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2002

THE
Peony Pavilion

Mudan ting, Second Edition

Tang Xianzu



TRANSLATED WITH A NEW PREFACE BY

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION BY

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INDIANA
University Press

Bloomington and Indianapolis

SCENE THREE: *Admonishing the Daughter*

PREFECT DU BAO:

I Sichuan scholar of renown
 now Prefect of Nan'an
 I have trodden in turn the covered halls of court
 and the riverbanks of retirement.
 Robe of purple, girdle of gold
 can hardly be said to represent
 no achievement whatsoever.
 Hair frosted now, I dare not look back,
 but long to unpin my cap of office
 and seek, west of the Bridge of Myriad Miles,
 the retreat of my ancestor, the great Du Fu.¹
 I fear, however, that the favor of my prince
 has not yet extended thus far,
 and so my prefectural carriage
 hesitates uncertain.

Capping a lifetime of honored office
 here I govern Nan'an
 —and let no one mistake me
 for a Prefect of the common run.
 Always I have drunk
 "only the local water";²
 in retirement I shall feast my gaze
 on "the hills before my door."

I am Du Bao, Prefect of Nan'an, styled Zichong and descended from Du Fu of the Tang dynasty. My family residence is in Sichuan, my age past fifty. I reflect that I was twenty when I gained my *jinshi* degree, and now after three years as Prefect here my name is widely synonymous with honesty and benevolent administration. My lady wife, of the Zhen clan, is in direct line of descent from the Empress Zhen of the Wei dynasty. Her family resides at Mount Emei and for generations has been a byword for integrity and virtue. This lady has borne me one daughter only, a girl of good gifts and pleasing

1. Du Fu (712–770), generally acknowledged to be China's greatest poet, built a retreat by this bridge at Chengdu in Sichuan. Prefect Du thus neatly caps the claims to distinguished ancestry made in the preceding scene.

2. That is, "I have been content with my official emoluments and accepted no bribes or perquisites of corruption."

person named Bridal. No arrangement has yet been made for her betrothal. It is evident that no virtuous and eligible young lady should fail to be properly educated, and today, having some respite from my official duties, I have summoned my lady wife to discuss this matter. Truly,

Cai Yong, rich in learning, had one daughter only,
 Deng You, poor in office, lacked sons altogether.³

MADAM DU (*enters*):

IIa Of Sichuan family, in direct line
 from Empress Zhen, Goddess of the River Luo,⁴
 wife of Du Bao, I bear from the court
 the title Lady of Nan'an.

(*She greets her husband*)

DU:

In late years appointed to prefecture of note
 though unworthy of such honor

MADAM DU:

and what have I done that I should deserve
 proud title from the court?

DU:

In the women's chambers, days of spring
 are hard to fill

MADAM DU:

daylong in the blossom-patterned shade
 we pattern our sewing.

DU: When it comes to sewing and embroidery our daughter shows exceptional delicacy. But it is evident that a virtuous and eligible young lady has always needed an understanding of letters, so that when the time comes for her to marry a learned husband she will not be deficient in conversation. Is this not also your view?

MADAM DU: I bow to your judgment.

(*Enter BRIDAL DU, followed by maid SPRING FRAGRANCE bearing tray with wine vessels*)

BRIDAL DU:

IIb Voice of oriole falters
 before such radiance of spring.

3. Deng You, an honest and therefore poor official of the Jin dynasty, disowned his son to save the life of his nephew in a time of rebellion.

4. The claimed ancestress was consort to the poet Cao Bei, who became Emperor Wen of the Wei dynasty. His brother, Cao Zhi, wrote a poem to the Goddess of the River Luo. The present speaker makes the two figures one.

How can this heart, mere wisp of straw,
give thanks for light by loving parents shed?

(She greets her parents)

Blessings on you, dear Father and Mother.

DU: What is the purpose of this wine your maid brings, child?

BRIDAL (kneeling): The spring sunlight is so delightful today that I am taking the liberty, as you sit at ease here in the rear hall, of offering three cups of wine to you with my respectful wishes for a thousand such springs.

DU (smiling): That's kind of you.

BRIDAL (offering the wine):

IIIa Blessings on you, my parents,
for boundless joy to your daughter given.
May a hundred springs brighten the Prefect's hall
and this wine be "Heaven's reward" to our family.
O mother gentle as lily,
father as cedar strong,
though the faery peach comes only
after thirty centuries to fruit
and even so I your child
was born of your evening years
yet with careful guarding
you bring me now to ripeness.

DU, MADAM DU:

Then raise the wine jar
for the "fledgling phoenix" nurtured
amid the flowers, shaded by tall bamboo.

DU: Fragrance, fill a cup for the young mistress.

IIIb Our ancestor Du Fu,
"wandering, drifting, felt shame before wife and children."

(He weeps)

My state, dear wife, is yet more pitiable than that of the noble Du Fu. He at least had

a son who could "recite his father's verses"
when all I have is

a daughter who "models her eyebrows on her mother's."

MADAM DU: Do not be distressed, my lord. If we can only find a good husband for our daughter, won't that be the same thing as a son of our own?

DU (laughs): The same thing?

MADAM DU:

When the Emperor of Tang showered favors
on Yang Guifei, "Honored Consort,"
families wished for a girl
to be born to them, rather than a son.
Now, in your middle years,
why indulge in this complaining?

DU, MADAM DU:

Then raise the wine jar
for the "fledgling phoenix" nurtured
amid the flowers, shaded by tall bamboo.

DU: Child, take the wine things away.

(Exit BRIDAL)

Fragrance, tell me, how does your young mistress spend her time all day long in the "brocade chambers"?

SPRING FRAGRANCE: In the brocade chambers? She does brocade.

DU: And what does she embroider?

FRAGRANCE: Fabrics with a nap.

DU: What sort of nap?

FRAGRANCE: A catnap.

DU: Oh, very good. Madam, you were speaking just now of "patterning your sewing in the blossom-patterned shade," and here I find you permitting your daughter to doze in idleness—what sort of upbringing is this? Call the girl here.

BRIDAL (reenters): What does my father wish?

DU: I was just asking Fragrance about you. What is the meaning of your drowsing in broad daylight? If you have time to spare from your embroidery, there are books on the shelves that are there to be read. Then at some future date when you enter your husband's family, your understanding of learning and of the rites will reflect credit on your own. But this your mother has been neglecting.

IVa Empty chests are mine as I strive for integrity,
nor have my studies dishonored the name of scholar.
You, so long a guest in your parents' house,
will see the day when you rule a home of your own.
Your father, by duties distracted, neglects your discipline
—it is after all your mother should be your model.

MADAM DU:

IVb You, daughter, before my eyes
bring joy to my heart though my limbs already weary.

Delicately nurtured, jewel held in the palm,
 now she comes forth the pearl of all her peers.
 Child, note well the meaning of your father's words
 —only a backward "creature of the comb"
 "reads characters backwards"!

BRIDAL:

ivc Favored in the Prefect's mansion
 I have indulged myself in idle pastimes
 painting one day a "garden scene with swing"
 the next embroidering mating ducks for a trousseau.
 From now on every idle waking minute
 I'll use to the full
 at the bookshelves that will line my dressing table!

MADAM DU: Very well, but we must still have a lady tutor to instruct you.

DU: That is not possible.

ivd The tutor engaged by an official residence must be
 a scholar soaked in orthodoxy from the academy.

MADAM DU:

A daughter has no need for all of Confucius,
 the *Book of Songs* or the *Documents*
 but you must gain some knowledge
 of the Duke of Zhou's *Book of Rites*.

DU, MADAM DU:

Shameful waste
 for a "Silver Maid" or "Jade One" to ply her spinning
 wheel
 when she could be a Lady Collator of Texts
 like Xie Daoyun or Ban Ji of ancient times.⁵

DU: It will not be difficult to find a tutor, but he must be treated
 with respect.

v Lady, as you love your daughter grudge no expense,
 let the tutor's "rice and tea" be of quality suited
 to the quality of his learning.
 Observe how there are volumes of instruction
 in my mode of regulation
 of state affairs and of my own household.

Envoi:

Why in those bygone years
 was a tutor summoned?

5. Xie Daoyun, poetess of the Jin dynasty. Ban Zhao (Ban Ji) of the Later Han period completed the *History of the Han* of her brother Ban Gu.

His the duty of vernal breeze
 to foster youthful flowering.
 No son to follow me
 in the evening of my days,
 shall my daughter rival the Lady of Wei
 in calligraphic skill?

SCENE FOUR: *Pedant's Lament*

TUTOR CHEN:

I Mumbling of texts by lamp and window light
 freezes and sours the taste of hopes once bright,
 my progress through the halls of examination
 thwarted, here I dither in desperation.
 'Mid sighs for scholarship run down to waste
 only my asthma flourishes apace.

While my coughing waxes
 wine cups tend to wane
 an income supplied by village lads
 brings little smoke to my kitchen.
 "Is there no one at home
 up there in Heaven
 to take pity on the sorrowful
 crane-white locks of a sage?"

I am Chen Zuiliang, styled Bocui, graduate of the prefectural academy at Nan'an. My father and grandfather both were medical practitioners; I myself followed the path of learning from an early age, entered the academy at twelve and was eventually included among the recipients of government support. Fifteen times in forty-five years I sat for examination until I had the misfortune to have my stipend cut off by the Supervisor, merely because I was placed in the lowest grade. On top of that, for two years past I have failed to find any post as tutor and am reduced to short commons and a meager wardrobe. So now, instead of Chen Zuiliang, "Chen So Good," the young fellows delight in calling me Chen Jueliang, "Chen No Food,"¹ and, because of my expertise in medicine, divi-

1. Confucius, according to the *Analects*, "went without grain in the state of Chen." This elaborate pun has thus an additional layer of classical allusion.

SCENE SEVEN: *The Schoolroom*

CHEN ZUILIANG:

Droning verses, re-revising
 lines composed last spring,
 pondering, my belly filled,
 the taste of the noontime tea;
 ants climb up the table leg
 to skirt the ink-slab pool,
 bees invade the window
 to raid the blooms in my vase.

Here in the Prefect's residence I, Chen Zuiliang, have "hung my bed curtain" so that I may instruct the daughter of the house, following family tradition, in the *Book of Songs*. The mistress, Madam Du, is treating me with the greatest kindness. Now that breakfast is over I shall immerse myself for a while in the *Songs*.

(He intones)

"Guanguan cry the ospreys
 on the islet in the river.
 So delicate the virtuous maiden,
 a fit mate for our Prince."¹
 "Fit," that is to say, "fit"; "mate," that is to say, "seeking." (He looks about) How late it gets, and still no sign of my pupil. Horribly spoilt. Let me try three raps on the cloud board. (He raps the cloud board) Fragrance, summon the young mistress for her lesson.

(Enter BRIDAL DU, followed
 by SPRING FRAGRANCE bearing books)

BRIDAL DU:

I Lightly adorned for morning,
 to library leisurely strolling,
 unconcerned I face
 table's gleam by window's brightness.

1. The first stanza of the first of the *Songs*. Actually a folk love lyric, this, like many more of the *Songs*, was traditionally interpreted in didactic fashion as expressing popular esteem for a benevolent prince or whatnot. I use Legge's translation both to accord with this kind of interpretation and for the sake of its by now somewhat fustian quality.

SPRING FRAGRANCE:

Words of Worth from the Ancients
 —What a deadly thought

but when I'm through

I'll be able to teach the parrot to order tea.

(They greet CHEN)

BRIDAL: Our best respects, esteemed sir.

FRAGRANCE: We hope you're not vexed, esteemed sir.

CHEN: As the *Rites* prescribe, "it is proper for a daughter at first cockcrow to wash her hands, to rinse her mouth, to dress her hair, to pin the same, to pay respects to father and mother." Once sun is up then each should attend to her affairs. You are now a pupil and your business is to study: you will need to rise earlier than this.

BRIDAL: We shall not be late again.

FRAGRANCE: We understand. Tonight we won't go to bed so that we can present ourselves for our lesson in the middle of the night.

CHEN: Have you rehearsed the portion of the *Songs* I presented yesterday?

BRIDAL: I have, but await your interpretation.

CHEN: Let me hear you.

BRIDAL (recites):

Guanguan cry the ospreys
 on the islet in the river.
 So delicate the virtuous maiden,
 a fit mate for our Prince."

CHEN: Now note the interpretation.

"Guanguan cry the ospreys":

the osprey is a bird; "guanguan," that is to say, its cry.

FRAGRANCE: What sort of cry is that?

(CHEN imitates the call
 of the osprey; FRAGRANCE ad libs an imitation
 of CHEN imitating the osprey)

CHEN: This bird being a lover of quiet, it is on an island in the river.

FRAGRANCE: Quite right. Either yesterday or the day before, this year or last year some time, an osprey got trapped in the young mistress' room and she set it free and I said to myself, if I try to catch it again, I land in the river.

CHEN: Rubbish. This is a "detached image."

FRAGRANCE: What, a graven image? Who detached it?

CHEN: To "image," that is to say, to introduce thoughts of. It introduces the thought of the "delicate virtuous maiden," who is a nice, quiet girl waiting for the prince to come seeking her.

FRAGRANCE: What's he seeking from her?

CHEN: Now you are being impudent.

BRIDAL: My good tutor, to interpret the text by means of the notes is something I can do for myself. I should like you rather to instruct me in the overall significance of the *Book of Songs*.

CHEN:

IIa Of all six Classics
the *Book of Songs* is the flower
with "Airs" and "Refinements" most apt for lady's
chamber:
for practical instruction
Jiangyuan bears her offspring
"treading in the print of God's big toe";
warning against jealousy
shine the virtues of queen and consort.

And then there are the

"Song of the Cockcrow,"
the "Lament for the Swallows,"
"Tears by the Riverbank,"
"Longings by the Han River"
to cleanse the face of rouge:
in every verse an edifying homily
to "fit a maid for husband and for family."

BRIDAL: It seems to be a very long classic!

CHEN: "The *Songs* are three hundred, but their meaning may be expressed in a single phrase":

no more than this,
"to set aside evil thoughts,"
and this I pass to you.

End of lesson. Fragrance, fetch the "four jewels of the scholar's study" for our calligraphy.

FRAGRANCE: Here are paper, ink, brushes, and inkstone.

CHEN: What sort of ink is this supposed to be?

BRIDAL: Oh, she brought the wrong thing. This is "snail black," for painting the brows.

CHEN: And what sort of brushes?

BRIDAL (laughing): Mascara brushes.

CHEN: Never did I see such things before! Take them away, take them away. And what sort of paper is this?

BRIDAL: Notepaper woven by the Tang courtesan Xue Tao.

CHEN: Take it away, take it away. Bring such as was woven by the noble inventor of paper, the ancient Cai Lun. And what sort of inkstone? Is it single or double?

BRIDAL: It's not single, it's married.

CHEN: And the "eye" patterns on it—what sort of eyes?

BRIDAL: Weeping eyes.²

CHEN: What are they weeping about? —Go change the whole lot.

FRAGRANCE (aside): Ignorant old rustic! (To CHEN) Very well. (She brings a new set) Will these do?

CHEN (examines them): All right.

BRIDAL: I believe I could copy some characters. But Fragrance will need your hand, sir, to guide her brush.

CHEN: Let me see how you write. (As BRIDAL writes, he watches in amazement) Never did I see writing of this quality! What is the model?

BRIDAL: The model is "The Beauty Adorns Her Hair with Blossoms," the style transmitted by the Lady Wei of Jin times.

FRAGRANCE: Let me do some characters in the style of "The Maid Apes Her Mistress."

BRIDAL: Too early for that.

FRAGRANCE: Master, I beg leave to be excused—to leave the room and excuse myself. (She exits)

BRIDAL: Esteemed tutor, may I inquire what age your lady has attained?

CHEN: She has reached exactly sixty.

BRIDAL: If you would let me have the pattern, I should like to embroider a pair of slippers to congratulate her.

CHEN: Thank you. The pattern should be from Mencius, "to make sandals without knowledge of the foot."

BRIDAL: Fragrance isn't back yet.

CHEN: Shall I call her?

(He calls thrice)

FRAGRANCE (enters): Clapping like that—I'll give him the clap!

2. Inkstones of a highly prized variety made at Duanxi in Guangdong were decorated with patterns of "eyes" carved to follow the natural grain of the stone. If the "eyes" were not "bright eyes," clear-cut, they were known as "weeping eyes," or worse, "dead eyes."

BRIDAL (*annoyed*): What have you been doing, silly creature?

FRAGRANCE (*laughing*): Peeing. But I found a lovely big garden full of pretty flowers and willows,³ lots of fun.

CHEN: Dear, dear, instead of studying she is off to the garden. Let me fetch a bramble switch.

FRAGRANCE: What do you want a bramble switch for?

 iib How can a girl

 take the the examinations and fill an office?

All it's for is to

 read a few characters and scrawl a few crow's-feet.

CHEN: There were students in ancient times who put fireflies in a bag or read by the moon.

FRAGRANCE:

 If you use reflected moonlight

 you'll dazzle the toad up there;

 as for fireflies in a bag

 just think of the poor things burning!

CHEN: Then what about the man who tied his hair to a beam to keep from nodding off, or the scholar who prodded himself awake with an awl in the thigh?

FRAGRANCE: If you were to try

 tying your hair to a beam

 you wouldn't have much left

 and pricking your thighs

 you'd be even scabbier than you are.

 What's so glorious about that?

 (*A flower vendor's cry comes from within*)

Listen, young mistress,

 a flower vendor's cry

 drowns out the drone of studies.

CHEN: Again she distracts the young lady. This time I shall really beat her. (*He moves to do so*)

FRAGRANCE (*dodging*):

 Try and beat me then,

 poor little me—

 tutor to young ladies

3. "Flowers and willows": this euphemism for "syphilis" reinforces the "clap" of her previous speech. We are no doubt to assume that Bridal remains innocent of these suggestions of her maid, aimed at Tutor Chen.

scaring this poor malefactor
within an inch of her life!

(*She grabs the bramble switch and throws it to the floor*)

BRIDAL: You wicked creature, kneel at once for such rudeness to the tutor. (*FRAGRANCE kneels*) Since this is her first offense, sir, perhaps it will be enough if I give her a scolding:

 iic Your hands must not touch the garden swing
 nor your feet tread the garden path.

FRAGRANCE: We'll see about that!

BRIDAL: If you answer back, we shall have to scorch with an incense stick these lips of yours that blow breezes of malice, blind with a sewing needle these eyes that blossom into nothing but trouble.

FRAGRANCE: And what use would my eyes be then?

BRIDAL: I insist that you hold to the inkstone stand fast by the desk attend to "it is written in the *Songs*" be there when "the Master says" and do not let your thoughts wander.

FRAGRANCE: Oh, do let's wander a little!

BRIDAL (*seizes her by the hair*): Do you want as many weals on your back as there are hairs on your head? I'll have you show respect for the "comptroller of the household"

—the stick Madam Du my mother keeps in her room!

FRAGRANCE: I won't do it again.

BRIDAL: You understand then?

CHEN: That will be enough, we shall let her go this time. Get up.

(*FRAGRANCE rises to her feet*)

III Except she lacks ambition for the fame of office, instruction of the girl pupil parallels the boy's.

Only when your lessons are completed may you return to the house. Meanwhile, I shall exchange a few words with your father.

BRIDAL, FRAGRANCE, CHEN: What a waste of this new red gauze on the sunlit window.

(CHEN exits; FRAGRANCE points scornfully at his retreating back)

FRAGRANCE: Ignorant old ox, dopey old dog, not an ounce of understanding

BRIDAL (*tugs at her sleeve*): Stupid creature, "a tutor for a day is a father for a lifetime"; don't you understand he has the right to beat you? But tell me, where is this garden of yours?

(FRAGRANCE refusing to speak, BRIDAL gives an embarrassed laugh and asks again)

FRAGRANCE (*pointing*): Over there, of course!

BRIDAL: What is there to look at?

FRAGRANCE: Oh, lots to look at, half a dozen pavilions, one or two swings, a meandering stream one can float wine cups down, weathered Taihu rocks on the other bank. It's really beautiful, with all those prize blooms and rare plants.

BRIDAL: How surprising to find such a place. But now we may go back to the house.

Envoi:

BRIDAL:

Catkins floated on the breeze
in the Xie family court

FRAGRANCE:

thwarted is my desire to become
a butterfly in the western garden.

BRIDAL:

Ask not what sorrows follow spring
for they are limitless.

BRIDAL, FRAGRANCE:

Take for a while this loan
of green shade for your strolling.

SCENE EIGHT: *Speed the Plough*

Enter PREFECT DU with PAGE BOY,
underlings, and attendants

PREFECT DU:

1a Where should the five steeds draw my
carriage to "advance the spring"
to learn as green shoots burgeon "what songs
are on farm folk's lips"?
From eave of thatch comes call of dove,
my crimson carriage draws forth the stag
as once the white deer, happy omen,
followed the good Zheng Hong
and I shall rest "beneath the sweet apple's shade."

The seasons run their course,
the second month of spring gives way to the third.
After enriching rains and fruitful mists
clear shines the sky for the Prefect to go forth
to speed the plough as the new season deepens.
Let farm work thrive,
ease burden of corvée and lawsuit.

