyone.

Around noon the next day, Ssu-ma came to Chiu-ma's house as agreed. Chiu-ma asked her, "How is the matter going?"

"It's almost settled. Now it's time for me to talk to Mei-niang," replied Ssu-ma.

Ssu-ma went into Mei-niang's room. After greeting each other, they chat for a little while and then Ssu-ma asked, "Have your patron arrived yet? Where is the money?"

Mei-niang pointed at the trunks by her bed and said, "Inside there." She opened all five or six of them and took out thirteen or fourteen packets with fifty taels of silver in each. Together with the jewels which she also counted from there, they amounted to exactly a thousand taels. Ssu-ma was so shocked that her eyes almost bursted with flame and her mouth watered. She thought, "What foresight for such a young girl! I wonder how did she managed to save up so much? Those girls over in my house receives patrons just like she does, but none of them can even come close to this. Let alone saving big money, what little they have in their pockets, they spend them all on dried seeds and candies. I even have to buy cloth for them when their foot-bindings get worn out. What a blessing for Sister Chiu to have bought her. She must have earned quite a batch during these years and now she's going to get such a handsome sum for letting her go. Sure is easy money for Sister Chiu."

When Mei-niang saw Ssu-ma pondering, she thought that the latter was not satisfied with what she had already given her, so she hurried to take out four scrolls of fine silk, two hairpins and a pair of phoenix jade pins, and put them on the table, saying, "These few things are to thank you for your troubles."

Ssu-ma accepted happily and went to inform Chiu-ma, "Niece is willing to buy her own freedom with exactly the same amount you've asked. It is even better than having someone else buy her since you can now save all the feasts and presents which you otherwise have to give to those go-betweens and idlers."

Chiu-ma appeared displeased when she heard that her daughter actually had so much private savings. Do you know why she's displeased? In this world, there are none as greedy as the madams. They won't feel satisfied until all the things which the courtesans get are in their hands. There are some courtesans who try to keep their private savings in their trunks, but if the madams hear about it, they would wait until their daughters are out, then break the locks of the trunks and take away all the valuables inside there. It was only because with her reputation, Mei-niang was such a money tree to Chiu-ma and all her patrons were rich and influential men, and also because that she had a rather stubborn character that Chiu-ma dared not do it to her. How could she know that Mei-niang had stored away such a lot of possessions if she dared not even go into the latter's room. When Ssu-ma saw the change of color in Chiu-ma's face, she guessed what was in her mind and hastened to say, "Sister Chiu, please don't think too much about it. Niece has saved up all these from her own proper share, and they don't belong to you. If she wants to spend them, she would have spent them all by now; if she is dumb enough to give them to her poorer lovers, you wouldn't even know about it. It is nice that she

has some money. You can't very well let her go naked! If she has no money, you'll at least have to fit her out decently so she can get married respectably. Now that Mei-niang is taking care of everything, you don't have to worry about a thing and you can keep the entire sum of money to yourself. Furthermore, even if she does buy back her freedom, she's still your daughter; if she makes good, she will surely come back to visit you on festivals and other occasions. Also, even if she gets married, she still has no real father and mother, and you will probably be honored as the grandmother and other such things when the time comes."

All this talk made Chiu-ma feel better and she agreed to keep her part of the deal. Ssu-ma went inside to bring out the silver, checking every packet and appraising each piece of jewelry before handing them to Chiu-ma.

"I've purposely put down the price on each item, I'm sure you can get more money if you sell them," she told Chiu-ma.

Even though Chiu-ma was a madam, she was one of the more simple-minded ones, so she took in everything Ssu-ma said. After Chiu-ma had taken in everything, Ssu-ma asked Chiu-ma's husband to write a letter of release for Mei-niang.

"Since Auntie is here, I would like to take leave of father and mother right now, and live at Auntie's place for a few days until I can pick an auspicious day to get married. I wonder if Auntie will grant me this wish?" Mei-niang asked.

Since Ssu-ma had already taken the many presents given to her by Mei-niang, she was eager to get Mei-niang out of Chiu-ma's house so that the latter could not go back on her bargain. So she agreed, "This is the right way to do it."

Mei-niang immediately packed up her make-up box and jewelry boxes, trunks and beddings, leaving everything that belonged to Chiu-ma untouched. She then followed

Ssu-ma out, took leave of her adopted parents and called upon all the sisters to say goodbye. Chiu-ma shed a few drops of tears as was customary. Mei-niang hired several men to carry her belongings and boarded a sedan-chair happily for Ssu-ma's house. Ssu-ma cleared a nice quiet room for her, and all the courtesans there came to congratulate her.