Spring comes early to my prefecture here between the River and the southern Guang provinces. I reflect that I have little way of telling, sequestered as I am in my prefectural court, whether there may not be far-off hamlets falling into ruin while their inhabitants roam as vagabonds. Yesterday, therefore, I instructed this particular county to prepare garlands and wine for my reception as I come to speed the plough. I believe they should be ready for me.

COUNTY OFFICIAL (*enters*):

No secretary carried out
the Prefect's orders, but only I
and my farm-folk helpers.

Your Honor, the garlands and wine are all ready for you to speed the plough.

DU: Let the procession start. And when we approach the village I don't want a lot of hubbub.

(ALL chorus assent and move in
procession with shouts of "Clear the way!")

Truly,

"to quicken summer life move I in procession,
not to enjoy the pleasant signs of spring."

(Exit)

IIIb Troubles you have brought about,
 wave on wave like the sea
 —just you dare come looking for something nice from me!

LAD: Ai-yo!

FRAGRANCE: Just you wait
 till I go tell His Honor, then perhaps we'll see

(She seizes him by the hair)

how a bamboo rod or two can whip your apple tree!

LAD *(falling flat)*: All right, I give up. To what do we owe the honor of this visit, Miss?

FRAGRANCE: The young mistress will be coming to view the garden in three days' time, so make sure the paths are swept.

LAD: It shall be done.

Envoi:

Time of sweetest fragrance
 in eastern suburb now,
 happy the home in Yangzhou, ruled
 by the Woman Star of Aquarius.
 Send not young boys
 to the realm of rouge and powder
 lest the chattering of orioles
 take on a lascivious tone.

SCENE TEN: *The Interrupted Dream*

BRIDAL DU:

I From dream returning, orioles coil their song
 through all the brilliant riot of the new season
 to listener in tiny leaf-locked court.

SPRING FRAGRANCE:

Burnt to ashes the aloes wood
 cast aside the brodering thread,
 no longer able as in past years
 to quiet stirrings of the spring's passions.

BRIDAL:

Like one "eyeing the apricot flower to slake her thirst"

at dawn, cheeks blurred with last night's rouge,
 I gaze at Apricot Blossom Pass.

FRAGRANCE:

The coils of your hair
 dressed with silken swallows in the mode of spring
 tilt aslant as you lean
 across the balustrade.

BRIDAL:

Rootless ennui,
 "where are the scissors can cut
 the comb can untangle this grief?"

FRAGRANCE:

I have told the oriole and the swallow
 to leave their urging of the flowers
 and with spring as their excuse
 to come look at you.

BRIDAL: Fragrance, have you given orders for the paths to be swept?

FRAGRANCE: Yes.

BRIDAL: Now bring my mirror and my gown.

FRAGRANCE *(reenters with these)*:

"Cloud coiffure set to perfection
 still she questions the mirror,
 robe of gauze soon to be changed
 still she adds sweetening incense."

I've brought your mirror and gown.

BRIDAL:

II The spring a rippling thread
 of gossamer gleaming sinuous in the sun
 borne idly across the court.
 Pausing to straighten
 the flower heads of hair ornaments,
 perplexed to find that my mirror
 stealing its half-glance at my hair
 has thrown these "gleaming clouds"
 into alarmed disarray.

(She takes a few steps)

Walking here in my chamber
 how should I dare let others see my form!

FRAGRANCE: How beautifully you are dressed and adorned today!

BRIDAL:

III See now how vivid shows my madder skirt,
 how brilliant gleam these combs all set with gems
 —you see, it has been
 always in my nature to love fine things.
 And yet, this bloom of springtime no eye has seen.
 What if my beauty should amaze the birds
 and out of shame for the comparison
 "cause fish to sink, wild geese to fall to earth,
 petals to close, the moon to hide her face"
 while all the flowers tremble?

FRAGRANCE: Please come now, it's almost breakfast time.

(They begin to walk)

Look how

while on the lacquered walkway
 traces of gold dust glitter,
 there on the lodge at pool's edge
 mosses make a green mass.
 Timid lest the grass stain
 our newly brodered socks
 we grieve that the flowers must bear
 the tug of tiny gold bells.¹

BRIDAL: Without visiting this garden, how could I ever have realized this splendor of spring!

IV See how deepest purple, brightest scarlet
 open their beauty only to dry well crumbling.
 "Bright the morn, lovely the scene,"
 listless and lost the heart
 —where is the garden "gay with joyous cries"?

My mother and father have never spoken of any such exquisite spot as this.

BRIDAL, FRAGRANCE:

Streaking the dawn, close-curved at dusk,
 rosy clouds frame emerald pavilion;
 fine threads of rain, petals borne on breeze,

1. A prince of the Tang court strung tiny gold bells on red thread to hang on the stems of flowers and instructed the gardener to tug the thread when necessary to scare off the birds. Here Fragrance, though aware that this was done out of compassion for the flowers, takes sensibility a stage further by lamenting the burden they must bear.

gilded pleasure boat in waves of mist:
 glories of spring but little treasured
 by screen-secluded maid.

FRAGRANCE: All the flowers have come into bloom now, but it's still too early for the peony.

BRIDAL:

V The green hillside
 bleeds with the cuckoo's tears of red azalea,²
 shreds of mist lazy as wine fumes thread the sweetbriar.
 However fine the peony,
 how can she rank as queen
 coming to bloom when spring has said farewell!

FRAGRANCE: See them pairing, orioles and swallows!

BRIDAL, FRAGRANCE:

Idle gaze resting
 there where the voice of swallow shears the air
 and liquid flows the trill of oriole.

BRIDAL: We must go now.

FRAGRANCE: Really one would never weary of enjoying this garden.

BRIDAL: Say no more!

(They begin to walk back)

VI Unwearying joy—how should we break its spell
 even by visits each in turn
 to the Twelve Towers of Fairyland?
 Far better now, as first elation passes,
 to find back in our chamber
 some pastime for idle hours.

(They reach the house)

FRAGRANCE:

"Open the west chamber door,
 in the east room make the bed,"
 fill the vase with azalea,
 light aloes in the incense burner.

Take your rest now, young mistress, while I go report to Madam.

(She exits)

2. An involved wordplay here. *Dujuan* means both a flower, the azalea, and a bird, the cuckoo. An old legend related that the Prince of Shu in ancient times was transformed after death into the cuckoo, which ever since has wept tears of blood.

BRIDAL (*sighing*):

Back from spring stroll
to silent room,
what to do but try on
the spring's new adornments?

Ah spring, now that you and I have formed so strong an attachment, what shall I find to fill my days when you are past? Oh this weather, how sleepy it makes one feel. Where has Fragrance got to? (*She looks about her, then lowers her head again, pondering*) Ah Heaven, now I begin to realize how disturbing the spring's splendor can truly be. They were all telling the truth, those poems and ballads I read that spoke of girls of ancient times "in springtime moved to passion, in autumn to regret." Here am I at the "double eight," my sixteenth year, yet no fine "scholar to break the cassia bough" has come my way. My young passions stir to the young spring season, but where shall I find an "entrant of the moon's toad palace"?³ Long ago the Lady Han found a way to a meeting with Yu You, and the scholar Zhang met with Miss Cui by chance. Their loves are told in *Poem on the Red Leaf* and in *Western Chamber*,⁴ how these "fair maids and gifted youths" after clandestine meetings made marital unions "as between Qin and Jin."⁵ (*She gives a long sigh*) Though born and bred of a noted line of holders of office, I have reached the age to "pin up my hair" without plan made for my betrothal to a suitable partner. The green springtime of my own life passes unfulfilled, and swift the time speeds by as dawn and dusk interchange. (*She weeps*) O pity one whose beauty is a bright flower, when life endures no longer than leaf on tree!

VII From turbulent heart these springtime thoughts of
love
will not be banished
—O with what suddenness

3. See scene 2, note 4.

4. *Poem on the Red Leaf* (*Tihongji*) is the title of a play by Tang Xianzu's friend, Wang Jide. The theme is taken from the Tang story of the Lady Han, who wrote a poem on a red leaf, which she set adrift on the water of the palace drain. The leaf was found by Yu You, who returned a message to her by similar means, and eventually met and married her. *Western Chamber* (*Xixiangji*) is Wang Shifu's famous play on the romance, again of Tang times, of the scholar Zhang and Cui Yingying, whom he met by chance on his visit to the temple in which she was lodging. In fact, our text does not name the *Xixiangji* at this point; rather, the *Cui Hui zhuan*, the story of another Miss Cui, but this seems an unnecessary complication.

5. Two states of the "Springs and Autumns" period, whose ruling families for generations made marriage alliances.

comes this secret discontent!
I was a pretty child, and so
of equal eminence must the family be
truly immortals, no less
to receive me in marriage.
But for what grand alliance
is this springtime of my youth
so cast away?
What eyes may light upon my sleeping form?
My only course this coy delaying
but in secret dreams
by whose side do I lie?
Shadowed against spring's glory I twist and turn.
Lingering
where to reveal my true desires!
Suffering
this wasting,
where but to Heaven shall my lament be made!

I feel rather tired, I shall rest against this low table and drowse for a while.

(*She falls asleep and begins to
dream of LIU MENGMEI, who enters bearing a branch
of willow in his hand*)

LIU MENGMEI:

As song of oriole purrs in warmth of sun,
so smiling lips open to greet romance.
Tracing my path by petals borne on stream,
I find the Peach Blossom Source of my desire.⁶

I came along this way with Miss Du—how is it that she is not with me now? (*He looks behind him and sees her*) Ah, Miss Du!

(*She rises, startled from sleep, and
greets him. He continues*)

So this is where you were—I was looking for you everywhere. (*She glances shyly at him, but does not speak*) I just chanced to break off

6. Allusion to a story of Liu Chen and Ruan Zhao of Han times, who found faery love by following a "peach-blossom spring" into the Tiantai ("Terrace of Heaven") Mountains. Even more celebrated is the Peach Blossom Spring of an allegory by Tao Qian describing, at the stream's source, a secluded Shangri-la upon which a mortal stumbled.

this branch from a weeping willow in the garden. You are so deeply versed in works of literature, I should like you to compose a poem to honor it.

(She starts in surprised delight and opens her lips to speak, but checks herself)

BRIDAL *(aside)*: I have never seen this young man in my life—what is he doing here?

LIU *(smiling at her)*: Lady, I am dying of love for you!

VIII With the flowering of your beauty
as the river of years rolls past,
everywhere I have searched for you
pining secluded in your chamber.

Lady, come with me just over there where we can talk.

(She gives him a shy smile, but refuses to move. He tries to draw her by the sleeve)

BRIDAL *(in a low voice)*: Where do you mean?

LIU:

There, just beyond this railing peony-lined
against the mound of weathered Taihu rocks.

BRIDAL *(in a low voice)*: But, sir, what do you mean to do?

LIU *(also in a low voice)*:

Open the fastening at your neck
loose the girdle at your waist,
while you
screening your eyes with your sleeve,
white teeth clenched on the fabric as if against pain,
bear with me patiently a while
then drift into gentle slumber.

(BRIDAL turns away, blushing. LIU advances to take her in his arms, but she resists him)

LIU, BRIDAL:

Somewhere at some past time you and I met.
Now we behold each other in solemn awe

but do not say

in this lovely place we should meet and speak no word.

(LIU exits, carrying off BRIDAL by force.)

Enter FLOWER SPIRIT in red cloak strewn with petals
and ornamental headdress on his piled-up hair)

FLOWER SPIRIT:

Commissioner of the Flowers' Blooming,
come with new season
from Heaven of Blossom Guard
to fulfill the springtime's labors.
Drenched in red petal rain
the beholder, heartsore,
anchors his yearnings
amid the clouds of blossom.

In my charge as Flower Spirit is this garden in the rear of the prefectural residence at Nan'an. Between Bridal, daughter of Prefect Du, and the young graduate Liu Mengmei, there exists a marriage affinity that must some day be fulfilled, and now Miss Du's heart has been so deeply moved by her spring strolling that she has summoned the graduate Liu into her dream. To cherish in compassion the "jade-like incense ones" is the special concern of a flower spirit, and that is why I am here to watch over her and to ensure that the "play of clouds and rain" will be a joyous experience for her.

ix Ah, how the male force surges and leaps
as in the way of wanton bee he stirs
the gale of her desire
while her soul trembles
at the dewy brink of a sweet, shaded vale.
A mating of shadows, this,
consummation within the mind,
no fruitful Effect
but an apparition within the Cause.⁷
Ha, but now my flower palace is sullied by lust.

I must use a falling petal to wake her.

(Scatters petals in the entrance to the stage)

Loath she may be to loose herself
from the sweet spellbound dream of spring's delight,
but petals flutter down
like crimson snow.

So, graduate Liu, the dream is but half-complete. When it is over, be sure to see Miss Du safely back to her chamber. I leave you now.

7. In the Buddhist doctrine of karma, every effect is the result of some prior cause in either the present or a previous incarnation.

(Exit. Enter LIU, leading
BRIDAL by the hand)

LIU: For this brief moment

x nature was our comforter,
grasses for pillow, our bed a bed of flowers.

Are you all right, Miss Du?

(She lowers her head)

Disarrayed the clouds of her hair,
red petals caught
by emerald combs aslant.

O lady, never forget

how close I clasped you
and with what tenderness,
longing only to make
of our two bodies one single flesh
but bringing forth
a glistening of rouge raindrops in the sun.

BRIDAL: Sir, you must go now.

BRIDAL, LIU:

Somewhere at some past time you and I met.
Now we behold each other in solemn awe

but do not say

in this lovely place we should meet and speak no word.

LIU: Lady, you must be tired. Please take a rest. (He sees her back to the table against which she was drowsing, and gently taps her sleeve)
Lady, I am going. (Looking back at her) Have a good rest now, I shall come to see you again.

Rain threatened the spring garden as she approached
and when she slept the "clouds and rain"
broke over Wushan, hill of faery love.

(Exit)

BRIDAL (wakes with a start and calls in a low voice): Young sir, young sir, oh, you have left me. (She falls asleep again)

MADAM DU (enters):

Husband on Prefect's dais,
daughter in cloistered chamber
—yet when she broiders patterns on a dress
above the flowers the birds fly all in pairs.

Child, child, what are you doing asleep in a place like this?

BRIDAL (wakes and calls again after LIU): Oh, oh.

MADAM DU: Why, child, what is the matter?

BRIDAL (startled, rises to her feet): Mother, it's you!

MADAM DU: Child, why aren't you passing your time pleasantly with needlework or a little reading? Why were you lying here sleeping in the middle of the day?

BRIDAL: Just now I took an idle stroll in the garden, but all at once the raucousness of the birds began to distress me and so I came back to my room. Lacking any means to while away the time I must have fallen asleep for a moment. Please excuse my failure to receive you in proper fashion.

MADAM DU: The rear garden is too lonely and deserted, child. You must not go strolling there again.

BRIDAL: I shall take care to do as you bid, Mother.

MADAM DU: Off to the schoolroom with you now for your lesson.

BRIDAL: We are having a break just now, the tutor is not here.

MADAM DU (sighing): There must always be troubles when a girl approaches womanhood, and she must be left to her own ways. Truly,

moiling and toiling in the children's wake,
many the pains a mother needs must take.

(Exit)

BRIDAL (watching her leave and sighing heavily): Ah Heaven, Bridal, what unsought fortune has befallen you today! Chancing to visit the garden behind the house, I found a hundred different flowers in bloom everywhere, and the beauty of the scene set my heart in turmoil. When my elation passed and I came back, I fell into a midday slumber here in my incense-laden chamber. Suddenly a most handsome and elegant youth appeared, of age just fit for the "capping ceremony" of the twentieth year. He had broken off a branch from a willow in the garden, and he smiled and said to me, "Lady, you are so deeply versed in works of literature, I should like you to compose a poem in honor of this willow branch." I was on the point of replying when the thought came to me that I had never seen this man in my life before and did not even know his name. How should I so lightly enter into conversation with him? But just as this was in my mind he came close and began to speak fond words to me; then taking me in his arms he carried me to a spot beside the peony pavilion, beyond the railings lined with tree peonies, and there to-

gether we found the "joys of cloud and rain." Passion was matched by passion, and indeed a thousand fond caresses, a million tenderesses passed between us. After our bliss was accomplished he led me back to where I had been sleeping, and many times said, "Rest now." Then, just as I was about to see him off, suddenly my mother came into my room and woke me. Now perspiration chills all my body—it was no more than a "dream of Nanke, the human world in an anthill." I hastened to greet my mother with the proper decorum, and was duly given a good talking-to. Though there was nothing I could say in my defense, how can I now free my mind from memories of all that happened in my dream? Walking or sitting still, I find no peace, all I can feel is a sense of loss. Ah mother, you tell me to be off to the schoolroom to my lesson—but what kind of book has lessons to lighten this heavy heart! (*She weeps, screening her face with her sleeve*)

xI Through scudding of "clouds and rain"
I had touched the borders of dream
when the lady my mother
called me, alas! and broke
this slumber by window's sunlit gauze.
Now clammy cold a perspiration breaks,
now heart numbs, footsteps falter,
thought fails, hair slants awry,
and whether to sit or stand
is more than mind can decide
—then let me sleep again.

FRAGRANCE (*enters*):

Against the coming of night
rid cheeks of powder's traces,
against the damp of spring
add incense to the burner.

Young mistress, I have aired the bedclothes for you to sleep now.

BRIDAL:

xII For heart spring-burdened, limbs
now lax from garden strolling,
no need of incense-aired
brocaded covers to entice to slumber.

Ah, Heaven,

let the dream I dreamed be not yet fled too far.

Envoi:

Idle spring excursion
begins from painted hall,
sweet-scented is the shade
of apricot and willow.
You ask where Liu and Ruan
met with their faery loves?⁸
Look back, and on the east wind
heartbreak comes again.

SCENE ELEVEN: *Well-meant Warning*

MADAM DU:

Day by day I decline,
older this year than last.
My daughter by study window
to sad seclusion holds fast.

For several days I had not visited my daughter in her chamber. When I called on her this noon I found her alone and listless, lying drowsily in her room. On inquiring the reason for her weariness, I discovered that she had just returned from the garden behind the house. She is too young to realize the impropriety, for a girl of tender years, of a pleasure stroll in all her finery in such a deserted place. It was that scamp Fragrance lured her into this. Fragrance!

SPRING FRAGRANCE (*enters*):

Try to take a rest,
always some new behest.

Madam, it's so late, isn't it time you retired?

MADAM DU: Where is your young mistress?

FRAGRANCE: After your visit to her chamber, Madam, she fell to talking to herself, and then drowsed off into a spring slumber. I expect she's having a dream.

MADAM DU: You good-for-nothing scamp, it was you who enticed your young mistress into the garden behind the house. What if something untoward had happened to her?

FRAGRANCE: I won't dare do it again.

8. See note 6

SCENE FOURTEEN: *The Portrait*

BRIDAL DU:

I By winding walks I left my dream
and lost him, fading.
Now jade-like charms grow chill in chamber's depth
where soul must languish
since as the mist the petal
or the moon the cloud
a flicker of untold love
once touched my heart.

SPRING FRAGRANCE:

Dreading some glimpse of amorous butterfly
leaf-lost in quest of fragrance,
weary she rises, paints her face,
and listens to the harshness of the shriek.
Spring passes, though crimson sleeves still beckon.

BRIDAL:

No man was there at the peony pavilion,
yet though my dream grows dim
there is one who holds my longings.

FRAGRANCE:

In the curving of her eyebrows
shows her beauty, spring-tormented
—but who should depict these "slopes of distant hills"?

BRIDAL:

In my thin gown I tremble,
wrapped against the morning chill
only by regrets
to see red tears of petals shake from the bough.

BRIDAL, FRAGRANCE:

How to depict the fairy maid of Wushan,
whether by sun or rain
against the cloud and shadow of Gaotang?¹

FRAGRANCE: My young mistress: ever since you took that stroll in
the garden you have been careless of your meals and careless of
your rest. Do you think it can be the disturbance of the spring that

1. See scene 1, note 4.

is causing you to pine and grow thin? I am too stupid to be offering
advice to such as yourself, but I do not think you should visit the
garden any more from now on.

BRIDAL: Ah, but how are you to know what lies behind this? You
must understand how

vernal dreams mysteriously
flower with the third month,
lightly the chill of dawn
thins out the blossoms.

(She sings softly)

II So chill the spring's leave-taking
daily my thoughts grow idler,
my will more feeble.
My toilet made at last, I sit alone,
listless as the incense smoke I watch,
no peace of mind
until the choking weeds that breed distress
are rooted out, and the shoots of joy can grow.
Whom to please if I mask my sorrow with smiles?
—My vision quivers in a blur of tears.

FRAGRANCE: My young mistress,

III if your fever cannot be cooled,
then why doesn't it dry the cold tears?
It's clear that in these spring roamings
you have had no defense
from the upsetting chatter of oriole and swallow.
Just think
what anxiety you will cause Madam your mother.
Go on with this grieving
and folk will be far from perfectly enchanted
with this perfect beauty of yours.

BRIDAL *(with a gesture of alarm)*: Oh, dear, from what Fragrance tells
me I must have become completely haggard. Let me see in the mir-
ror what has really happened. *(She looks in the mirror and sobs)* Alas,
when before I could boast of an enticing soft fullness, how could I
have grown as thin and frail as this? Before it's too late let me make
a portrait of myself to leave to the world, lest the worst should sud-
denly befall me and no one then ever learn of the beauty of Bridal
Du who came from far Sichuan! Fragrance, bring plain silk and
colored inks, and attend on me while I sketch.

(FRAGRANCE returns with silk and brushes)

FRAGRANCE:

Easy to sketch
freshness of youth,
hard to portray
the pain at heart.

The silk and the colored inks are ready for your use.

BRIDAL (*weeping*): How can it be that Bridal Du must sketch with her own hand the grace of her sixteen years! Ah, that time should have etched

iv these peach-bloom cheeks of youth
so swiftly with lines of care!
Surely a happy lot is beyond my deserving
—or why must “fairest face be first to age”?
Many the beauty has been praised as peerless
only for time to erase the bright vision—so soon.
Now to damp down the burning
of desire in the soul’s brief resting place of flesh,
take brush and paper, ink and inkstone,
the “four jewels of the study,” of quality
such as is found in chambers of princely consorts
and render eyebrows to rival the Western Maid’s
which arched above the West Lake’s loveliness²
twin crescent moons.

v With a silk cloth
lightly wipe the mirror.
Hair tip lightly brushing, deftly limning;
ah, mirror semblance,
you must be my close model
for cheeks with teasing smile
and cherry mouth
and willow leaf of brow
and now in washes of drifting mist
the cloud of hair.
Far tip of eyebrow lost in hair at temples,

2. The “Western Maid” is Xi Shi, the most celebrated of all Chinese beauties, who seduced the King of Wu into the ruin of his realm. The West Lake is the famous Hangzhou beauty spot.

already the eyes with light of autumn stream
personify the sitter;
hair ornaments bright with feathers and gems
set off the brows curving as hills of spring.

FRAGRANCE:

vi Best fit to smile,
slender waist poised to breath of spring breeze,
yet sensing too the sorrows the east wind brings.

BRIDAL:

A hint of hill and stream,
a gate, a door
and my own self, captured in likeness,
bearing in hand a “green sprig of apricot”
as I recall my lover.
Here see me lean
in a dawn dream against a rocky mound,
grace of bearing to match the wind-stirred willow;
to lines so fine-drawn
add last for contrast broad green leaves of the plantain.

Fragrance, hold it up so that we may see whether I have caught a likeness.

FRAGRANCE:

vii Easy enough to sketch her aspect
in hues red or dark;
harder to portray the rare individual self
when the image reflects the reality
like flowers seen behind closed lids
or the moon on water.

BRIDAL (*pleased with her work*): But it will make a charming picture.
Ah,

surely my painting promises well
with a sweet appeal more marked than in the model!

FRAGRANCE: All it lacks is a husband by your side. If only
your marriage destiny could be soon fulfilled
and a fine handsome husband found
then we should see a double portrait

—happy couple limned against clouds of bliss!

BRIDAL: Fragrance, I have something to confess to you: that time I was strolling in the garden—I found a man.

FRAGRANCE (*startled*): Oh, my young mistress, how could you be so fortunate?

BRIDAL: Why, in a dream!

VIII There he stood smiling,
and I could recall his living likeness,
catch with the fine lines of my brush
the very essence of his soul
but that I fear to reveal my secret love.

And so this portrait must hang by itself,
lone crescent of an autumn moon
rising in space where peak is touched by cloud
—not this the cloud that frames the honored guest
in the moon's toad palace!³

Now take good note of this, Fragrance: The young scholar who appeared in my dream had broken off a branch of willow to present to me. Surely this must be a sign that the husband I shall meet in time to come will have the surname Liu, for "willow"? What would you say to my making up a poem now, to inscribe at the head of this scroll, which would contain hints of my spring yearnings?

FRAGRANCE: That would be a clever plan.

BRIDAL (*inscribing the poem, and reciting it as she does so*):

However close the likeness
viewed from near at hand,
from farther off one would say
this was some airborne sprite.
Union in some year to come
with the "courtier of the moon"
will be beneath the branches
either of willow or apricot.

(*She sets down her brush with a sigh*)

Fragrance, many a beautiful maiden in past or present time has married early in her youth a loved and loving husband who has painted her portrait; whilst many another has taken up the brush herself to send her own likeness to a lover. But who should receive this portrait of Bridal Du!

IX Pleasure yields to pain:
pleasure in the bright vision
elegantly demure
as faery pendants sway;
pain to predict, as the years deepen

3. See scene 2, note 4.

the fading of tint from eye and lip
of this Ajiao, locked up in golden chamber.⁴
Vain labor
when to no lover's eye this lovely image
unrolled will bring a tear,
when there is none to call
the living Zhenzhen from the painted scroll.⁵

(*She weeps*)

O melancholy fate
that this most imminent presence must stay hid
for latter days to witness.

Fragrance, call softly now for the flower lad, I have an errand for him.

(FRAGRANCE calls)

GARDENER'S LAD (*enters*):

Like Qingong I have lived
"among flowers all my days"⁶
yet no Cui Hui I have known
rivals the beauty of this scoll!⁷

What is your errand, miss?

BRIDAL: I want you to take this self-portrait of mine to the scroll maker's to be mounted, and tell him I want it done with care:

x Who shall mount this portrait, so to enhance
the happy capture of the living model?
Let the material be flowered damask
bleached to a gem-like gleam of white
and have the margins slender.
Let there be no blabbing
should anyone inquire the painter's name.
Lining and mount must survive

4. Emperor Wu of the Han said that if he were given Ajiao as his consort he would build a chamber of gold for her to dwell in.

5. Zhenzhen, in a Tang story, was a lady on a painted scroll who magically came to life.

6. Qingong was the favored consort of the Han general Liang Ji.

7. Cui Hui (alluded to above, scene 10, note 4), in a Tang story, sent her portrait to her absent lover, with the proclamation that, should the day come when she no longer resembled the figure on the scroll, she would have died for love of him. Here the lad, with an improbable talent for literary allusion, is referring to his girlfriends in the village.

burning of sun and buffeting of breeze,
for "finest things are least enduring"
and the delicacy of red stroke or of black
must not be sullied.

LAD: Young mistress, once the scroll is all complete, where shall I hang it?

BRIDAL:

x1 To the gentle boudoir none will come to enjoy its beauty

FRAGRANCE:

more fit to be enshrined in the faery temple of Wushan

BRIDAL, FRAGRANCE:

or will it take its flight
in transformations between cloud and rain?

Envoi:

FRAGRANCE:

Feather-worked jewelry
at odds with the heart's emotions

BRIDAL:

tears sting the eyes
to turn from the flowers' blooming.

FRAGRANCE:

Show them the bewitching grace
captured in this painting

BRIDAL:

portraits of the Consort Yang
pale in comparison.

SCENE FIFTEEN: *A Spy for the Tartars*

BARBARIAN PRINCE (*enters with suite*):

1 At Heaven's will we have destroyed the Liao
and share the empire with the house of Zhao.¹
The whipcrack summoning all to courtly ritual
drowns out the wail of nomad flutes.

1. The Jurchen, a Tungusic people from Manchuria, overcame the Liao to establish their Jin dynasty in the north of China in 1125. Zhao was the surname of the Chinese

Toll drums, chime bells
for staffs civil and martial to assemble,
and let the southerners guffaw
at beaky noses,
freckled hides,
and stubby hair.

Far-flung dominions, far-flung dust,
to each new ruler his own new court:
why should we northerners put up with drifting sands
when the south enjoys a land of rich brocade?

I am Dignai, Prince of Hailing and Emperor of the Great Jin Dynasty. I am barbarian by birth and a lecher by nature. Some thirty years ago my great forebear Ogda seized the southern realm and forced the Song lord Gaozong to retire to Hangzhou. But they say he has done up Hangzhou until it now outshines the old capital at Kaifeng, and on the West Lake there people make merry day and night: a poem talks about "cassia buds the autumn through, miles of flowering lotus." So what's to stop me from raising a million men and gobbling it up? But military strategy is a business full of ins and outs, and I need a southerner as a guide. Luckily here's the Huaiyang bandit Li Quan,² who's a match for any ten thousand men. He's been willing to submit to me, and I've bestowed on him the title of Prince-errant of Jin. I've set him a time limit of three years to raise men, buy steeds, and create havoc in Huaiyang. This will be my pretext for launching my expedition of conquest. Oh, oh, but I can't wait to be taking my pleasure on the West Lake!

II Heaven's mandate shared,
Heaven's mandate shared between us,
it's still on me that Heaven smiles,
but my astrologers declare
the south's the nicer place.

ATTENDANTS: How can it be nicer?

PRINCE:

Why, think of the smile on West Maid's lips
as on West Lake with charming grace
she leans on oars bedecked with orchids.³

ruling house of the Song dynasty, who retreated south across the Yangzi to Hangzhou in 1127.

2. Li Quan was a historical figure, a rebel against the Southern Song, but a century later than the time of "Dignai."

3. See scene 14, note 2.

ATTENDANTS: Is this West Lake as big as our South Sea and North Sea here in Peking?

PRINCE: A hundred miles around.⁴

Blossoms sway above the waves,
 "rare scents blow from behind the clouds."
 Nights that know no dawn
 as singers and musicians clad in brocade
 thread the tipsy crowd.

ATTENDANTS: Lord of Myriad Years, let's borrow it and have a bit of fun!

PRINCE: I already sent an artist on a secret mission to make a painting of the entire scene. There's a Mount Wu above the lake and he's painted me on horseback on the peak. And don't I just look fierce!

Mount Wu is the top
 and I'm on top of Mount Wu,
 "South of the River" will be an easy prey
 and here we see how easy.

(He dances)

Just watch me star as

"The Gorgeous Horseman of the Beauteous West Lake."

ATTENDANTS: Lord of Myriad Years, we may not be able to get to West Lake first stop. Where will you rest your carriage?

PRINCE:

III Eager to let the horse in the painting sniff West Lake,
 first I must wend my way through the beauties of Loyang.
 Soon I'll pick up what's left of the realm of Zhao!

Envoi:

Long River narrow as single thread,
 sky the size of a fan,
 like a line of wild geese flying
 banners float afar.
 Who will ever drain them,
 the wine jars of the south?
 Hills and streams delivered up
 all the way to Yan.

4. The figure is actually closer to ten.

SCENE SIXTEEN: *The Invalid*

MADAM DU:

I What does this life hold?
 Truly, "hard is the lot of beauty"
 and drear the prospect for parents
 soon to be left childless!

(She weeps)

Jewel in my palm,
 flesh of my inmost heart,
 silent pearls of tears I shed for you.

Ah Heaven, when others can be
 surrounded by seven sons,
 why must a solitary daughter sicken and pine?

Delicate as a petal
 she should enjoy Heaven's mercy,
 but storm of wind and rain
 cruelly torments the blossom.
 Properly secluded in curtained chamber,
 who brought the moon to peep,
 the breeze to set the eaves atinkle?
 As my hair thins with age
 my bowels twist in sorrow,
 from gummy eyes the tears come coursing down.

Approaching my midcentury, I have been blessed with one daughter only, Bridal. Why now should a sickness have laid her low for so many months? From the way she looks and moves and speaks it does not seem to be any ailment born of inclement cold or summer heat. But if there is anything behind this, Fragrance must know about it, and I will question her. Fragrance, you scamp, are you there?

SPRING FRAGRANCE: Coming.

Ailing beauty on my hands
 and no little page to help me out;
 down come the mistress' commands,
 must be some leftovers lying about.
 Fragrance, Madam, at your service.

MADAM DU: Your young mistress was in perfectly good health until you came into her service, and now after half a year of your attentions she is seriously ill. It's all very distressing. Tell me, how has she been eating lately?

FRAGRANCE:

IIa Don't call it eating;
nothing can rouse her interest,
no question brings response.
She babbles prettily to herself,
laughs and makes no sense,
then stares with vision glazed.

MADAM DU: We must send for the doctor at once.

FRAGRANCE: It will take

all the eight schools of acupuncture
to prod her tender feelings;
the alchemist's pill nine times refined
won't separate out this shameful sickness.

MADAM DU: What sickness is it?

FRAGRANCE: I'm sure I don't know, but

I'd have said her thoughts were pure as autumn sky
and here she gets spring fever.

MADAM DU: What!

IIb She is no more than a wisp
"so thin the scale can hardly register."

And it's you have inveigled her into this.

Mist-laden blossoms do the damage,
oriole and swallow carry word,
clouds and moon conspire together.

Kneel, you scamp! Hand me the rod!

FRAGRANCE (*kneeling*): I truly know nothing about it.

MADAM DU:

What is it has wasted her graceful form,
what cause had you to stir her gentle nature?

FRAGRANCE: My young mistress went happily sampling the flowers
and willows,¹ how do I know why she should get sick?

MADAM DU (*enraged, beats her*):

Take that for your show of solicitude!
Your runaway tongue
leaks what it tries to cover up!

1. See scene 7, note 3; "flowers and willows" equal syphilis.

FRAGRANCE: Careful lest you tire your arm, Madam; let me tell you all that happened. It was that day when she'd been for a stroll in the garden and you chanced upon her after her return. She told me about a young scholar who held a sprig of willow in his hand and asked my young mistress for a poem about it. She said she'd never seen him before in her life and she didn't give him any poem.

MADAM DU: Well then, so she didn't give him any poem. What then?

FRAGRANCE: Then . . . then . . . then the young scholar up and carried her good and proper into the peony pavilion.

MADAM DU: And what was that for?

FRAGRANCE: How should I know? It was all just a dream.

MADAM DU: Just a dream?

FRAGRANCE: Just a dream.

MADAM DU: There's some devilry here. Summon the master, I'll discuss this with him.

FRAGRANCE (*calls*): The master's presence is requested.

DU BAO (*enters*):

Heavy the weight of my gold girdle of office,
fragile the jade tray bearing the "jewel in my palm."²

Madam, what is the reason for our daughter's sickness?

MADAM DU (*weeps*): Hear my words, my lord:

IIc My heart aches to speak
of this sickness of cause unknown.
Long are her slumbers, brief her stirrings,
reasonless her tears and laughter,
shadow in place of substance.

It seems our daughter went for a stroll in the garden at the rear of the house. There she dreamed of a man with a willow sprig in his hand who spirited her off. (*She sighs*) I only fear

her limbs sullied by willow sprite,
body possessed by genies of the flowers.

Oh, my husband,

quickly offer invocations

lest the moon and wheeling stars afflict her.

DU: More of your folly. Here I have engaged Tutor Chen to teach her restraint and decorum, while you her mother freely permit her to go wandering off. (*He laughs*) This is all the result of some chill she has caught from the alternation of hot sun and cooling breeze. But if you wish to invoke the stars we need seek no Taoist wizard. It will

2. The "jewel in my palm" is Bridal; the "jade tray," her emaciated body.

suffice to have Sister Stone of the Purple Light Convent intone a few scriptures. As the ancients put it, "to slight the doctor for the witch doctor is the best way to avoid a cure." I have already sent for Tutor Chen to come examine her pulse.

MADAM DU: Examine her pulse! If only we had found a marriage partner for her in good time, then no such sickness would have occurred.

DU: What! Among the ancients, "man takes wife at thirty, at twenty woman goes as bride."³ Such a child as our daughter is, what can she understand?

III A silly girl,
what can a babe know of the seven passions?
She has a fever from going abroad,
an ague of some kind,
some convulsion or inflammation of the spleen.

I fear that you, as her mother,
kept fast our jewel too tightly in your palm
till now, a too delicate blossom,
she cannot withstand heartsickness.

DU, MADAM DU (both weeping):

A pair bereft of support
we plead to high Heaven for this girl
the lifeline of our house.

STEWARD (enters):

Visiting Apricot Ridge
one sails past Solitude Peak.⁴
Master, a messenger to see you.

DU:

Official duties must claim my attention.
Madam,
take loving care of our daughter's health
for autumn's a fell season to the sick.

(Exit, with STEWARD)

3. This is the prescription of the *Book of Rites*.

4. Entrance verses for minor characters are not always full of significance. Here the steward plays on the names of two mountains to prefigure the bereavement of the old couple through the agency of Liu Mengmei ("apricot" being the meaning of the last syllable of his name).

MADAM DU (to FRAGRANCE):

"Lacking office, one has freedom;
having sons, all things are supplied."

I fear my husband is too preoccupied with his official visitors to concern himself with his daughter's sickness. It saddens me very much. (She weeps) Meanwhile, we shall have Sister Stone invoke the stars and Tutor Chen prescribe medicine. But will either have any effect? Truly,

though mother and daughter are closest of all
on doctor and soothsayer still we call.⁵

SCENE SEVENTEEN: Sorceress of the Tao

SISTER STONE:

I Driven by yin and yang,
people rush pell-mell in pursuit of marriage,
but Heaven denied me
woman's proper parts
and so my sole recourse
was to the Way, to don the shaman's robe.
Now as I crook my fingers
four decades have I seen.
What is this life but a dream?
Song from the void fills purple palace
under cold jade sky,¹
bamboo and rock rise high as hills,
none here may tranquil lie.
We grieve that human heart
can never be as stone,
but we may open it and look
when the good times chance by.

I am Sister Stone of the Purple Light Convent. "Stone" was not my

5. Very untypically, the scene ends with recited rather than sung verse, and lacks an envoi.

1. This verse comprises a "pastiche of Tang lines": each is cited from a different Tang poet, but the whole is consistent in meter and rhyme. The lines are from Li Qunyu, Du Fu, Liu Yuxi, and Han Yu, respectively.

surname in lay life, but I got to be called this because of my rock-hard hymen, on account of which I lost my mate. Come to think of it, if I wanted to return to lay life you'd find my family in the *Hundred Surnames*;² as for my religious career, *The Thousand Character Text*³ has a few lines describing that. Heaven knows, it's not for me to expound

the dusty tomes of ancient lore
it's just that
a quiet life the Master praised
and Yu his thoughts to virtue raised.
Why do I live in these halls
their minarets seem to touch the sky
messing about with
perfection of the Golden Mean?
Well, in religious practice
virtue's reward is happiness;
doctrine of karma means that
vice ever ends in wretchedness.
How can it be that
fortune and fame you're sure to seize?
My ancestors were content to
deep in some dusky forest hide.
With me, it's always been
good deeds a good example set
not to speak of
a tranquil mind no passions fire.
I've got a bumhole
rejoice to see the lilies fair
and a piddlehole
and flowerets clustering everywhere
but right there at the fork, unfortunately

2. An ancient compilation which worked the various surnames into a rhymed reader.

3. From here on the old bawd's monologue consists essentially of ludicrously misapplied lines of *The Thousand Character Text*. This medieval tour de force is an essay in rhymed quadrisyllabics that uses a thousand characters without repeating a single one. Because of its universal use as a primer and as a calligraphic model, it was familiar to every literate person. To bring out the piquancy of these gross misquotations, I have borrowed the sonorous English version of the *Text* done by the great Herbert Giles over a century ago. It is hoped that some serendipities emerge from the conjoint ingenuities of the author of the *Text*, the author of the play, and the solemn (and wholly innocent) Victorian translator.

where boisterous streams, cliffs hard to mount
there seems to be some obstruction
deserts, and Dongting's liquid fount.
So Stone is my name, and while on a stone highway
causes are heard in every street
what's the use of a stone field
to drop the millet seedlings in?
How could I marry when
through valleys deep, through empty halls
echo, reverberating, calls?
Much better to stay home with Mum and
in filial duties strain each nerve.
Unfortunately there were all
your nephews and your nieces too
who kept yapping at me
you girls, your mother's words obey!
Then Mum says, though the way I was made meant that someone
must
strive hard substantial good to gain
still as far as looks went
Mao's beauty wore a pensive air;
everyone else gets a partner
let peace 'mongst high and lowly reign
so why shouldn't I
the housewife sing her husband's strain?
So we hired a go-between with a flexible tongue
let your sincerity be known
and got me promised to a son-in-law with a good big—nose:
no superficial talents own.
All fixed up in no time at all. So we consulted the calendar
the sun and moon their courses run
and checked the horoscopes
the stars shine out when day is done.
He sent over his gifts
gold from the river Li is brought
and I entered the palanquin
and jade at far Kun'gang is sought.
To hide my face
there silken fans of matchless white;
we had runners in front of the procession
and silver tapers burning bright.

And the groom, what a sight,
 their Prince they follow close behind
 their feathers fluttering in the wind
 and me the bride got up just as fine
 adjust your dress with equal care.
 We invited all the relatives
 respect for age should be observed
 and there they stood all along the road
 and brimming goblets crowned with flowers.
 So we were wed
 whilst round about a numerous band
 of robed officials sit or stand
 and there I was with the bridesmaids
 attending in the inner room.
 We drank from the bridal cup
 sweet music charms the banquet hours
 and coins and sweets were distributed to the children
 in spotless lambs the *Odes* delight.
 He carefully inspected my face
 and learn men's characters to read
 and went through my trousseau, every item on the list
 books, read by stealth at stalls, supply
 learning for those who cannot buy.
 Night comes on and the groom gets itchy. He babbles away
 the phoenix warbled overhead
 and then he gets frisky
 and snow-white colts in meadows fed.
 He lays me where the bedsheets
 compose our mortal tenements
 and there in the lamplight off comes everything
 and men their earliest garments wore.
 Dear Heaven! I took one look at that thing like a rearing donkey's
 affrighted animals betray
 by hasty flight their wild dismay
 and I can tell you it set me back a bit
 nor dares to raise the trembling eyes.
 The groom sees how nervous I am and says, "Bride, you're no
 chicken,
 the added months the year complete.
 So I'll take it easy with you while
 the yin and yang in music meet."