That night, Chu Ch'ung sent Hsin Shan over for news and learned that Mei-niang had already bought her freedom. He picked an auspicious day and came for her with all the due pomp and ceremony. Liu Ssu-ma was of course the official matchmaker. Chu Ch'ung and Mei-niang passed their wedding night with all the bliss and happiness:

Even though their love affair was one of old,

Yet the joys of marital consummation were not thereby deminished.

The next day, when Hsin Shan and his wife came to meet the new bride, both sides were shocked. After some exchanges, they turned out to be the long separated parents and daughter, and everyone cried in joy. When Chu Ch'ung realized that the old couple was actually his father and mother-in-law, he immediately asked them to sit down while he and Mei-niang paid them their due respects. The neighbors were all amazed when they heard about it. That day, they prepared a big feast to celebrate this double happiness, drinking and enjoying themselves to the fullest. After three days, Mei-niang asked her husband to prepare several sets of presents to send over to her various intimates' houses, thanking them for keeping her trunks and also giving the news of her marriage. This showed how thorough and thoughtful Mei-niang was. There were also presents for Wang Chiu-ma and Liu Ssu-ma who were both extremely thankful.

One month later, Mei-niang opened her trunks. They were filled with silver, gold and fine silk amounting to about three thousand taels of silver. She gave the keys to her husband who made prudent and gradual use of the wealth to acquire land and property, and also to strengthen his business. The oil shop was now under the care of the father-in-law Hsin Shan. In less than a year, his household had already prospered impressively, with a fine mansion and many servants.

To show his gratitude to the gods for their blessings, Chu Ch'ung made a vow to make offerings of candles and a three-month supply of oil at all the monasteries in the region. At each monastery, he himself took to fasting and participated in all the ceremonies. He started from the Monastery of Manifest Blessings and went on through the Monastery of Soul's Retreat, Monastery of Buddhist Incarnation, Monastery of Pure Compassion and the T'ien-chu Monastery. Let us just mention about the T'ien-chu Monastery. It was a monastery of the Goddess of Mercy, Avalokitesvara, and had three separate but all very popular temples, namely the Upper T'ien-chu Temple, the Middle T'ien-chu Temple, and the Lower T'ien-chu Temple. But since they were all in the mountains, boats were not accessible there, so Chu Ch'ung told the servants to carry the loads of candles and oil while he himself went on a sedan-chair. They first came to the Upper T'ien-chu Temple. The monks there received him into the main hall, while the attendant Old Ch'in lit the candles and incenses. At that time, Chu Ch'ung's physical appearance and mannerisms had both been enhanced as a result of his prosperity. He looked quite stately and very different from when he was young. Naturally Old Ch'in could not recognize him, but the big characters "Ch'in" and "Pien-liang" on the oil buckets attracted his attention. What a coincidence it was, that these two buckets were used for this trip! When

Chu Ch'ung finished offering the incense, Old Ch'in brought out the tea and the abbot offered it to Chu Ch'ung.

"Sorry to bother you, but can you please tell me why these three characters are on the buckets?" asked Old Ch'in.

When Chu Ch'ung heard that the man asking the question had a thick Pien-liang accent, he hurried to ask in return, "Old attendant, why do you ask? Are you a native of Pien-liang too?"

"That's right," answered Old Ch'in.

"What is your name? Why did you come to work here? How long ago was it?"

Old Ch'in told him in detail, "I've come here as a refugee a few years ago but I gave my thirteen year old son Ch'in Ch'ung up to Chu Shih-lao for adoption because I could not support the two of us. It has been eight years now, but since I'm old and weak, I did not go down the mountain to look for him."

Chu Ch'ung embraced him and bursted out into tears, "I'm Ch'in Ch'ung. I used to peddle oil for Chu Shin-lao and have put the three characters on the buckets in the hope that you might one day see them and recognize them. Who could have known that we would meet here! This must be the will of heaven."

When the monks saw this miraculous reunion, they all marvelled. Chu stayed the night at the Upper T'ien-chu Temple and bedded with his father, exchanging past events. The next day, he took out his invocations at the Middle and Lower T'ien-chu Temple and changed his name on them from Chu Ch'ung back to Ch'in Ch'ung. After performing all the ceremonies at the two temples, he returned to the Upper T'ien-chu Temple and asked his father to go home with him, so that he could be well looked after. But Old Ch'in was accustomed to the way of life as a devout

Buddhist, and was unwilling to go back to the mundane world. Ch'in Ch'ung persuaded him, "We've been separated for eight years, so I must make up for these times when I did not take care of you. Furthermore, I have gotten married recently and you must let your new daughter-in-law pay her respects to you."