I didn't say a word but I smiled to myself, it's up to you
 the music's measured cadence beat
 try your best, mister bridegroom,
 to others' faults indulgence show
 your merits should unnoticed go.
 A couple more watches pass and there he is on the Terrace of De-
 light
 collecting clouds form raindrops bright;
 but how come he's down in Witch's Gorge
 and frozen dew is snowy white?
 He can't find his way, wonders what's up, and calls for a lamp.
 Down he goes to look
 two vast saloons lie left and right,
 the "spacious hall," the "mansion bright"
 and there he's gazing
 o'er many a gorgeous ivory bed.
 I lay there without a word, but I had a good grin to myself, aha,
 mister bridegroom, this thing I've got here
 for private as for public wear
 but don't start thinking you can have it
 and eaten with a keener zest.
 A few more bouts, and him panting away
 thus men in every age have shown
 those virtues that support a throne.
 But I was made all wrong; he just couldn't get through
 dark skies above a yellow earth.
 And there he'd been inching away all night
 make every inch of time your own.
 I felt quite ashamed of myself
 for rooms have walls, and walls have ears
 and didn't know whether to hang myself or jump in the river
 make righteousness your end and aim.
 Yet if I were to take a scalpel or needle and thread to myself
 let nought their precious tissues tear.
 Of course, I could just run away and
 live far from men and worldly strife
 but wasn't there some way to bring him where
 joy reigns supreme, while hands and feet . . . ?
 Aha, got it! For want of better he's after the "flower in the rear
 court"
 a stream before, a hill behind

so I just present him with my "dry lotus leaves" and let him
in autumn reap, in winter store.

Ai-yo! Face to face

let women guard their chastity;

but once turn your back

and men the sages' rivals be.

Well, although for a while

nought could their energies arrest

in the end the loving couple had to think of the

five virtues and four elements.

Why should he keep an impenetrable bride when

the wife's son is the father's heir;

yet he'd be ridiculed if he married me off to someone else

while hungry men coarse food enjoy.⁴

So I try to persuade him, "Husband, bear in mind

a concubine should ply the loom

then you wouldn't need to envy other men

to see good omens sent by Heaven.

Then I would be reckoned

'mongst monarchs—each resigned the throne

as long as you

forget not what you've once acquired."

Later on he really did get a concubine and began to

take heed of good advice the more,

which left me without a leg to stand on

e'en foreign nations sought their sway.

I didn't blame him

the more you draw from Fortune's store;

but it was then I decided to become a nun

to learn the art of government.

Now I've got this convent, in the past it wasn't much

throughout pavilions scattered lie

so it was my job to clear up the

chaos before Creation's birth.

I hung up portraits of the guardian gods

one sword "Excalibur" was hight

and started "pacing the Dipper"

one pearl was christened "Queen of Night."

4. Giles loses the point of this line, which says "do not because your belly is full reject [the wife of your years of] coarse food."

For my altar offerings and table fare

'mongst fruits and vegetables come

first mustard, ginger, damson, plum.

I have transcended the distinctions of the mortal world

the sea is salt, the river sweet

and escaped the meshes of the nets of men

fish swim, and birds on wing are fleet.

Now that I've taken the veil, I think of that slaving bridegroom of
years ago

a dirty person seeks a pool

and that foolish itch I had to be somebody's wife

burnt fingers clutch at something cool.

Only, it's hard being the abbess of a convent

the restless eagle wings its flight

and I must

with clearness ever strive to speak.

When I go to a banquet

the plainest viands are the best;

but when I come round with my begging bowl, then let

the old with nicer food be served.

I live all alone here, it's really

a noiseless and secluded life

and nobody even writes, so there's no need to

in composition terseness seek.

I'm not getting any younger

like arrows years fly swiftly by

and, when I look in my mirror, compared to me

the changing moon is constant found.

I'm certainly no portrait model

the painter's art preserves their fame

though I might get myself into one of those pious biographies
whose message

in fixity of purpose lies.

I'm too lazy to go roaming

two noble cities, east and west;

I'm quite content just to sit here

their sole desire—a noble bent!

Among the nuns I have bosom friends

as branches of the self-same tree—

I'm just not interested in those miserable priests

but Shi was blithe as she was fair.

And if there should be some unsuspected tiger of a man

Bu drew the bow, good marksman he
 I'd guard my chastity like a cold water fish
 and Ren 'mongst anglers far from worst.
 I've got just one young novice
 love, as though they belonged to you
 called Scabby Turtle
 for all men love to crack a joke
 at ignorant and vulgar folk.

VOICE (*from offstage*): There you go, Mistress Superior, making fun
 of me, when I'm really a little gem.

SISTER STONE: Young rip,
 by shame or insult sorely tried
 I suppose you want a bit of flattery
 and all mankind their worth confessed.

VOICE: There's a runner come to haul you off to Prefect Du, Madam.

SISTER STONE: Whatever for?

VOICE: Says you're a thief.

SISTER STONE: So there's a warrant out for me,
 calligraphy one also finds
 calling me some kind of monster;
 let death the brigand's fear be made
 but I'm innocent,
 no cares to vex while you explore;
 so don't try to raise a storm while
 the sun shines brightly in the sky.⁵

PREFECT'S RUNNER (*enters*):

From the prefectural hall
 on sainted nun I call.

(*He greets SISTER STONE*)

SISTER STONE: What is your errand, brother runner?

RUNNER:

IIa Prefect on dais above
 orders from my lady
 clappers sound in court:
 his honor's daughter,
 what age can she be

5. By this point Sister Stone has used up approximately one-half of the entire
Thousand Character Text.

to fall so sick
 full half a year?

SISTER STONE: But I'm no healer of women's ailments.

RUNNER:

You are implored
 to say a mass
 to invoke the aid of the stars.

SISTER STONE:

IIb Occult prescription from the sorceress:
 a little magic charm
 to keep about her person
 and all is cured in an instant.

RUNNER: If that's the way of your charm, please hurry!

(*They move off*)

SISTER STONE: You child there!

(*VOICE, from offstage, responds*)

Take close care
 of sacred halls,
 while my altar is vacant
 look to lamp and incense.

VOICE: Understood.

Envoi:

SISTER STONE:

Ladies burn their nightly incense
 in the Hall of Purple Light.

RUNNER:

Weedgrown is the road to the old convent
 on the heights where clouds take root.

SISTER STONE:

Still wearing the silken amulet
 sacred to the Nine-splendored Lady

RUNNER:

make no excuse of other concerns
 there in the tranquil heavens.

SCENE EIGHTEEN: *Diagnosis*

BRIDAL DU (*enters, ailing, leaning on the arm of FRAGRANCE*):

I Fever deepens,
so frail yet failing still,
and still no answer
to the riddle that torments.
Returned from dream to watch
swallows buffeted by breeze
that tosses rustling blinds
of bamboo flecked with tears.
How long since spring departed,
how long since spring departed
that beauty should fade so fast?
Dry paulownia leaves beside the well
scrape on my heart.

Ah, Fragrance,
fine-drawn spirit,
body slender as leaf,
never made to withstand such train of sickness!

SPRING FRAGRANCE:

By little and little
were wrought in you
such delicacy,
such height of fancy,
such depth of passion.

BRIDAL:

Alas, my joy in sprig of apricot,
my willow-bearing lover
fade and dim as spring's traces vanish.

FRAGRANCE:

Then rest through incense-laden noon,
cool breezes fan your pillowed head.
For whose sake are your frowns,
for whom the wasting,
whose the pain?

BRIDAL: I have lain sick, Fragrance, ever since that springtime strolling. No itch, no hurt, but I lie confused and stupefied. What is wrong with me?

FRAGRANCE: Young mistress, what's the good of forever thinking about what happened in that dream?

BRIDAL: But how can I stop myself!

IIa Each spell of senseless longing
mires me in passion ever deeper.
What good such thoughts—
but how can thinking stop?
And so I pine in secret,
fearing discovery.
Faint breath stirs my heart
only to cough.

Alas,

what sympathy can there be
for such a secret burning?
And how withstand the strength
of yearnings I conceal?
I rue,
I rue the springtime sleep that started all.

FRAGRANCE: Madam your mother believes that, if your marriage can be arranged, this will divert the evil spirits.

BRIDAL:

What hope from such a plan?
Does she believe that day
I fell afoul of some wicked garden genie?

FRAGRANCE:

IIb Spring goes to its rest: what resting-place for her,
her spring sleep no true sleeping.
Lingering breath fails as the days lengthen,
but like the frail Xi Shi¹
drawn brows, hands clutching heart
only enhance her beauty.

Young mistress,

the dream is done
and he was never real;
sickness endures
and robs you of your true self.
Thirst struck this sailing cloud at Witch's Mount.²

1. Xi Shi (see scene 14, note 2) is the archetype of the fragile, or "ailing," beauty.

2. For Witch's Mount, see scene 1, note 4.

All this for nothing,
no evident cause for such lovesickness,
no sultry summer heat,
nor wine fuddling your senses—
why then do you reel like someone drunk?

TUTOR CHEN (*enters*):

Dry your calligraphy in the sun,
men think the birds left tracks;
pound your prescriptions in the moon
with juice from warts of toad.³

Prefect Du has instructed me to examine his daughter's pulse. Arriving at the inner court I must let them know of my presence. (*He calls*) Is my disciple Fragrance there?

FRAGRANCE (*greets him*): It's Tutor Chen. The young lady is sleeping.

CHEN: Don't disturb her. I'll just peep in. (*He greets her*) Young lady!

BRIDAL (*pretends to wake with a start*): Who is it?

FRAGRANCE: Tutor Chen is here. (*She helps BRIDAL up*)

BRIDAL: Tutor Chen, your pupil has been sick and must apologize for long truancy.

CHEN: Ah, my young disciple, as the ancients put it, "Study is perfected through application, neglected through pleasure seeking." I fear that exposure to sun and wind in the garden at the rear has led to your health being affected, your studies rejected. And I, your tutor, though absent, have been ill at ease whether eating or sleeping. Now I rejoice that the Prefect your father has called me in to examine you. But I had not thought to find you so frail as this. Such being your state, how long before you will be able to return to your studies? The Dragonboat at the earliest!

FRAGRANCE: Yes, and Tutor Chen's the dragon!

CHEN: I am speaking of the Dragonboat Festival, miss, and don't think I'm after *your* sweet dumplings!⁴ Now, young lady: "observe the breath, listen to the voice, inquire the condition, feel the pulse."⁵ Tell me, what is the reason for your sickness?

FRAGRANCE: Why need you ask? It's those *Songs* you were expounding, "So delicate the virtuous maiden, / A fit mate for our Prince"—no wonder she's delicate!

3. See scene 2, note 4.

4. Sweet dumplings were eaten to celebrate the Dragonboat Festival on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month.

5. The four modes of observation of traditional medicine.

CHEN: But who's the prince?

FRAGRANCE: How should I know what prince?

CHEN: This being the case, since it's a *Songs* sickness we'll use a *Songs* cure. Right in the first section there's a Sacred Simple for the treatment of feminine disorders.

FRAGRANCE: And do you have it right there in your head?

CHEN: We may prescribe accordingly. The young lady's sickness was caused by a prince, so we'll use the Envoy Prince.⁶ According to the *Songs*,

Having seen her prince
how should she not recover?

All we have to do is get a prince to cover her, and she'll recover.

BRIDAL (*embarrassed*): Oh, dear!

FRAGRANCE: What else?

CHEN: Ten sour apricots. According to the *Songs*,

Plop fall the apricots,
seven are left

and then later

three are left.⁷

Seven plus three equals ten. This is a special prescription for young men and ladies whose thoughts are a little overripe.

(BRIDAL sighs)

FRAGRANCE: Anything else?

CHEN: Three Southern Stars.⁸

FRAGRANCE: Only three?

CHEN: Add a few if you wish. According to the *Songs*,

Three stars of Scorpio on high.⁹

This is a special prescription for young men and young ladies in their seasonal sickness.

FRAGRANCE: Anything else?

CHEN: It is apparent that the young lady has excess of fire in her belly. I want you to clean up a big chamberpot, and I'll flush the fire out for her with wild celery. This is according to another prescription of the *Songs*:

6. Name of an herb used in traditional medicine.

7. From a song of courtship: the girl warns prospective suitors that time is passing.

8. Another herb name.

9. The song celebrates the meeting of lovers. Scorpio is the "heart constellation" in Chinese.

She is off to the bridegroom's chamber,
we feed her horses with celerity.

FRAGRANCE: But, Tutor Chen, you've got the wrong chamber, the wrong celerity, and the wrong horse.

CHEN: That's all right, as long as the breeching goes under the asshole.

BRIDAL: As a physician, Tutor Chen certainly doctors the *Songs*!

FRAGRANCE: Such stately periods—he's more like Mammy Chen the midwife!

BRIDAL: Tutor Chen, your prescriptions are beyond description, I think you should stick to feeling my pulse.

(CHEN attempts to locate her pulse on the back of her hand)

FRAGRANCE: Tutor Chen, maybe you should turn her hand over!

CHEN: Ladies should be examined with the back turned, according to Wang Shuhe's *Secrets of the Pulse*. However, either way is handy. (He feels her pulse) Eh? What a sorry state her pulse has reached!

IIIa So trim a maiden,
so feeble a pulse.
Young as she is,
what has worn her so?

(He rises)

Fragrance,

take good care
of one who hurt by spring
now fears the summer,
for fall is cruellest
to those who suffer sickness.

Young lady, I go to prepare your medicines.

BRIDAL (sighs): Tutor,

where love attacks the marrow,
how can needle enter?
When sickness springs from mist-laden flowers,
what herbs can have effect?

(She weeps)

Your visit honors me
but when will you call again
on this disciple fated
like Yan Hui to die young?

BRIDAL, FRAGRANCE, CHEN:

In sickness fear disturbance.
Seek rest,
avoid the gossip's chatter.

BRIDAL: Be free to leave, Tutor Chen, I'm afraid I cannot see you off. Tell me, have you cast my horoscope?

CHEN: All will be well if you can pass the Midautumn Festival. Eight characters form the horoscope,¹⁰ three generations the good physician.

(Exit)

FRAGRANCE: Here comes a Taoist nun.

SISTER STONE (enters):

No sound of Nongyu playing her pipes
but here comes Chang E stealing elixir.¹¹

I am Sister Stone of the Purple Light Convent, here in response to Madam Du's orders to invoke the stars for her daughter.

FRAGRANCE (greets her): What are you here for, Auntie?

SISTER STONE: I am Sister Stone of the Purple Light Convent, under instructions from Madam Du to invoke the stars for her daughter. What sickness does she suffer?

FRAGRANCE: She fell.

SISTER STONE: Fell?

FRAGRANCE: In love.

SISTER STONE: Who's the man?

FRAGRANCE: No man at all—something in the garden.

(SISTER STONE holds up three fingers,

FRAGRANCE shakes her head; then five fingers,

FRAGRANCE shakes her head again)¹²

SISTER STONE: No good either way—you tell me what's wrong with her.

FRAGRANCE: No, you go ahead and ask her.

SISTER STONE (greeting BRIDAL): Young lady, respects from an old nun.

BRIDAL (again pretends to wake with a start): A nun?

10. The eight characters establish (two each) the year, month, day, and hour of birth.

11. Nongyu, in a legend, played the pipes with her faery lover. For Chang E, see scene 2, note 4.

12. Three fingers, in sign language, mean the pulse; five fingers, the whole body.

SISTER STONE: Sister Stone from the Purple Light Convent. Madam your mother has instructed me to pray for you. They tell me you were possessed by an evil spirit in the rear garden, but it's hard to believe.

IIIb How could one smart as yourself be possessed?
Yet how so distraught without some demon?

BRIDAL (*as if in a trance*): Oh, my love!

SISTER STONE, FRAGRANCE (*aside*):

Hear her mumble and mutter
as if her senses had flown.

SISTER STONE: Fortunately I've brought a little charm along.

(*She takes a pin from BRIDAL's hair and sticks it through a charm, reciting as she does so*)

Bright golden beams,
sun rise in east,
fly evil dreams,
all ills cease.

"Immediate effect, as commanded."¹³ (*She returns pin with charm to BRIDAL's hair*)

Amulet or silver pin
walking or sleeping never laid aside
repulses idle thoughts and untoward dreams.

BRIDAL (*coming to her senses*): Alas, I fear the charm is useless. My love is no

slender sprite inhabiting flower or tree
yet he turned me into a

poor crazed creature clutching at windborne shadows.

SISTER STONE: Any crazier, and we'll have to strike her with a "thunder in the palm."¹⁴

BRIDAL:

Unfair, unfair,
my thoughts are all of cloud and rain¹⁵
and you would strike with "thunder in the palm."

BRIDAL, FRAGRANCE, SISTER STONE:

In sickness fear disturbance.
Seek rest,
avoid the gossip's chatter.

13. This is the stock conclusion to any incantation.

14. A Taoist magic formula for controlling storms.

15. Sexual love.

SISTER STONE: One last instruction: you must set up a prayer flag thirty feet in height.

BRIDAL: What will be the good of that?

IV Willow and apricot dimly I recall.

Holy sister,

no bamboo prayer staff will serve the purpose.

Leave me to my thoughts, to seek

by incantation to renew my dream.

(*She exits, supported by FRAGRANCE and SISTER STONE*)

Envoi:

FRAGRANCE:

Moth-antenna brows oppressed
by cruelty of her fate.

SISTER STONE:

In Taoist robes, all ready to pray
for release from this disaster.

BRIDAL:

Seek her not now
where flowers blossom red

BRIDAL, FRAGRANCE, SISTER STONE:

but let us ask the east wind
to desist from its promptings.

SCENE NINETEEN: The Brigandess

LI QUAN (*enters at the head of his men*):

I Ranks of ancestors
rank as goats,
a mongrel genealogy.

When swords of war flash
we bandit heroes can barely
challenge the éclat of the cat burglar.

A thousand thundering hoofbeats raise
the dust of war o'er hill and glen;

I've learned to speak the Tartar's praise
and curse my fellow countrymen.

Behold Li Quan of Huaian, bold to resist myriad men. The southern

SCENE TWENTY-THREE: *Infernal Judgment*

JUDGE (*attended by demons, with CLERK bearing writing brush and register*):

I Commissioned officer of tenth tribunal of Hell
my seal bestowed by Lord of Heaven.
Mortals the world over
upon their burial
must cross this threshold of mine.

I am Judge Hu of the staff of the Infernal Prince Yama. There used to be ten princes, but then in the mortal world the Song imperial house of Zhao began its strife with the Jin barbarians. Terrible losses resulted, the population was decimated. Observing this reduction in numbers, the Jade Emperor ordered staffing cuts. Nine princes were left for the nine regions of China. The one that was abolished was mine, the tenth. But there was nowhere to dispose of my seal of office, and the Jade Emperor, impressed by my honesty and intelligence, has reinstated me acting pro tem in charge of the tenth tribunal. This very day I have ridden here to take up my duties, no small affair as you can see from my dual escort of sword-bearing demon lictors and yakshas.

CLERK (*offering brush*): The new incumbent will have need of this brush to record indictments and to inscribe his signature. May it please the new incumbent to deliver a eulogy of the brush.

JUDGE (*examining brush*): Demon lictor, this offering of the brush is a significant occasion. The stand for it to rest on,

II lotus flower of human flesh,
rising before magisterial bench
like sacred Isle of Potlaka.¹

Now offering the brush to me is
a worthy scribe
charged with all matters documentary.

CLERK: What of the stem?

JUDGE: The stem is the bone of a hand or foot
whittled round as bamboo tube.

1. Where the bodhisattva Guanyin, who saves souls, manifested herself. There is a grim contrast between the shape (the sacred lotus flower, a common shape for brush stands) and the material this particular stand is made of.

CLERK: And the brush hairs?

JUDGE: The hairs, from the beards of ox-head demons and the scalps of yakshas,

twisted wires of flaming red.

CLERK: Your Honor, whose name appears on the brush as selector of hairs?

JUDGE:

This pointy-headed gentleman
was appointed by the ruler of Zhexu.²

CLERK: What name and title does the brush hold?

JUDGE:

Scholar of Tube City,
holding office in Yelang.³

CLERK: What when Your Honor is inspired?

JUDGE (*laughs and begins to dance*): Then I'll whistle whoo-
whee
knocking Zhong Kui's cap awry⁴
and dance swish-swoosh

till the Demon Kick-the-Dipper
gets ink all over his face,⁵
for who touches ink gets blackened.

CLERK: And when merry?

JUDGE: When I'm merry
I'll write graffiti on the bridge
over the River of Blood.⁶

CLERK: And when bored?

JUDGE: When I'm bored
I'll hand in my brush at the Gate of Hell
and go home.

CLERK: Was Your Honor's name announced among the examination successes?

JUDGE: I entered the celestial lists

2. An elaborate double allusion to Cao Zhi, a third-century poet who in legend was granted after death, in the imaginary land of Zhexu, the throne he had been denied in life, and to an ill-favored courtier of the same period who was known as "Brush Head."

3. Yelang was a tiny principality in modern Guizhou, whose ancient ruler once asked an envoy whether China was as big as Yelang. The "Tube City" joke is from "Biography of Mao Ying, Mr. Brush," by the Tang writer Han Yu (see scene 6).

4. Zhong Kui was a legendary failed examination candidate who after death was commissioned to chase off evil demons.

5. See scene 22, note 2.

6. This is the bridge the wicked must cross after death.

and my name appeared among the successful
on first and fifteenth of month.

CLERK: Are you skilled as a calligrapher?

JUDGE: I can hold my own
with Gemini and Cancer
in accomplishments of studio.

CLERK: Your Honor is a man of lofty talent.

JUDGE: Though I may not match
the "Demon Genius" Li He
who from his White Jade Lodge⁷
scraped the sky with his songs,
still I should not disgrace the company
of Shi Manqing, Lord of Wind and Moon,
setting down his evening thoughts
in Hibiscus City.⁸

Though it is beyond me to record
every motion of sun and moon
across the Four Continents

yet I can dispatch
all the Five Bearers of Pestilence
to summon storm and thunder.

CLERK: What is your jurisdiction?

JUDGE: My jurisdiction
is in the court of Prince Yama
under the administration of the Dipper.
Say I have no official residence:
then how is it you'll find my image
in every temple to Lord of Eastern Peak
or City God?⁹

CLERK: To whom do you pay respect?

JUDGE: From this high seat of office
I salute in my turn
revered countenance
of Great Bodhisattva.

CLERK: And who annoys you?

7. Built by the Lord of Heaven for the poet's use after death, according to a legend reported by his near-contemporary, the late Tang poet Li Shangyin.

8. The Song poet Shi Manqing was said to have been appointed Lord of Fairyland (Hibiscus City) upon his death.

9. Here the Judge reminds us that he is none other than the court officer whose statue stood beside the images of the Lord of the Eastern Peak and the City God (in general charge of the sentencing of the dead) in every city temple in China.

JUDGE: Why, when my statue is only three feet tall, a little lacking in
majesty, and I have to face those

tiny demon lictors
grotesquely posturing
on the steps below.

CLERK: Your black silk hat looks a bit antiquated.

JUDGE: I've been standing here so long,
writing brush poised over register,
dust gathers thick on my robe and headpiece.

CLERK: Your brush has dried out.

JUDGE: It can be moistened—at a price:
ten gold ingots,
ten strings of cash
or a nice pile of paper
in appropriate denominations.

CLERK: Here is your register of the dead.

JUDGE: Carelessly I
scan the list of names
on pages marked with fishtails,¹⁰
unremittingly I
note against each name
the destined date of death.
Behold me, inscribing my signature
like an infernal version of the ancient
incorruptible historian Dong Hu;
I follow pattern
of Spring and Autumn Annals themselves
to record day, month, and year
of all who are to pass, perish, expire, or de cease;¹¹
and just as Yu the Great
having subdued the fearsome Spirit of the River Huai
cast his likeness, and all creatures' also,
all elves, sprites, gnomes, and trolls
on nine great tripods, so shall I
clearly distinguish every one from other.

CLERK: Let me grind the ink for you.

10. Chinese books of traditional binding had double pages, on the margins of which the title appeared in parentheses shaped like fishtails.

11. The euphemism varied according to the rank of the subject.

JUDGE:

Scratch-scratch of midnight ink slab,
effort rewarded with a shiny black pool.

CLERK: The cock just crowed.

JUDGE:

Bim-bam on clapper board,¹²
crowing of golden cock
cuts short their dreams and calls back errant souls.

CLERK: Let Your Honor call the roll.

JUDGE:

Each name once checked
may fly to any one
of forty-eight thousand fates
in the Three Realms of Desire,
of Form, and of the Formless.

Born to mortal care

they scatter like sparks from a firecracker.
The tip of this brush
commits to a hundred and forty-two
levels of Hell, without remission
till Iron Tree shall blossom.

CLERK: Your signature for each.

JUDGE: Ah, yes, my signature, so each may be
sliced, burnt, ground, or pounded.

CLERK: There should be a "please" somewhere.

JUDGE: "Please" has been said
by the Four Visitants from Hall of Nothingness:
palsy, dropsy, jaundice, consumption.

CLERK: Hang up the scales, there!

(The LICTORS do so)

JUDGE:

Strung up by the hair
men's bodies are light
to the weight of their sins.
Like jailers of court of Qin
we process their cases by the hundredweight.

12. A wooden block is struck to summon the souls of the recently deceased.

*(Offstage cries of "Ai-yo!" "Let
us go!" "It hurts!")*

CLERK: They're flogging the dead souls in the Ninth Court next
door.

JUDGE: This is the "music of the flesh,"

hear demons wail and ghosts cry out
as they did in the time of Xiao He,
cruel clerk of Han.

To laugh at a time like this

were you the mirthless incorruptible

Judge Bao himself

would draw men's hatred.

(Offstage wails)

To hear such sounds

who wouldn't weep as Confucius wept

when his disciple Yan Yuan

died young and coffinless!

CLERK: Your Honor is afraid!

JUDGE *(annoyed)*:

I take my laws and precepts

from the Bestiary,¹³

even the blossoms on my courtyard trees

are knife-edged.

See the wind ruffle my hairy beard,

my eyes flash lightning 'neath lifted brows.

Nor do I lack for demons and spirits

to be my secretaries and recorders.

Don't compare me with Judge Gold, Judge Silver, Judge Copper,
Judge Cash in the world of the living:

I prepare my indictments,

supervise my coroners

as though the fearsome White Tiger Spirit himself

were come to sit in judgment.

From this infernal court of mine issues each sentence of rebirth
whether from womb, from egg, from moisture, or from air.

13. That is, "I am perfectly prepared to sentence these dead souls to reincarnation in any form, animal as well as human."

Bluebottle will report pardons I grant¹⁴
and merit of my achievements
will secure a triple advance in rank.
In solemn dignity
I rule the fates of men,
in sternest majesty
I clear the path of Heaven.

Call the clerk of the court. Everything in this register has been satisfactorily disposed of. Are there any other cases that still await sentencing?

LICTOR (*enters*):

One runner less in the mortal world—
here in the shades a lictor am I.

Your Honor, this hell has been unoccupied for three years on account of the vacancy of Your Honor's position. All we have awaiting disposal are some minor offenders from the City of the Wrongfully Dead. There are four males: Zhao the Eldest, Qian Fifteen, Sun Xin, and Monkey Li; and one female, Bridal Du.

JUDGE: Call the male offenders.

CLERK (*leads in the four male offenders*): The males, Your Honor.

JUDGE (*checks off their names*): Zhao the Eldest: for what offense were you committed to the City of the Wrongfully Dead?

ZHAO: I was guilty of no offense, Your Honor, it's just that I was fond of singing.

JUDGE: Stand aside. Call Qian Fifteen.

QIAN: No offense, Your Honor, only I built a little hut for myself and paneled the walls with fragrant aloes wood.¹⁵

JUDGE: Stand aside. Call Sun Xin.

SUN: I'm just a young lad, Your Honor, and I liked to spend a bit of money on the "powdered blossoms" in the local brothel.

JUDGE: Call Monkey Li.

LI: I was guilty of an offense, Your Honor, I practiced sodomy.

CLERK: And that's the truth, even here in Hell he's been after this young Sun.

JUDGE (*annoyed*): Who asked you to butt in? Get up and look after your charges. (*He writes in the register*) Let the offenders hear the

14. When Fu Jian, the unifier of North China in the fourth century, was preparing a pardon, a bluebottle fly hovered about his brush. It then metamorphosed into a black-robed lictor, who spread the news of the pardon before it was officially issued.

15. This was presumably an offense against the sumptuary regulations.

verdicts. (*The four male offenders kneel*) Since I am in a temporary acting position, I shall not prescribe punishment. You are pardoned and permitted to be reborn from eggs.

LI: May it please Your Honor, by "eggs" do you mean "balls"? If it's Muslim balls,¹⁶ that means rebirth in the border regions!

JUDGE: Tchah, you still have hopes of human form? Off with you, to the insides of birds' eggs.

ZHAO, QIAN, SUN, LI (*weeping*): Oh, oh, this means people will cut our heads off!

JUDGE: Very well, we shall ensure that you are not the sort of creatures humans eat. Since Zhao the Eldest likes to sing, he shall be an oriole.

ZHAO: Good, good, I can be Yingying, Miss Oriole of the play *Western Chamber*.

JUDGE: Qian Fifteen lived in a hut scented with aloes wood: very well, you can have a swallow's nest for your pleasure, go be reborn as a swallow.

QIAN: Then I can be the Imperial Consort Flying Swallow!

JUDGE: Sun Xin spent his money on the powdered blossoms, he can be a butterfly.

LI: Let me be a butterfly, too, so I can go with him.

JUDGE: You are the sodomist, Monkey Li: you can be a bee and have a sting in your backside.

LI: Ai-yo, who can I stick with a thing like that?

JUDGE: Now, you four flying creatures, hear my instructions: you, butterfly,

III what tailor could match your powdered wings?

And you, bee,

a wicked one you are

with sucking mouth and stinging tail.

You, swallow,

your shadow swoops within the curtains

as you bear fragrant clay to your nest;

and you, oriole,

your piping song beyond gauze window

breaks the spell of dreams.

Now you may all

fly away without restraint,

16. "Muslim balls" was an ethnic slur on the Muslims who formed part of the population of northwestern China.

four friends of flower garden;
 and even though careless children in the world of the living
 pelt you with pellets,
 strike at you with fans,
 still you may become
 subjects of paintings for men of taste to cherish.
 So off with you now, and let your wings
 bear the stirring burden of spring.
 LI: If I'm to be a bee, I'll come back here and sting Your Honor's
 head.
 JUDGE: Do you want a beating?
 LI: Oh, spare this tiny life!
 JUDGE: Then that's enough. Off with you all, fly away, quick!

*(He gives a puff, and the four exit,
 each imitating his particular way of flying.
 The JUDGE, as they go, gives another audible
 puff in the direction of the exit)*

CLERK (escorting BRIDAL DU):

I'm not a man you'll meet on paths of heaven
 but don't blame me if Hell's a cruel place.

Here is the female prisoner.

JUDGE (aside): Not a bad-looking one, either! Suddenly before my
 eyes

IV a beauty to throw Heaven and earth into turmoil!
 Hey, you there,
 come a little closer!

(BRIDAL wails)

Wailing her woe in this basin of blood
 yet lovely as Guanyin herself!

CLERK (whispering in his ear): Why not keep her a while as your con-
 cubine, Your Honor?

JUDGE: Tush, there's a celestial law that prescribes beheading for
 anyone who sequesters a female prisoner for his own enjoyment.

That little head of yours keeps churning out crazy ideas
 but where to get another head if I lose this one?

(BRIDAL moans)

Yet never did I see
 one so young
 look so fetching.

Tell her to step forward.

V I can envision you with blooming cheeks
 on terrace of flowers and wine cups
 or decked with ornaments
 joining the song and the dance
 or smiling your favors in faery tryst
 in fabulous Qin or Chu.
 What sickness brought you here?
 Of whose family are you?
 Such freshness does not belong
 by yellow springs of Hell.

BRIDAL DU: If I have any youthful freshness it is because I was born
 this way, and I have neither married nor drunk wine. But I am here
 because I once dreamed of a young scholar, beneath the apricot
 trees in the garden behind the Prefect's residence at Nan'an. He
 broke off a willow sprig and asked for a poem on the subject. He
 was affectionate and gentle and we loved each other dearly. On
 waking from the dream I fell to musing, and composed the lines,

Union in some year to come
 with the "courtier of the moon"
 will be beneath the branches
 either of willow or apricot.

Then, falling into longings, I lost my life.

JUDGE: This is all lies. When in the world did anyone die of a
 dream?

VI How could such slip of girl
 cling so strongly to her dream?
 Who was it claimed to interpret your dream
 or told your fortune in character riddles?
 Hey now, tell me
 where is this young scholar?
 And who else did your dreaming spirit encounter?

BRIDAL: There was no one else. But there were indeed flower petals
 that fluttered down and startled me into wakefulness.

JUDGE: Call for questioning the Flower Spirit of the garden behind
 the Prefect's residence at Nan'an.

(CLERK repeats the order)

FLOWER SPIRIT (enters):

Showers of pink petal rain
 and spring is ended,

one chorus of "The Scented Hills"
and maiden's soul dissolves.¹⁷

My respects to the Judge. (*He salutes*)

JUDGE: Flower Spirit, this ghost maiden claims to have died of a shock she received when flower petals disturbed her dream in the garden. Is this true?

FLOWER SPIRIT: It is true. She was tenderly entwined in a dream of a young scholar when a chance fall of petals startled her into wakefulness. Passionate longings brought about her death.

JUDGE: My suspicion is that the young scholar was none other than yourself in disguise, leading people's daughters astray.

FLOWER SPIRIT: Now, why should I have led her astray?

JUDGE: You think we here in Hades don't know what goes on?

VII Spring left alone would know no cares
but the Bureau of Flowers
performs all kinds of mischief.
In a twinkling one's vital strength is sapped
by boudoir's sudden voluptuous charm,
licentious scenes on every hand,
one's fate adrift on a sea of wine.
Beauty already close to perfect
you people make irresistible.
Come, list for me
the flowers in your bag of tricks!

FLOWER SPIRIT: I will list them.

(*As he speaks the name of each flower,
the JUDGE sings a rhyming line in which through pun
or allusion he brings out some erotic suggestion*)

FLOWER SPIRIT:

Double peach:
pink-flowering pear:
gold-coin flower:
embroidered-ball viburnum:
peony:
brushtip magnolia:

JUDGE:

Place where trysts are made;
on fan of ghostly maid;¹⁸
gifts she won't refuse;
throw it at her you choose;
never an angry frown;
write the message down;

17. When the song "The Scented Hills" was sung at the Western Queen Mother's fairy banquet, flower petals came raining down.

18. Allusion to the Yuan play *Xie Jinlian*, in which a young scholar is tricked into believing his courtesan ladylove to be a ghost when a sprig of pink-flowering pear appears folded in her fan.

water chestnut:

jade-hairpin lily:

rose:

wintersweet apricot:

"shear spring":

narcissus:

lantern flower:

yeast flower:

golden goblet:

brocade-sash weigela:

"joyous-union" mimosa:

willow:

trumpet flower:

pepper flower:

smiling magnolia:

sunflower:

convolvulus:

crape myrtle:

"son-bearing" lily:

lilac:

mace:

milk flower:

gardenia:

patience:

orange blossoms:

crabapple:

baby flower:

"two sisters":

pink:

daphne:

set her mirror there;¹⁹

stick it in her hair;

dew to scent her cheek;

her forehead to bedeck;²⁰

tailor her gown so neat;

silk stockings for her feet;²¹

shadows glowing red;

tipsy she's off to bed;

for the loving cup;

bind her waistband up;

her drowsy head she droops;²²

her waist sways and swoops;

he's in strongest form;

her welcome is warm;

passion on its way;²³

turns his head more each day;

twines herself about him;

such an itch without him;²⁴

progeny may she bear;²⁵

clustering everywhere;

pregnancy confessed;

gently stroke her breast;

charmingly discreet;

how long can you wait?

sweetest thoughts will bring;

drowsy maid in spring;

dimpled infant's smile;

jealous all the while;

outlasts any other;

smells too sweet to gather;

19. The water chestnut was a common motif for the design of mirror backs.

20. Allusion to a Song princess who set a new style of coiffure when apricot blossoms settled on her forehead during a garden nap.

21. The name for narcissus is "water fairy," and the Judge's response alludes to the rhyme on the Goddess of the River Luo by the third-century poet Cao Zhi.

22. The leaflets of the mimosa fold together at night.

23. A fragrant variety of *Michelia*, related to magnolia, is called in Chinese the "smiling flower."

24. The crape myrtle is known as "itching plant" because when the trunk is scratched the branchlets quiver.

25. The day lily, worn at a woman's waist, would help ensure the birth of a son—a belief stemming from its use as a drug to relieve the pains of childbirth.

lotus: so much love within it;
pomegranate: over in a minute.²⁶

JUDGE:

I leave the rest to your imagination:
how can the Lord of Heaven himself
counter such snares?
Why should they be allowed
to disturb this innocent maid
and from peony pavilion
send azalea soul in panicked flight?²⁷

FLOWER SPIRIT: It was the Lord of Heaven himself who decreed every last variety of flower. All I do is carry out his commands, it's absurd to accuse me of deliberately enticing people to mischief. And considering all the beautiful women there have been, who ever heard of one dying of a love of flowers?

JUDGE: You say no beauty ever died of a love of flowers? Let me list some for you:

VIII. Ladies whose youth was sacrificed to flowers,
ladies whose tragic fates the flowers decreed:
like that night-blooming lotus
who, though they clutched her billowing fairy skirt,
could not be stopped from soaring to the sky;²⁸
or like that sprig of crabapple bloom
whose brocade perfume sachet
bore magic testimony to her griefs;²⁹
or yet again, the daphne
that spelled the death of Parting Mist.³⁰
You ask which beauties died for love of flowers?
Flower Spirit, here is guilt that you must share.

26. Lotus (*lian*) has a homophone meaning "love"; pomegranate (*liu*) has a homophone meaning "endure."

27. See scene 10, note 2.

28. Composite allusion to the Han Emperors Lingdi, whose orgies were held beside pools of night-blooming lotus, and Chengdi, whose consort was Flying Swallow Zhao. Once as Flying Swallow danced a breeze filled her skirts and would have carried her off had not onlookers clutched at them. She "could not be stopped" for long, though, for she took her own life after Chengdi's death.

29. The crabapple ("drowsy maid in spring" in the list above) was the symbol of Yang Guifei, consort of the Tang Emperor Xuanzong; when her grave was opened after her enforced suicide, only a perfume sachet was found within.

30. Parting Mist was a concubine whose jealous husband beat her to death after

FLOWER SPIRIT: I confess my crimes. I shall cause no more blooming from now on.

JUDGE: Flower Spirit, I have just now committed four friends of the flower garden to your charge. As for this female prisoner, since she died of amorous longing, let her be reduced to the ranks of the swallows and orioles.

FLOWER SPIRIT: Your Honor, this woman's offense took place in dream, and is as immaterial as dawn breeze or waning moon. In view of her father's reputation as an upright official, and of the fact that she is his only child, she should be treated with leniency.

JUDGE: Who is her father?

FLOWER SPIRIT: Her father is Du Bao, the former Prefect, recently promoted Governor of Huaiyang.

JUDGE: So, a young lady of quality. Very well then, out of consideration for His Honor Du, I shall seek advice from the Celestial Court before I pass sentence.

BRIDAL: If Your Honor graciously pleases: Is it possible to investigate the source of these distressful feelings of mine?

JUDGE: The matter is all noted in the Register of Heartbreaks.

BRIDAL: Then might I trouble you to determine whether my husband was to have the name of Liu or Mei, Willow or Apricot?

JUDGE: Let me see the Register of Marriages. (*He turns away from the defendant to examine it*) Here it is. Here is a Liu Mengmei, Prize Candidate in the next examinations. Wife, Bridal Du, loved in the shades, later formally wedded in the world of light. Rendezvous, the Red Apricot Convent. Not to be divulged. (*He turns again to face the defendant*) There is a person here with whom you share a marriage affinity. On this account I shall release you now from this City of the Wrongfully Dead, so that you may wander windborne in search of this man.

FLOWER SPIRIT: Bridal Du, prostrate yourself before His Honor.

BRIDAL (*does so*): I prostrate myself in gratitude for your clemency, father and mother of my rebirth. And my own father and mother in Yangzhou—may I see them again?

JUDGE: You may.

IX A span remains for her in the land of light,
the shades do not claim her yet.

discovering a poem from her lover; a line of the poem referred to the amorous promise of the daphne's fragrance.

These mist-laden blooms of spring are a shifty bunch
 and passion was bound to ensue
 from meeting with willow and apricot.³¹
 Now to her view of the lily her mother
 the cedar her sire
 let Heaven place no impediment,
 but let her mount our Home-gazing Terrace³²
 to spy across crystal wastes
 ashes of spirit money swirl
 above night markets of Yangzhou.

Flower Spirit, take her to the Home-gazing Terrace and let her look
 her fill.

BRIDAL (*follows him onto the Terrace, where she gazes toward Yangzhou
 and weeps*): There is Yangzhou, and my mother and father! Oh, let
 me fly to them!

FLOWER SPIRIT: It is not yet time for you to go there.

JUDGE: Come back and hear my instructions. Attendants, prepare a
 passport for this wandering soul; and you, Flower Spirit, guard her
 fleshly body from corruption.

BRIDAL: I thank Your Honor for this clemency.