Old Ch'in had to agree, so Ch'in Ch'ung let his father sit in his sedan-chair while he himself walked all the way home. He took out a new set of clothes for Old Ch'in to change into, and then made him sit down in the main hall so he and his wife could paid their respects to him. The nsins were also introduced and a large feast was arranged for the day, with only vegetable dishes and wine served at the insistence of Old Ch'in. The next day, the neighbors all came to congratulate them, bringing along many presents. Indeed, this was a four-fold happiness: the new marriage, the reunion of the bride's family, the reunion of father and son, and Master Ch'in resuming his original name. The celebration lasted for several days.

Old Ch'in was unwilling to stay with his son and only wished to live quietly at the upper T'ien-chu temple. Ch'in Ch'ung dared not go against his father's wish, so with two hundred taels of silver, he built a new room at the temple for his father to live in. He sent over the expenses punctually every month; he himself went to visit his father every ten days, and brought his wife along once every season. Old Ch'in lived until he was eighty and passed away peacefully. He was buried in the mountains as he wished. But all these happened later and really do not concern us here.

Let us now go back to Ch'in Ch'ung and his wife. They lived happily till their old age, and their two children both became famous scholars. Up till now, someone who is skilled in the art of "Pang Ch'en" is still referred to as "Master

Ch'in" or the "Oil Peddler" in the argot of romance. Here is a poem to prove it:

When spring comes, a hundred kinds of flower blossoms anew everywhere,
Bees and butterflies raced hither and thither to collect spring as best
they can.

What a pity that so many rich young lords,
Are not as amorous as an oil peddler.

FOOTNOTES

¹ P'an An (潘安) is the fictional version of the poet P'an Yueh (潘岳, 247 - 300) who was exceedingly handsome. The early Han minister T'eng T'ung (鄧通) was allowed to mint his own currency and was therefore exceedingly rich.

² For the story of Cheng Yüan-ho (鄭元和) and Li Ya-hsien (李亞仙), see the Chang tale "The Story of Li Wa" (李娃傳) by Pai Hsing-chien (白行易). It is included in the collection T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi (太平廣記).

³ Ts'ai Ching (蔡京, 1046 - 1126,) Kao Chiu (高俅, ? - after 1127,) Yang Chien (楊戩, ? - 1121,) and Chu Mein (朱勔, 1075 - 1126) were among the six notorious ministers, known as the "Six Villains," who served under Emperor Hui-tsung (欽宗.)

⁴ According to legend, Prince K'ang (趙構) in dodging the pursuing Jurchen (金) soldiers, takes cover in a Taoist temple and a horse there takes him across the Yangtze River (長江.) After the crossing, he finds out that the horse is made of clay.

⁵ Pien-liang (汴梁,) also known as the Eastern Capital (東京,) was the capital of the Northern Sung Dynasty. It is modern K'ai-feng (開封) in Honan (河南) province.

⁶ Chien-k'ang (建康) is the present-day Nanking (南京) in Kiangsu (江蘇) province.

⁷ Yuan-yen Tsung-pi (完顏宗弼) the fourth son of the founder of the Jurchen Chin Dynasty, was commonly known as Chin Wu-shu (金兀术,) Wu-shu being one of his personal names.

⁸ kua-chu-erh (掛枝兒) is a type of folk song, mostly love songs, popular

in the Ming period.

⁹Hsi-tzu (西子, 5th century B.C.,) better known as Hsi-shih (西施,) was one of the most celebrated beauties in the history of China.

¹⁰Sui Ho (隋何) and Lu Chia (陸賈) were two political advisors living in the early second century B.C. and were famous for their eloquence.

¹¹Hsiao-chi (孝己,) the crown prince to succeed Emperor Kao-tsung Wu-ting (高宗武丁, 1339B.C. - 1281B.C.) of the Yin (殷) Dynasty, and Shen-sheng (申生, ? - 654B.C.,) the heir-apparent of Duke Hsien (獻公) of the State of Chin (晉) in the Spring and Autumn period (春秋,) shared the same fate of being slandered by the consorts of their fathers. Both died as the result.

¹²It would seem more logical that the order of these two sentences be reversed.

¹³Evidently there is textual problem here, since it is mentioned in an earlier sentence that Ch'in Ch'ung has already taken off his robe.

¹⁴Kuan Yu (關羽,) styled Yun-chang (雲長,) was one of the major generals of the Kingdom of Shu (蜀) in the period of the Three Kingdoms (三國.) He rose to fame through his sworn-brotherhood with Liu Pei (劉備) the founder of Shu.