JUDGE:

x Against time of desire
 when fire shall meet dry tinder
 let these green hills be undisturbed³³
 by pelting rain or wind or burning sun.
 Your marriage vow to Heaven and earth
 will follow flights past moon and stars
 as spirit-self comes and goes.
 No further permit needed for release,
 no mortal womb for rebirth.
 Four Friends of the Flowers are yours to command,
 oriole and swallow, butterfly and bee
 to help you seek, to aid your wooing
 till the predicted star, the Coffin Breaker
 comes to fulfill your dream.

31. That is, with Liu Mengmei, "Willow Dream-of-Apricot."

32. The terrace at the edge of the underworld from which lost souls could view
 their earthly homes.

33. Allusion to a proverb—"As long as the green hills are there, we can always
 find firewood"—playing on the "dry tinder" of the previous line.

(Exit)

FLOWER SPIRIT: Come, young lady, let me take you back to the rear
 garden.

Envoi:

FLOWER SPIRIT:

Threads of hair escape from cap
 drunkenly awry

BRIDAL:

prayer flags hang limp all day
 untouched by spirit breeze.

JUDGE:

Year after year reviewing
 the disputes men engender

JUDGE, BRIDAL, FLOWER SPIRIT:

we await the judgment of Xiao He,
 great lawgiver of Han.

SCENE TWENTY-FOUR: The Portrait Recovered

LIU MENGMEI:

I Never did spring torment man so:
 through all my journeying no other thought.
 Winds have rent rough jacket dark-hued as grapes,
 rains discolored light gown of apricot silk.
 In today's mild sun
 airing my coverlet

I found the cloud stains of a passionate dream.
 Pearl blossom fills the court with gentle fragrance,
 useless to dwell on the past year's discontents.
 How much spring longing can this "willow" bear
 before his waist grows thinner than Master Shen's?¹
 Sickness has detained me in this Apricot Shrine. By good fortune
 my new friend Chen Zuiliang is skilled in medicine and has re-
 stored me to health. But for some days past I have been suffering an

1. The fifth-century poet Shen Yue became legendary for his frailness.

ennui born of springtime longings, and I can find nowhere to turn to assuage my sorrows. Ha, here comes the old abbess.

SISTER STONE (*enters*):

II A Taoist sister is just the one
to see through a young scholar's poses.
Do you want to know where his fond dreams linger
as he sighs and stretches a thousand times a day?

I trust you are feeling better, sir?

LIU: My health has been mending recently and now I grow weary of sitting about. This Apricot Shrine is such a sizable place, it must surely have a garden where one might amuse oneself?

SISTER STONE: There is a garden to the rear, and although the pavilions and kiosks are in poor repair there are plenty of flowers to brighten it up. You may while away some hours there, but be careful to avoid grieving.

LIU: What would I find to grieve about?

SISTER STONE (*sighs*): What indeed! No matter, if you go on your own. Follow the west gallery past the painted wall. After a hundred paces you will come to a wicket gate. Enter this and you will find pools and teahouses for a mile around. You may enjoy them as you please and amuse yourself there the whole day through. No need for me to accompany you:

"All may freely enter
this noted demesne
but few can be aware
of the sorrows of its past."

(*Exit*)

LIU: Now that I know of this garden, let me take a leisurely stroll there. (*He mimes the act of strolling*) Here is the western gallery. (*Strolls further*) How overgrown is this wicket gate, and half of it collapsed. (*He sighs*)²

"Still leaning on this marble balustrade
my sad gaze shuns the walls on every side.
Such moons, such breezes, nights of long ago!
Willows once lush as mist now sere and dry."

(*He mimes the act of arrival*)

2. Liu here recites a pastiche of lines from four different Tang poets.

Ha, what a grand garden!

III How silently the splendor has eroded.
One stretch of painted wall still stands,
the next slants all awry.

(*He stumbles*)

Slipping on mosses,
stumbling by broken banks
to a gate shaped as butterfly wings
bolted for no good reason.

There must have been many visitors in times gone by, to judge from the names cut into the bamboo stems.

Guests came
and as months and years drew on
a thousand emerald tablets bore inscriptions.

But already

wildflowers invade the steps
and weeds form thickets.

Strange! How would nuns like these of this Apricot Shrine have built such a magnificent garden? There is something very curious in this. See where this stream winds its way:

IV Is it the true Peach Blossom Spring³
behind bolted gate?
So fair a spot, in such disarray!
Amid drifts of mist
lakeside pavilion leans askew,
painted boat lies on its side,
girl's sash dangles from motionless swing.
No pillaging of armed men
wrought these ravages
but surely some grieving owner absent far
fills this place with sorrowful memories;
try as you may to forget,
each turn of path by mound or pool
captures your thought again.

Here is a fine mound of rocks. (*He looks closely*) Ha, a little box there among the boulders. If I brace myself against this rockface I can see what it is. (*Mimes the act of dodging as the rock rolls aside*) Yes, a

3. Allusion to Tao Qian's famous allegory; see scene 10, note 6.

rosewood box. (*Opens the box, revealing the portrait scroll within*) So, it is a portrait of the blessed bodhisattva Guanyin. Wonderful! Rather than leave it buried here I shall take it back to my study, there to make formal obeisances before it.

(*He retraces his steps, with the box held reverently in his hands*)

v Rosewood box
entombed beneath miniature peaks
as in a handsome shrine to the bodhisattva.
This boulder below the summit
is surely an Airborne Peak
or Rock of Three Incarnations.⁴
Reverently I shall perfume the scroll with incense,
kowitz before the portrait
that in light of sacred flames
her blessing shine upon me:
accept my diligent service,
deign to bestow thy mercy.

(*He reenters the hall of the shrine*)

Now that I am back in the shrine I shall select a place to install the portrait and an auspicious day to perform my obeisances.

SISTER STONE (*enters*): Back already, Master Liu?

LIU: Aunt Stone,

vi so many woes beset a life of wandering
sun sinks low behind deserted grove.

If you would have me give up my cares, then you must find me
some place, if such there be, where no cares come.

Envoi:

LIU:

Fond as I am of woods and rills
close by my hermitage

SISTER STONE:

already the days of dream and rain
mourn the passing of spring.

4. The Airborne Peak is the site of a celebrated temple by the West Lake at Hangzhou: legend claims the Peak flew there from India. The Three Incarnations are the lifetimes (past, present, and future) through which one's karma works itself out; see also scene 1, note 3.

LIU:

Where is the path that promises
return to gilded mansion?

LIU, SISTER STONE:

The green of the Three Peaks
half-hidden by blossoming branches.

SCENE TWENTY-FIVE: *Maternal Remembrance*

SPRING FRAGRANCE:

ia Sight of object recalls owner
but owner once departed
object itself grows stale.
True enough the saying
"faery fruits long in ripening
choicest blooms first to fade."

(*She sighs*)

Not my fate to be buried by her side
awaiting resurrection in the Orchid Palace;¹
mine only to clear the incense ashes.

I am Spring Fragrance of the household of His Excellency the Commissioner Du Bao, whom with his lady I have accompanied to Yangzhou. It is now almost three years since my young mistress passed away. Never a day in all this time but the old lady has missed her and wailed her grief. Though His Excellency tries for the time being to console her, how is such sorrow to be assuaged? For let alone the old lady, even I am sad at heart when I recall the kindnesses my young mistress always showed me and the words she spoke as she lay dying. Today would have been my young mistress' birthday, and Madam Du has ordered me to set out incense and lamps that she may pour out a libation in the direction of far-away Nan'an. Now, mistress, all is ready for your use.

1. The Orchid Palace was where the ghost of a girl named Cheeks-of-Cloud met a lover who secured the resurrection of her body. Cheeks-of-Cloud had been a hand-maid of the celebrated Tang imperial consort Yang Guifei, and had poisoned herself to accompany her mistress in death.

call her name loud and long. Today I call her, young mistress, young mistress, and again I call

but can my young mistress hear me?

MADAM DU, FRAGRANCE (*weeping*):

So fond her longing,

so deep her grief:

our plaint rises to Heaven

that Heaven should cut off

so cruelly mother from child.

FRAGRANCE (*turns again to the altar*):

O my darling young mistress,

can you return to your old home?

Or where will be the place of your rebirth?

(*She kneels*)

Madam, I would remind you that persons mature in years should beware the ravages of grief. The young mistress is dead and cannot return to life, but Madam lives on and must not let this death imperil her own health. Take good care as age draws on, that you may relish wealth and honor in the company of His Excellency.

MADAM DU (*weeps*): Fragrance, are you aware that some years past His Excellency, lacking a son, contemplated taking a concubine? Only his joy in our daughter persuaded him to carry on as usual. Now she is gone and there is none to continue our line. What consolation can I offer my lord as we face each other in lonely silence? Ah Heaven, pity me!

FRAGRANCE: Madam, you are too worthy a lady to be advised by one of my stupidity. But from what you have said, and since His Excellency has contemplated taking a concubine, would it not be the best thing to follow his wishes and install such a one in your household that she may bear a son?

MADAM DU: But Fragrance, can a son born of a concubine match one's own?

FRAGRANCE: Madam, since you have raised me in your service, I have become a member of your family though none in fact. If you will look kindly on the child of a concubine, then surely you may have a son though none in fact.

MADAM DU: A clever tongue, indeed!

Envoi:

MADAM DU:

Visit to my daughter
under waning moon

FRAGRANCE:

how many now will share
the white aspen's grief?

MADAM DU:

Know that this is the sorrow
hardest to assuage

MADAM DU, FRAGRANCE:

as by the wintry pond
tears fleck the orchid leaves.

SCENE TWENTY-SIX: *The Portrait Examined*

LIU MENGMEI:

Raindrops disperse from plantain leaves,

breezes cease to ruffle peony tips.

Still studying the painting's guarded secret,

look where a gleam of spring light holds the clue.

Lone and listless in my wanderings, I took an idle stroll in the shrine's rear garden. There among rocks by a pool I found a painted scroll, apparently a portrait of the great bodhisattva Guanyin, secreted in a precious casket. Continuous wind and rain for the past few days have prevented my viewing it, but happily today is clear and bright and I may inspect my find.

(*He opens the rosewood box
and unrolls the painting*)

1 The blessed bodhisattva
shows her celestial form
sharp-etched as shadows in clear autumn light
beneath Heaven's silver river, the Milky Way.
Each holy attribute complete
as in the manifestation at Potlaka¹
but vouchsafed now to one from Southern Sea.

1. See scene 23, note 1.

(He ponders)

Yet why for such majesty
is there no lotus pedestal?
And why, on closer look
does silken skirt reveal
a pair of tiny wave-tripping feet?²

If this is Guanyin, why are her feet so tiny?³ I must examine this more closely.

II For a while longer
let me reflect on the image here portrayed.

I have it!

A little Chang E to hang in someone's study,⁴
so delicate, so gracefully portrayed.

If this is Chang E, I must certainly pay my respects.

Please say, Chang E,
shall I be one to break the cassia bough?

—But if it be Chang E,
why does no faery cloud support her?
And why no flowering cassia grove?

But if it is neither Guanyin nor Chang E, how could it be some mortal girl?

Bewildered,
seeming to recognize her
I search my heart.

Look again: is this the work of a painter, or from the hand of the beauty herself?

III Whence comes this lovely maid
portrayed in colored inks
flowing clear as moonlight from brush's tip?
No flower but would hide in shame
before such a maiden as this.
Impossible to render pose so free
and who would attempt her hair,
pale washes of springtime clouds?

What painter could have achieved this!

Surely this brushwork shows
skill of lovely maid herself.

2. "Tripping the waves" is a common kenning for the feet of a beautiful woman, originating in Cao Zhi's "Goddess of the River Luo" (see scene 23, note 20).

3. Guanyin did not have bound feet.

4. For Chang E, the cassia tree, and their associations with studying for the examinations, see scene 2, note 4.

Wait a minute: here at the top of the scroll is an inscription in small characters. (He peers closely) Yes, a quatrain:

"However close the likeness
viewed from near at hand,
from farther off one would say
this was some airborne sprite.
Union in some year to come
with the 'courtier of the moon'
will be beneath the branches
either of willow or apricot."

So, this is a self-portrait by some mortal girl. But what does she mean, "beneath the branches either of willow or apricot"? Most mysterious!

IV How could she know that Liu Mengmei
crossing Apricot Ridge, over hill and pass
would reach this spot?
And what is this talk of "union in the moon"?
Promise of joy
but wait, wait—
how could my name provide such a riddle
for Chang E to determine?
Wondering, pondering,
can it be true that what will come to pass
was already perceived in dream?

See how she gazes back at me!

V Image of slender grace
trailing her silken robe
where leaves of spring plantain seem to sway:
love's longings locked between her brows,
which curve, gentle as spring hills
to soft mist of hair.
We meet each other's eyes—
how can gaze of either lightly move?
Ah, flashing rays
transfixing me again and again!

And she bears a green sprig of apricot in her hand, as if somehow she were holding my own self in her arms!

VI Apricot branch in hand
softly intoning her verse,
luring my stumbling heart to thoughts of love.
Just as I "sketch a cake to appease my hunger"
so she "gazes at apricots to slake her thirst."

Ah, my young lady, my young lady,
 tiny mouth like lotus bud,
 lips unparted
 yet the corners, so delicately touched,
 give promise of a smile
 and of a passionate heart.

Sadly she longs to speak, but breathes not.

The young lady rivals in her skill the painting of Cui Hui, the poetry of Su Hui, the calligraphy of the Lady Wei.⁵ Though I have cultivated my own talents, how could I ever hope to match this girl! Brought suddenly face to face with her like this, I shall try a verse in corresponding meter:

The excellence of the painting
 is nature's inspiration,
 a sprite either of heaven
 or of earth below;

the "moon-palace union"
 may be near at hand or far
 but hopes of spring are lodged
 in willow and apricot.

vii Equally skilled is she
 in painting and poetic craft;
 perfect match of figure's grace
 with background hill and stream.

Let me call her as earnestly as I can: Lovely lady! Gracious mistress!
 Till my throat bleeds I cry for Zhenzhen⁶
 but does she hear?

The proverb says
 one whose name is spoken will sneeze in response:
 I wait for her feet to move
 in slow swaying descent—
 but her image stays immobile.

So, as I stay on, solitary in this place, I shall spend my days before this portrait, to admire her and present my obeisances, to call her and sing her praises.

viii Happiest of omens, to have found this portrait:
 surely the "willow" of my name

5. For Cui Hui, see scene 14, note 7. Su Hui was the author of a famous poem in palindrome form; the Lady Wei was a celebrated calligrapher of the fourth century.

6. See scene 14, note 5

and the apricot branch in her hand
 must form a closer union yet?
 Ah my young lady,
 image without form,
 your gaze destroys me!

Envoi:

Useless to go on resenting
 the portrait's gentle hues;
 rather let it hang
 forever by the door.
 Rhyme your discontents,
 hide among the willows.
 Mounting tipsiness of spring,
 waking ever harder.

SCENE TWENTY-SEVEN: *Spirit Roaming*

SISTER STONE:

i Radiance of spring fills hall and terrace,
 pillars carved of jade reflect
 from silver-surfaced pools.
 Smoke of incense rises everywhere,
 cadence of chimes ascends to Heaven
 as we unroll
 sacred scriptures of salvation.

(She recites a pastiche of lines from Tang poets)

"For a handful of years, rouge powder
 layered the yellow clay,
 on Witch's Mount the moon
 descends to the Twelve Peaks.¹
 I plucked a single blossom
 of the rose

1. See scene 1, note 5. Each line of this pastiche suggests the death of a girl from pining.

as on Bank of Withdrawn Maiden²
east wind blew."

This burial shrine of Bridal Du has been in my charge for over three years now. Today is an auspicious day, which I have selected for a mass to secure her rebirth in the Realm of Jade. Outside the gate I have set up a banner to announce this mass, let us see who will attend.

YOUNG TAOIST NUN (*enters, followed by her NOVICE*):

II Over ridges of river lands
a particolored cloud supports the moon
as like bluebird messengers
of sainted Queen Mother of the West
we come and go.

NOVICE: It grows late, let us seek rest at this Apricot Shrine.

NUN:

Incense in a "magpie-handled" burner
scents south-pointing branches.

I am Abbess of the Azure Cloud Convent at Shaoyang. My wanderings have brought me to this place where a solemn banner indicates the imminence of a mass. We are just in time to ascend to the altar and join in the celebration.

(*She greets SISTER STONE*)

"Beneath the Canopied Heaven
willows are veiled in mist"

SISTER STONE:

"with feathered talisman and crimson pennant
approach the rocky niche"

NUN:

"among hills and streams
I seek a lodging"

SISTER STONE: Very well then,

"surplice sleeves atrail
attend our mysteries."³

Whence do you come, sister?

NUN: From Shaoyang, and I should be obliged for a night's lodging.

SISTER STONE: Our chief guest-room is occupied by a gentleman

2. The Embankment of the Withdrawn Maiden, at Loyang, commemorates an ill-fated Tang slave girl: she was abducted, and threw herself down a well in protest.

3. This exchange is again a Tang pastiche.

named Liu from Lingnan, who is recuperating from a sickness, but there is a side room at your disposal.

NUN: I am grateful to you. May I ask the purpose of this evening mass?

SISTER STONE (*sighs*): Ah,

young mistress of the house of Du
three full years departed;
tonight her soul is summoned
to ascend the ninefold Heavens.

NUN: So this is your purpose.

For sacrament of prayer
this is a favored time;
let me with incense and burning lamp
assist the holy celebrant.

SISTER STONE: You are welcome to do so.

(*Bells and drums sound offstage*)

CELEBRANTS: We request our head to offer incense.

SISTER STONE: In honor of the First Consort of the Southern Dipper, charged with mortal matters, and of the Lady of the Eastern Peak, charged with reincarnations.

(*She offers incense and
prostrates herself*)

IIIa Flames of newly kindled fire,
incense of highest excellence,
devotions offered on behalf of Bridal Du.

CELEBRANTS (*prostrating themselves*):

Clouds of incense wreath about our banners,
delicate music soars aloft on breeze.

O holy ones,

in your immeasurable majesty
receive this frail fragrant soul
swiftly into Heaven's height;
or if her mortal longings still persist
and she would live again in human form
let her be born again as maid or man
and grant that she may find
a partner for eternal bliss;
let her not once again
perish so young.

SISTER STONE: I reflect that the young lady died of her passionate grieving for the flowers, and so today I have picked a sprig of flowering apricot to present before her in a consecrated vase.

(She makes obeisance before the spirit tablet)

iii b In purified vase
under cold spring sun
set one last spray of apricot
its waxen blooms still red.

Ah young mistress,
spirit so determined—
by whose side do you walk
in fragrant dream?

CELEBRANTS: Tell us, revered teacher, what is represented by the consecrated vase, and what by the sprig of apricot?

SISTER STONE:

Within the hollow of this vase
is held the mortal world
while her poor self
just like this fading apricot,
watered but rootless,
still brings a fragrance to our senses.

CELEBRANTS: Young lady, may you accept this offering and find cool balm for your flesh,
sweet fragrance for your soul;
if you will return to mortal world
cannot this sprig of apricot
serve as your canopy?

(Sound of wind offstage)

SISTER STONE: Most strange! A whirlwind rustles and strikes chill!

(Booming of bell offstage)

CELEBRANTS: The hour of the evening meal, let us eat before we return to bring our ceremonies to a close. Truly,
before morning mirror we laid aside
all inconstancy,
now bell of evening interrupts
our song of "Pacing the Void."

(ALL leave the stage)

BRIDAL DU *(enters, wailing as a ghost, and hiding her face with her sleeve)*:

iv In spirit form, as in a dream,
from Home-gazing Terrace I come
where graveyards silent lie in shimmering night.

(She starts at the offstage barking of a dog)

So, it is only

false promise of the shadows—
a puppy barking at the stars.
Cool and dim

springtime shade of flowering pear.

Ah, here is the pavilion of the tree peonies, and here the peony walk, and all neglected and overgrown, for three years have passed since my parents left this place.

(She weeps)

Crumbling wall and weed-grown path
so deeply wound my spirit.
Now as I gaze, whence comes
dull gleam of ghostly lamp?

(She listens)

Ah me, surely the sound of human voices!

In former days, daughter highborn
cherished as hoard of gold
but now the stream flows on
the blossoms have faded:
alas for this passionate flower
of the noble house of Du,
self-willed beyond recourse
tonight I count the stars alone.
In life and death
passion was all to me
and how can passion be withstood!

You see before you the spirit form of Bridal Du. My death came of a dream, besotted with passion and longing for love. It happened that the tenth judge of Hell was relieved of his post, and for three years I lodged in the women's cells with none to despatch my case. Then it was my good fortune to meet with a judge who took pity on me and granted my temporary release. This is a night of bright moon and

gentle breezes and I roam at will. But here is the old garden to the rear of the study—how can it have been turned into an Apricot Blossom Shrine? How deeply this distresses me!

v Despair tortures bowels
of one who seems to wake from drunken dream.
Who will make restoration
of my remaining years?
No sister from the ghostly ranks keeps me company,
alone I straighten gauze robes that trailed on the ground.
I pace my realm
of shadows amid forms
where dew settles on breeze,
cloud obscures Dipper
and moon endures eclipse.
First watch, the flowers shadowed—

(She starts at the sound of chimes in the wind)

my heart suddenly catches in fear
but it is nought but sound of chimes
in breeze beneath eaves of shrine.

How sweet this scent of incense!

vi Smoke of incense clouding
where lanterns glow and shimmer,
I shiver at the sight
of saintly portraits mounted high.

What holy images are these? So, the Lady of the Eastern Peak and the First Consort of the Southern Dipper. *(She performs a deep kowtow)* The spirit of Bridal Du kowtows before the holy ones. From my obscurity

bring me to the light
that in full clarity I may be fated
to find rebirth in human form!

Let me read these charms: so, this shrine is in the charge of Sister Stone, and here is a mass for my ascension to Heaven. Ah Sister Stone, I am deeply in your debt. Ha, and here in this consecrated vase is a sprig of fading blossom from the apricot by my tomb. Sweet blossom, like Bridal Du herself you fade before your time, how sad!

But all these random drumbeats,
striking of bells,

intonings of precious scriptures
break in upon my yellow-millet dream.⁴
Stepping where roots of apricot
grip the fissured earth,
here let me leave some sign.

(She weeps)

Unless I leave some trace of my presence, how can I show my appreciation for the devotions of these pious sisters? Then let me scatter petals of the apricot here on the altar.

(She does so)

To each petal cling
myriad loving thoughts.

I long to know where my father and mother are this night, and where Spring Fragrance. Ha, but from somewhere comes a sound of someone moaning and calling. Let me listen.

LIU'S VOICE *(offstage)*: My gracious mistress! Lovely lady!

BRIDAL *(startled)*: Who calls, and for whom? Listen again!

*(The VOICE calls again,
and she sighs)*

vii You the living, I in death,
each fated to wander alone.
One full of longings calls forth
from the one he longs for no reply.
But why do you name no name of her you love?
On my solitary spirit
who would ever call?
Voice of mystery
calling continually
yet pausing ever and again.

(The VOICE calls again)

So, in some guest-room of the shrine
some wandering scholar
rambles in his sleep.

4. Allusion to a well-known story of a youth who borrowed the pillow of a Taoist adept and passed through a lifetime of illusion in a dream that took less time than the adept needed to cook the yellow millet for his supper.

VIII From heart I thought devoid of love
 longings rise
 as he calls and calls again.
 I shudder chill, and bitter tears start up.
 Ah me, could this be him I saw in dream,
 beloved "Apricot" or dearest "Willow"?
 For I recall
 such a pavilion by flowered pool
 was witness to our innocent play
 of breeze and moonlight.
 And yet what starry union
 could be the destiny of a lonely ghost?

I would go at once to find out what I could, but the Dipper turns,
 Orion wheels, and I may not linger!

IX What is this waving now of temple lamps?

NUNS' VOICES (offstage): There are sounds of someone at the shrine!

(The NOVICE stealthily enters and looks
 about. A second whirlwind rises)

BRIDAL:

I set embroidered banners aflutter
 and petals fall in the wind,
 sign of ghostly presence of Bridal Du.

NOVICE (comes face to face with BRIDAL as the latter exits wailing. She
 starts in terror): Holy sisters, hurry, hurry!

SISTER STONE, NUN (enter in alarm): What's all this fuss?

NOVICE: I was hiding in the lantern shadows to see who it was,
 when I saw this goddess or fairy maid. She shook her sleeve and
 the banner fluttered, and then she vanished! I'm frightened!

SISTER STONE: What was her appearance?

NOVICE (gesturing): About so tall, so thin, a pretty face, feather hair
 ornaments and a gold phoenix hairpin, red skirt and green jacket,
 jade girdle pendants all atinkle, must have been an Immortal come
 down to visit earth.

SISTER STONE: So, this is the very image of the living Miss Du. It
 must have been a manifestation of her spirit.

NUN: See, here on the altar, petals of apricot scattered everywhere.
 It is a miracle! Let us offer one more hymn to her.

ALL CELEBRANTS:

x Breezes disperse the incense smoke,
 moonlight floods the walks.

Swift apparition of chill spirit form.
 Longings of love so quickly wounded
 on a spring night when petals fall.

Speedily may you
 ascend to Heaven,
 ascend to Heaven:

linger no longer where you have no home.

NUN: Of what sickness did Bridal Du perish, and what was the rea-
 son for this manifestation?

SISTER STONE:

xi Calm your fears,
 do not ask for reasons,
 dismantle we now altar and instruments.

For listen, there along the walk
 chill breeze still bears
 cold pendants' tinkling sound.

Envoi:

SISTER STONE:

Realizing she dared not
 make manifest her presence

NUN:

she would relate her history
 but feared the bowels' torture.

NOVICE:

If the spring breeze could be taught
 to know of mortal longings

SISTER STONE, NUN, NOVICE:

surely it would recognize
 the fairy maid Orchid Fragrance.

SCENE TWENTY-EIGHT: Union in the Shades

LIU MENGMEI:

I Where to seek fairy maid
 who stood before my eyes?
 Wavering shade
 as cloud-veiled moonlight.

Aimlessly I pace:
silently I ponder
and already evening sun goes down.

A sunlit cloud descended from the heavens
sculptured grace, flower-like smile:
whose brush portrayed this living presence?
Surely she gazed at me with love unspoken.

Ever since I set eyes on the beauty in the portrait I have longed for her day and night. As the evening watch draws to a close, I shall devote myself to repetition of the "pearls and jade" of her verses and to fresh contemplation of what her eyes seem to say. If only she could come to me in dream, it would be as the spring breeze to my spirit. (*He unrolls and contemplates the portrait*) Ah, see how my lovely lady seems to speak, so clear the light from her expressive eyes! Truly,

"lone wild duck and sunset cloud
a single flight;
wide sky and clear autumn stream
one color only."¹

II Borne by evening breeze
a wisp of cloud from Peach Blossom Spring²
discloses loveliest of mortals
in flawless purity aglow
against fresh crimson gauze of sunlit window.
This one small painting I hang again,
object of all my yearnings.

Ah lady, lady, I die of longing for you!

III Delicately nurtured, demurely shy,
modestly elegant, daughter of honored house.
Yet with what stirrings did she approach
her mirror patterned with water-chestnut flowers?
What secret thoughts prompted this portrait,
what guesses of one who, finding it, would woo her?

IV As the bright moon her image floods
the sky of my sad longings.

On former nights I could sleep face to face with the moonlight, but in these past nights

1. Lines quoted from the Tang poet Wang Bo.
2. See scene 10, note 6.

so dazzling bright against dark shades
the radiance of her beauty
makes clamorous chaos of my thoughts
and there's no night, no daylight hour
I do not pine.

But that to take her portrait in my hands
could soil its delicate hues

I long to embrace her image as I lie.

Surely there must be a love affinity fated between this lady and myself? Let me recite her verses once again.

(*He does so*)

v These words she composed
for one who would understand
predestined "willow" or "apricot."
From crevice in poolside mound
spring longings bore her image
like that of fair Green Calyx, fairy maid³
soaring aloft, to light on this painted silk.

What I must do is perform reverences before her.

(*He does so, lighting incense*)

Agony to stare
at blushing face,
clear line of brow
inscribed already in my heart;
here is your love, not lost at sky's far edge!

Here in this respite from my travels, is there no way I can bring about a moment's rendezvous with my beloved?

VI Could I but urge
the transformation of this solitary image
until our twin souls stood together
as on painted screen
coarse reed may accompany tree of jade!⁴
Ah lady, those tiny ears emerging
like tip of crescent moon through cloud of hair,

3. Green Calyx was an immortal who, in a fourth-century legend, explained that after nine hundred years of self-discipline she was able to manifest herself or vanish at will.

4. Old metaphor for ill-assorted companions. The "coarse reed" is Liu himself.

do they hear one word
of all my lovelorn pleading?

vii How laughable
my poor attempts to joke with her!
Like a clear autumn moon
cloud-soaring over sea and sky
her gaze spans distant hills
to forest shades and misty void.
My offering should be tranquil contemplation,
not ribald mockery!

viii Then let my incantations,
my prayers of devotion
move stones to nod their heads,
the sky to rain flower petals.⁵
Does all my piety still lack power
to bring the fairy maiden forth?
She is reluctant to step forward
for cause too light.

*(Sound of wind rising offstage. LIU places
his hand on the scroll)*

In mounting of damask and ivory
I trust to stay my sylph from flight
in wind's buffeting.

But lest the wind tear her portrait, I should seek out some eminent
painter to make a copy.

ix Idle chatter!
How can I bring to share my couch
one who vies in majesty
with the "Moon and Water" Guanyin herself?⁶
Yet could I find a way
to meet with her in her own person
surely my talk of love
would bring such sweet response
as portrait seems to promise?

5. These phenomena, in early Buddhist legends, were the effects of sermons by abbots of great sanctity.

6. The bodhisattva Guanyin was often portrayed gazing at the reflection of the moon in water (a symbol of insubstantiality).

I'll trim the lamp and look again more closely.

(He holds the lamp closer to the portrait)

x Should such angelic grace
be encountered in mortal world
surely it would prove false.

(Sound of wind from offstage; his lamp flickers)

Suddenly a chill gust of wind. I must be careful
to let no lamp spark light on painted scroll.

Enough now, I shall
screen my window, sleep
and search for her in dream.

(He lies down to sleep)

BRIDAL DU (enters):

Long my sleep, but dreamless
in the shades below;
ended my life, but unspent
so many loving thoughts.
Now beneath the moonlight
a portrait draws my soul
where sounds of someone's sighing
carry on the wind.

I am the ghost of Bridal Du, who died of pining after a garden
dream. Before my death I painted my own portrait and buried it
among the Taihu rocks. I inscribed the portrait with the lines,

"Union in some year to come
with the 'courtier of the moon'
will be beneath the branches
either of willow or apricot."

After several nights of spirit roaming in the grounds of this shrine, I
was surprised to hear a young scholar call out from the guest room,
"Gracious mistress! Lovely lady!" So plaintive was the cry, it
touched my heart. Secretly I slipped into the room, to find a painted
scroll hung high on the wall. Looking more closely I recognized my
own portrait, and a poem in matching meter had been added. It
bore the signature "Liu Mengmei of Lingnan." "Liu" for "willow,"
"mei" for "apricot"—surely this was predestined! Now with the
consent of my infernal judges I come on this fair night to fulfill the
dream I once dreamed. Ah, bitter suffering!

xia When scent has left the air
and cold lie powder's traces
and tears start by crimson gauze pane
I fear return
to moonlit haunt of love.
Head swiftly turned in shame,
hair fallen awry,
hands clutch at temples.

So, this is his room.

Lest I mistake the path to Peach Blossom Spring
I linger to ensure
that it is he.

LIU (*recites in his sleep*):

"Union in some year to come
with the 'courtier of the moon'
will be beneath the branches
either of willow or apricot."

Gracious sister!

BRIDAL (*makes a gesture of weeping as she listens*):

xib Ah, the hurt to hear his cry
a tangled rain of tears
word for word my broken lines of verse.

Can he be still lying awake?

(*She peeps. He cries again*)

From the screened couch
his longings issue in sudden sighs!
Startle him with no clamor
but gently tap the bamboo window frame.

LIU (*wakes with a start*): Ah my mistress!

BRIDAL (*weeps*):

Draw near him now
in form of maiden spirit.

LIU: A sound of tapping on the bamboo frame: is someone there or
is it the wind?

BRIDAL: Someone is here.

LIU: Someone at this hour, it must be Sister Stone bringing tea. You
are too kind.

BRIDAL: No, not so.

LIU: Then it must be the nun who lodges here in her travels?

BRIDAL: No, not so.

LIU: Curious, curious, not the nun either. Who else could it be? I
must open my door and find out. (*He does so*) Ha,

xii of what noble family
is this young maiden
whose beauty startles so?

(*BRIDAL smiles at him and slips into the
room. LIU hastens to latch the door again*)

BRIDAL (*folds her hands in her sleeves and composes herself to bow to
him*): Blessing on you, sir scholar.

LIU: May I ask whence you come, young lady, and what cause
brings you here at dead of night?

BRIDAL: You must guess, sir.

LIU: Can it be

xiii the Weaving Maid of the heavens
surprised by old Zhang Qian
borne by his raft along the Milky Way?
Or her serving maid, Clear-as-Jade,
pursued by Heaven's officers
on her earthly escapade?

BRIDAL: Those you name are celestial sylphs, what would they be
doing here on earth?

LIU:

Then you are some mismatched mortal beauty,
"phoenix fated to follow crow"?

(*BRIDAL shakes her head*)

In some former time and place, did we
"tie our steeds beneath green aspen"?

BRIDAL: We have never met.

LIU: Have you mistaken me for
some hero of romance, Tao Qian
or Sima Xiangru, eloping with Wenjun?

BRIDAL: I have not mistaken you.

LIU: Is it a lantern you are seeking? The Rites prescribe

7. See scene 10, note 6, for the confusion of two allegories on the subject of a peach-blossom spring. From this confusion the great recluse-poet Tao Qian becomes associated with amorous adventure. The bohemian elopement of the Han poet Sima Xiangru with the young widow Zhuo Wenjun is a romantic motif especially common in plays.

"maiden at night walks not without her lamp"
and so you come
red sleeves to share the light by my gauze window.

BRIDAL:

xiiib I am no goddess
come to shower petals from the air
upon a bodhisattva⁸
nor seek I any lamp to weep
its tears of wax through my studies.
I am no consort Flying Swallow
of flawed repute from former days
nor willing Wenjun
early widowed.
But you, sir, you have strayed
in a butterfly dream among the blossoms.⁹

LIU (*ponders*): True indeed, I did have a dream.

BRIDAL:

And so with sound of oriole pipes
I search the willow grove;
should you now seek the place of my boudoir
like Song Yu, poet of old,
"try next door or the door beyond."

LIU (*reflects*): So that's it. In the rear garden, looking west toward the sunset, I did see a young lady walking there.

BRIDAL: It was myself you saw.

LIU: What family do you have?

BRIDAL:

xrva 'Mid fragrant grasses
beyond setting sun
I dwell with but my two parents alone.
Sixteen my years,
blameless bloom
leaf-hidden against all breezes
but moved to sighs by spring's leave-taking
and by one glimpse
of the elegance of your bearing.

8. Allusion to the *Vimalakirti sutra*: the petals hung to the body of Manjusri's disciple, but not to the saint himself.

9. The classic dream of the Taoist philosopher Zhuang Zi, unsure whether his waking self might not be a butterfly dreaming it was he.

No other errand but to join you,
trim lamp as wind rises,
chat by evening window.

LIU (*aside*): Amazing loveliness in mortal form! Jewel bright as moonlight, chance midnight meeting: how to respond to her?

(*To BRIDAL*)

xrvb Breathtaking beauty,
loveliest of mortals!
In lamp's glow, sudden bewitching smile!
Still bright the moon—
was this the night fairy raft
rose to River of Heaven?
Out of the dark, beauty adorned you come—
or does a heavenly sylph honor my couch?

(*He turns aside again*)

But who can tell
child of what family
she presents himself in this fashion?

I must question her further. (*To BRIDAL*) The favor of this visit at dead of night—can this be a dream?

BRIDAL (*laughs*): This is no dream, it is real—but, sir, I fear you cannot accept me?

LIU: I fear only that it can't be true. But, lovely lady, if I truly have your love, then this is joy beyond dreaming—how could I reject you?

BRIDAL: Then my hopes are fulfilled.

xv From cold secluded vale
a flower you bring to bloom in dark of night.¹⁰
Unbetrothed am I
as you must surely know,
cherished as daughter of good family.
Tenderness
at peony pavilion,
bashfulness
by rocky path,

10. As Wu Zetian, Tang Empress, ordered the flowers to be brought to bloom when she planned a midwinter tour of her gardens.

rustling of breeze
by study window.
Sharing this lovely night
how precious shall we find
cool breeze and brilliant moon!¹¹

LIU:

xvi Soul starts as if in dream
but wakes to find moon
still coolly gleaming.
This sudden splendor—
do we dream now on Witch's Mount?¹²

Now, lady, my gratitude to you for
never fearing
to walk in flower-patterned shade,
never stumbling
crossing the cool green moss,
never trembling
to think your parents deceived,
never doubting
that I am your true love.
See Dipper slant,
petals fold
as flowers sleep in deep of night.
We shall laugh,
sing for joy,
never wind and moon so fair.
Willfully I bend to me
your pliant, fragrant softness,
bringing you distress
but for one passing instant.

BRIDAL: Forgive me, sir, I have one thing only to entreat you.

LIU (*smiles*): Say it, whatever it is, my dearest.

BRIDAL: This body, "a thousand gold pieces," I offer you without
hesitation. Do not disdain my love. My life's desire is fulfilled if I
may share your pillow night by night.

LIU (*laughs*): You give me your love, my dearest: how could I dis-
miss you from my heart?

11. Wind and moon, commonest metaphor for romance: this is her direct invitation to Liu.

12. See scene 1, note 5.

BRIDAL: One thing more: let me leave before cockcrow, and do not
see me off but guard yourself against the chill dawn wind.

LIU: I shall do as you ask. But may I know your honored name?

BRIDAL (*sighs*):

xvii Flower has root
and jade its bed of origin
but once revealed, the storm may rage too fierce.

LIU: I hope you will come to me each night, my dearest, from now
on.

BRIDAL: Sir, it is for you
the spring breeze opens this first bloom.

Envoi:

LIU:

Outpour of love, disturbing fragrance
never met before.

BRIDAL:

Moon slants from tower, and the gong
strikes the watch of dawn.
Clouds of morning pass at night
to realms none ever saw.

LIU:

Count the peaks: who knows on which
the goddess makes her home?

SCENE TWENTY-NINE: *Gossip*

SISTER STONE:

ia Taoist priestess, to cowl and cloister born,
partnerless and childless,
I tend shrine of Three Pure Ones,
freshen their drinking bowls, light new incense
to boom of bell and thud of drum.
But see this wanton wandering nun:
what mischief behind that pious front?

In worldly matters
no such thing as trust;

xiv After my endless sleep of endless nights
now cockcrow takes me from your pillow:
untimely cry, banishing dreams of home
of sleeper beyond the frontier
so far from mortal world.

Waning moon
cannot withstand the cuckoo's call
borne on dim-lit breeze of dawn;
and yet I have told
only one part in three of my story.
xv Halting words
so slow to leave this clove-scented tongue.
Yet you untied my clove-perfumed girdle,
to you belonged my clove-fragrant chastity.
Be swift to act now,
do not delay,
my love is too deep for many words.

(Sound of wind rising offstage)

Ghostly garments swirl in the wind: I go.

(She hastens offstage)

LIU (*filled with alarm and doubt*): Uncanny! Liu Mengmei, son-in-law to Prefect Du: surely this was a dream? But let me try to recall: her name Bridal, her age sixteen years, and buried beneath the flowering apricot in the rear garden. Ah, no, it was flesh and blood I held in my arms, we loved as mortals love. What perversity makes Miss Du proclaim herself a ghost?

BRIDAL (*reenters*): You are still here, sir.

LIU: Why are you back so soon?

BRIDAL: I have one last instruction for you. Now that you have taken me as your wife you must look to this at once and not delay. For if you hesitate, my story is already revealed and I can come to you no more. Put all your mind to this and let nothing go wrong. For if I do not return to the living, then I can only follow you with hatred from the nine springs of Hades below.

(She kneels to him)

xvi Master Liu, you alone
are the lord of my rebirth.

(He kneels in his turn to raise her to her feet)

Have pity on me
—do not make me hate you from the yellow springs below, while
you

revile me as an importunate ghost!

*(She exits with a ghostly wailing, and
pauses to look back at him)*

LIU (*softly, to himself*): So it is a ghost who possesses Liu Mengmei. She has told me her story so openly, and with such troubled grief. Whatever the truth, I can do nothing but follow her instructions. The first thing then is to consult with the old Abbess.

Envoi:

Waking from dream, where now
the clouds that wrapped my love?
The troubling recollection
a skirt patterned with golden butterflies.
I'd seek the lonely grave—
but who will guide me?
Let messengers summon
the Lord of Purple Light.

SCENE THIRTY-THREE: Confidential Plans

SISTER STONE:

1a Priestess in hibiscus robe,
hair too short to coif and pin,
by incense stove and booming bell
teeth clack in reverence as head bows low.

Light breeze murmurs like palace pipes
but in deserted park
the Rainbow Skirt hangs cold and still.¹
Where lotus flowers cluster by poolside path
a scent of incense purifies the night.

1. "Rainbow Skirt," here used to symbolize Bridal Du, was the favorite dance of the Tang beauty Yang Guifei; see scene 23, note 29.

Mortals must age,
plans go awry,
dreams end too soon.
Love too deep
a shallow grave may hold
'neath westering sun.

This Apricot Shrine of mine commemorates Bridal Du. His Honor the former Prefect originally entrusted it to the charge of Tutor Chen, but for these past three years he has seldom visited other than to collect rents and offerings. He did manage to solicit contributions from local gentry and commoners and erect a memorial to Prefect Du after his departure. But, when I chanced to walk by the memorial hall yesterday, there wasn't just pig dung lying around but human dung as well. Chen Zuiliang, Chen Zuiliang, why don't you get someone to give it a good sweeping? Just compare Miss Du's shrine and tablet: incense and water changed daily, everything clean and neat and imposing. Truly,

"don't trust the Confucian
with his bagful of classical quotes;
real concern is the mark
of the follower of the Tao."

LIU MENGMEI (*enters*):

ib Private words in clandestine tryst
not for public knowledge:
long I hesitate
before voicing them abroad.

(*He greets SISTER STONE*)

Fragrance of falling petals
fills the hall of gold.

SISTER STONE:

Has sight of special blossom
disturbed your youthful heart?

LIU:

Fairy maiden still delays
descent in mortal form.

SISTER STONE:

Thrice has she seen the Eastern Sea
turn to mulberry groves.²

2. For this metaphor for time and change, see scene 31, note 5.

LIU: Sister Abbess, not once since my arrival here have I had the good fortune to view the central hall of your shrine. May I see it today?

SISTER STONE: Most appropriate. Please follow me. (*They reach the shrine*) Looking up you see the golden palace of the Jade Emperor.³ Beneath, at either side, stand the Lady of the Eastern Peak and the Consort of the Southern Dipper.

LIU (*bows as a bell is struck offstage*):

Emeralds massed in Heaven's height,
far terraces of jade,
banners proclaim the lofty court
of the Lord Most High.
Now that Feng Yi the River Spirit
comes to strike his drum
I understand the flute-playing skill
of the noble daughter of Qin.⁴

What a magnificent shrine! But I don't understand the inscription on this tablet: "The Ruler, Miss Du." Which "ruler" was this?

SISTER STONE: The character that looks like "ruler" needs an extra dot on top to make it read "host," that is to say, "tablet lodging the spirit of Miss Du." We are waiting for some person of distinction to inscribe the dot.

LIU: And who is Miss Du?

SISTER STONE:

IIa You ask the origin
of this Apricot Blossom Court.
It was built in a year now past
by Commissioner Du Bao
for interment of his cherished daughter,
Bridal, dead at sixteen years.
So swift was his departure
to post of new eminence
that inscription on spirit tablet
remains incomplete.

3. The Jade Emperor is the highest Taoist divinity.

4. This is the same "daughter of ducal house" referred to in the previous scene (scene 32, note 3). She eloped and ascended to Heaven with her lover Xiao Shi. A homonym of the surname Xiao means "flute," hence Liu's reference in this line, where she clearly stands for Bridal herself, to her "flute playing." This, in turn, is a euphemism for fellatio: the lady's name was Nongyu, "Fondle Jade." See also scene 18, note 11.

LIU: Who conducts the sacrifices and sweeps her grave?

SISTER STONE:

A bequest of land
provides the upkeep of the shrine
but a "host" is lacking
for the yearly Cold Food offering.

LIU (*weeps*): Your story reveals Miss Du to be my own beloved wife.

SISTER STONE (*startled*): Is this true, sir?

LIU: It is the most solemn truth.

SISTER STONE: Then you know the days of her birth and death?

LIU:

"Till you know about the living
how are you to know about the dead?"⁵
Dead in a bygone year
her birth is now.

SISTER STONE: When did you receive the news of her death?

LIU:

"In the morning I heard" of her,
"in the evening died"
she who could content me so.⁶

SISTER STONE: Since you were man and wife it is for you to offer the incense before her spirit tablet.

LIU:

"Till you have learnt to serve men
how can you serve ghosts?"⁷

SISTER STONE: Did you ever meet this lady who was your wife?⁸

LIU:

This Apricot Blossom Shrine
was our Terrace of the Prince of Chu⁹
though you were kept in the dark.

SISTER STONE: Which night was this?

LIU:

Two nights ago you made yourselves a nuisance.

5. *Analects of Confucius*, XI, 11 (Waley translation).

6. *Analects*, IV, 8: "In the morning, hear the Way; in the evening, die content!" (Waley translation).

7. *Analects*, XI, 11 (Waley translation).

8. An arranged marriage could be conducted by proxy, and it was therefore possible for man and wife not to meet until years after their wedding.

9. See scene 1, note 4.

SISTER STONE: Sir scholar, you are possessed by a ghost! I don't believe it!

LIU: If you don't believe me I'll produce an apparition to convince you. Bring me a brush. I shall complete the dot on the character "host," and it will move.

SISTER STONE: How can this be? —But here is a brush.

LIU (*inscribes the dot on the character*):

My brush turns stone to living thing
as husband furnishes "host."

Look there, look there!

SISTER STONE (*amazed*): Wonderful, wonderful, the host truly moved! Oh, young mistress!

I'd say the apricot before the tomb
was an uninscribed tablet to her
but it was Liu the Willow, all along,
that stirred up the incense stove!¹⁰

Since this is your wife, sir, you should
drum the pot

through three-year mourning in graveside hut.¹¹

LIU: Rather than that I shall raise her from the grave.

SISTER STONE:

Such marvelous powers:
you must be Yama, King of the Dead!

LIU: But I need men, workmates, to help.

SISTER STONE:

You are her man,
she is your mate
and the ghosts are at your command.

LIU: I want you to wield a spade also.

SISTER STONE: The Ming Dynastic Code prescribes execution for any person, instigator or accomplice, who opens a coffin to view the corpse.¹²

Pity that a Song dynasty scholar like yourself

10. The reference here is to the willow-wood dolls magicians used, punning of course on the meaning of the surname Liu.

11. A mixture of Taoist and Confucian prescriptions. The Taoist sage Zhuang Zhou drummed on a pot and sang when his wife died, regarding death as inconsequential. "Three years in graveside hut" was the Confucian rite for parents, not for wife.

12. This kind of anachronism is not unusual in plays. What is unusual is the self-conscious, joking use of the anachronism displayed in the remainder of Sister Stone's aria.

should not have read the laws of Imperial Ming.
Don't take this as some ordinary task
digging a posthole or wall's foundation.

LIU: There's nothing objectionable, it is the young lady's own instructions.

LIU: A plea to you
from one in the springs below;
whose orders should surpass
those of the lady herself?

SISTER STONE: Since it is the young mistress' own command, let me select an auspicious day. (*She consults her almanac*) As it happens, tomorrow is the *yi-yu* day of the cycle, appropriate for reopening a grave.

LIU:

Happy day
ruled by jade dog or golden cock
and not the ox.¹³
Now to secure the help
of some noble mover of mountains.

SISTER STONE: My nephew Scabby Turtle can help. But what will ensue when word of this gets out?

LIU:

Once she returns to life
let rumor stop,
argument cease.
No plunderer of tombs
sought here to glut his lust on buried beauty!

One thing more: when the young lady has returned to life she will need medicines and restoratives.

SISTER STONE: Tutor Chen keeps an herbalist's store. We'll just pretend that this young nun who is visiting us fell afoul of an evil spirit and needs a tonic from him.

LIU: Please see to this at once.

"Better to save one human life
than build a seven-story pagoda":
this is no children's game!

13. In yin-yang theory, each day was appropriate or inappropriate for various activities depending on the animal by which it was ruled in the zodiacal sequence.

Envoi:

SISTER STONE:

Moist clouds recall his dream,
rain swirls like dust

LIU:

west of the city wall
I seek the magician Li.

SISTER STONE:

Reaching at last the spot
where the Withdrawn Maiden died¹⁴

LIU:

I part the withered grasses
to gaze on the lonely grave.

SCENE THIRTY-FOUR: Consultation

TUTOR CHEN:

Years of poring o'er the classics
taught me a thing or two:

I traded satchel for bag of herbs
heavy as a rock.

Now my houseboy with respect
addresses me as "Squire"
and when I chance to walk abroad
the neighbors call me "Doc."

When I lost my post as tutor my only recourse was to set up as herbalist. Let's see what customer today will bring.

SISTER STONE (*enters*):

I In Heaven as on earth
good sense is hard to find:
dreams and false illusions
in one whose longings lodge
among the springs of Hades!

Tutor Chen, may your enterprise prosper!

CHEN: Welcome, Sister Abbess.

SISTER STONE: A fine display you have here, with the placard

14. See scene 27, note 2.

"Learned Doctor" bestowed on you by the former Prefect Du, and your "choicest herbs from every source." What are these two clods of earth for?

CHEN: They come from beneath a widow's bed. Dissolved in a little fresh water they will cure a man possessed by ghost or demon.

SISTER STONE: And what's this strip of cloth for?

CHEN: That's the seat of a he-man's pants. When burnt and the ashes swallowed it will cure a woman sick from ghost or demon.

SISTER STONE: Very well then, how about an exchange, five inches of your pants for three feet of the earth I sleep on?

CHEN: I'm not sure you're that much of a widow.

SISTER STONE: Ha! And how much of a he-man are you?

CHEN: Enough of this. What is the purpose of your visit?

SISTER STONE: I'll tell you. It's that young nun of ours, who

iia young and thoughtless
joined a procession for the River Spirit
and returned too late at night.

CHEN: Is she possessed of demons?

SISTER STONE:

Who knows in what deserted waste
she fell beneath the spell of what foul fiend?
In evil month of year accursed
departed never to return.

CHEN: Shows some want of discretion!

SISTER STONE:

Truth to tell
your powers, Prince of Healing,
surely will withstand
those of the living Yama, Lord of Hades.

CHEN: Is she living or dead?

SISTER STONE: Dead some days past.

CHEN: A dead person still has a mouth that can take medicine? Very well, we'll burn this trouser patch and administer it with heated wine.

iib Magic potion from lands across the sea
this trouser patch of a potent male.

SISTER STONE: Medicine of this sort, I've had some already.

CHEN:

Dame, how can you remember
what a potent male is like?
Just cut a square inch and burn it,

mix the ashes in sweet wine,
wedge the teeth apart and pour it down.
No common remedy
but a tonic for the soul
surpassing magic root
of fabled Resurrection Tree of Western Ocean.

SISTER STONE: My thanks to you.

Envoi:

CHEN:

Female companions join the procession
to honor the River God

SISTER STONE:

naught can prevent the sickness
brought on by amorous heart.

CHEN:

Cave hidden deep beneath the cliff
guarded by tight-locked gate

SISTER STONE:

urge the lady healer
forth from her flowered bank.

SCENE THIRTY-FIVE: *Resurrection*

SCABBY TURTLE (*spade on shoulder*):

i Balls bigs as gourds, like warts on a hog:
no pants.
Dig the soil and it all comes apart:
no chance.
Live bride not good enough, he's after a ghost:
no sense.
Caught robbing graves, get buried alive:
no thanks!

(He laughs)

Here you see Scabby Turtle, nephew of the Abbess of the Apricot Blossom Shrine. The Abbess has agreed to Scholar Liu's request to open up Miss Du's grave. What a laugh—says he and Miss Du are

going to be man and wife again. Well, devil talk or not, I've brought some spirit money along; I'll just stick it here on these Taihu rocks and light a stick of incense.

*(Enter SISTER STONE, bearing a jar of wine,
and followed by LIU MENGMEI)*

SISTER STONE:

II Where lies the maiden formed of jade?
Where lies the maiden formed of jade?
By her tomb the west wind
whistles through tangled weeds.
To the love song "Bamboo Stems"
responds "The Maid Revives";
can the cuckoo's calling reach across
the Brocade River of her birthplace?¹
Sorrow lingers in this pit
but the dream of three lifetimes goes on.

LIU MENGMEI: Sister Abbess, we have reached the rear garden, and all that greets the eye is a pavilion turning to a heap of rubble, brambles and brushwood all around. I seek her brocade sash and find only flowers of twining creepers that fold at night; I pursue her skirt of gauze where greening tendrils lengthen with the spring. I remember these Taihu rocks as the place I found her portrait, but all seems confused as dream, lost in uncertainty. What is best to be done?

SISTER STONE: Don't distress yourself, sir: here is the place, this mound beneath the apricot.

LIU: O my dear mistress, how pitiful! *(He weeps)*

SCABBY: What are you weeping for? Let's get on with it.

(He burns the paper spirit money)

LIU *(prostrates himself)*: Now manifest your holy powers, Spirit of the Hills, Presiding Deity of this place.

IIIa Ashes of money sacred to the spirits
cling to grassy slope,
red glows our brazier
beneath smoke-clad hills.

SCABBY:

Let's hope our digging doesn't fall

1. For the legend of Wangdi, turned into a cuckoo at his death, see scene 10, note 2.

beneath the bane of baleful Jupiter
as down we go
in search of this young lady's heels.

LIU: O Presiding Deity of this place, we are reopening this grave for the sole purpose of restoring Bridal Du to life. Let us find no lifeless corpse, but a living woman,

for you as a spirit should rise above jealousy
as we conquer our fear of offending the spirits;
let her beauty, her smiling ways remain unchanged
as if you, Spirit of Earth, gave up your own daughter.
See, spring buds the apricot—

a time to break the ground.

SISTER STONE, SCABBY *(beginning to dig)*:

IIIb Soil like cement beneath the hoe.

Lady, are you here in your narrow grave?

LIU: Be very careful. *(He peers down)* You've reached the coffin.

SCABBY *(drops his spade in alarm)*: The officer? Help, we're dead men!

LIU *(waves his hand impatiently)*: Silence!

*(BRIDAL DU groans offstage,
startling the three of them)*

SISTER STONE, SCABBY: That's a living spirit, it made a noise!

LIU: Careful lest you frighten her.

*(The three of them kneel by the stage entrance,
miming the act of opening the coffin)*

SISTER STONE: The nails have rusted through and the joins have split open. I'd say the young mistress has been off somewhere playing at "clouds and rain"!

*(BRIDAL moans offstage, LIU goes
to lead her forward)*

LIU: The lady is here as she said. A heavenly fragrance greets me, her beauty is unchanged. Ah, see,

though lid be stained with clay
no ant has entered crack or crevice.
These mottled boards of fragrant wood
carried her lovely form
as a soft couch toward the Yellow Springs
and the earth was unguent to her flower-like body.

*(He supports BRIDAL, who
totally lacks the strength to stand)*

Lean gently on me
as I raise your sleeping face
careful lest harm befall
the funeral stone placed in your mouth.

(BRIDAL vomits a goblet of mercury)

SCABBY: A lump of silver, must be a quarter of a pound, how about this as my reward?

LIU: This is a magic essence the young lady has borne in the manner of dragon or phoenix; it must be treasured as a precious heirloom. You will receive some other reward.

(BRIDAL opens her eyes and gives a sigh)

SISTER STONE: The young lady has opened her eyes.

LIU: Heaven has opened its eyes! Oh, my dear mistress!

BRIDAL DU:

iv Can this be real, or is my soul
falsely roused from evil dream?

(She shades her eyes)

Light of sun, moon or stars
hard for mortal eyes to bear,
fearful too the wind's capricious breath.

LIU: She fears the wind's blowing; what shall we do?

SISTER STONE *(taking the weight of BRIDAL from him)*: Lay her in this peony pavilion while we administer drugs to restore the soul. You, sir scholar, must cut a piece from this trouser patch.

(LIU does so)

SCABBY: Let me provide an extra ingredient or two.²

LIU: No need. Warm up a little wine.

(He mixes the drugs in the wine and applies it to BRIDAL's lips.)

va Life-giving potion
enters the jade-smooth throat.

(BRIDAL vomits some of the medicine back again)

2. In line with the trouser patch motif, Scabby probably breaks wind at this point.

Ai-yo, it spills across her bosom.
Mistress, take more. Of three mouthfuls
not half has stayed down.

(He examines her.)

Ah, good, good,
spring blooms again in cheek and limb!

BRIDAL *(looking about her)*: Who are these people?

Surely a gang of scoundrels
come to disturb my peaceful grave.

LIU: I am Liu Mengmei, "Willow Dream-of-Apricot."

BRIDAL:

My eyes blur, yet I fear
you are not he who stood
beside apricot or willow tree.

LIU: This Taoist sister will bear witness.

SISTER STONE: Don't you know me, young mistress?

(BRIDAL gazes at her but does not speak)

vb Still too soon for you to recall me.

LIU: Do you recall this garden?

(BRIDAL still does not speak)

SISTER STONE: No wonder,
all blurs as in a dream.

BRIDAL: But which is Master Liu?

(LIU answers, and BRIDAL shows sign of recognition)

Ah, sir, you are truly a man of your word.

I thank you deeply for persistence
like one who, seeking snakes,
moves every blade of grass,
for patience like his who waited
by tree where rabbit died.³

Let the jewels be saved from my coffin, and all the rest be thrown into this pond.

3. See scene 13, note 3 for the story of the rabbit or hare. It is a classic illustration of stupidity rather than patience, and oddly inappropriate for Bridal to use at this point.

(The three do this with exclamations of distaste)

The world shall see me fresh remade
as these waters wash away sepulchral traces.

LIU, SISTER STONE, SCABBY: What a trial for you, lady, to have slept
these three long years.

BRIDAL:

Years that flowed
"carrying as dust
the springtime of my youth."

LIU: Lady, you should stay no longer in this place of wind and dew.
Let us find a proper place for your rest.

VI Desperate effort
rescued you from living hell,
now fragrant waters shall bathe your body,
finest foods restore your strength.

BRIDAL: Where will you take me?

SISTER STONE: To your room in the Apricot Blossom Shrine.

BRIDAL: Where the dust of my sepulcher will be washed away
by gentle showers in the shrine of love.

Envoi:

LIU:

Heaven's gift
the rouge that tints her cheek

BRIDAL:

lead me now hence
from this terrace of the shades.

SISTER STONE:

There was a purpose
in the entering of this pit

LIU:

inept as I am, I claim
your hand in spirit union.

SCENE THIRTY-SIX: *Elopement*

Enter BRIDAL DU, on the arm of SISTER STONE

BRIDAL DU:

I Smile one moment,
vacant stare the next,
unbroken threads of yearning thoughts,
realm of dream ever before me.

SISTER STONE:

Startled from fragrant slumber
you left the underworld
your hearse your carriage
to the terraces of Heaven.

BRIDAL: Aunt Stone,

I struggle forward,
relapse in weakness,
tender infant you must raise anew.

BRIDAL, SISTER STONE:

The fear remains
of arms embracing mist,
enfolding but a shadow.¹

BRIDAL:

Moth-antenna brows afflicted
by sorrows of three autumn's frosts,
dreams lingered with setting sun
across the grassy tomb.
Petals of wildflowers lighted
on skirt of silken gauze,
sleep wore away
the rouge of cheek and lip.

SISTER STONE:

As bright clouds hover in windless air
or cold incense burns again at touch of flame,
goddess or ghost, not to be known until
she walks again the hills of faery love.

BRIDAL: Aunt Stone, I lay dead for three years, but love's devotion
brought a secret pact to new fulfillment. I owe my rescue to Master
Liu and yourself for your faithfulness. Now you restore me hour by
hour with wine and health-giving tonics, and over these past days I
have felt a gradual revival of vigor.

1. Allusion to the old legend of how King Fucha of Wu opposed his daughter's marriage. She died of love, but later appeared to her lover by the side of her grave. When her mother tried to embrace her, she encountered nothing but mist.

SISTER STONE: Very good. Scholar Liu has approached me already half a dozen times, asking me to set a date for your wedding.

BRIDAL: It is too soon, Aunt. First we must send to Yangzhou to ask my father and mother to appoint a matchmaker.

SISTER STONE: How conventional! But I leave it to you. Let me ask you, are you able to remember your earlier life?

BRIDAL:

II My earlier days

I now recall.

Spring-afflicted I languished, pined,
then, spring-strolling, fell prisoner
in a world of dream beyond enduring.

The portrait of my youthful beauty

I painted myself for him to find.

How earnest he was, how worshipful,

gazing as on some sprite of Heaven,

gazing till glassy-eyed,

calling as on the name of Guanyin,

calling till tongue grew numb.

SISTER STONE: I heard some of this myself. But how did you learn of it in the shades below?

BRIDAL:

Though buried deep in earth

my ears burned to hear him.

So strongly moved by such devotion

from death's cold shade I sought the light

and stepped forth living from the infernal springs.

SISTER STONE: Here comes Scholar Liu now.

LIU MENGMEI (*enters*):

III So fair yet buried in the dust

now gracing anew this world of mists and flowers.

See now the smile that wakes as she sets

her hair with golden pin,

see now the sway of trailing sash

as she steps forward.

(*They greet each other*)

Bridal—my wife!

(*BRIDAL turns aside bashfully*)

Dearest mistress, I entered the earth itself to carry you forth, a fairy maid.

BRIDAL: Resurrected, I owe you a debt greater than to my own father and mother.

LIU: Then let us be joined in marriage this very night.

BRIDAL: Dazed and confused, I am still not fully recovered.

SISTER STONE: Just now she spoke of renewed vigor: she is trying to trick you, sir.

BRIDAL: Sir, I must remind you of the words of Mencius, that a young couple must "await the orders of the parent and the arrangements of the go-betweens."

LIU: Although a few days ago I did not "bore a hole to steal a glimpse of you,"² still I did bore into the grave to reach you. I see that you have recovered your ability to quote the classics.

BRIDAL: Sir scholar, our condition has changed. The other night I was a wandering spirit; now I am a living woman. A ghost may be deluded by passion; a woman must pay full attention to the rites. Let me explain:

IV From the shades I have stepped
into the white light of day.

(*She prostrates herself before him*)

Accept this salute, in thanks
for lifetimes past, present, and future
but grant, before you take me as wife,
the services of a go-between.

(*She weeps*)

And when the nuptial cup is drunk
let my honored parents be present.

LIU: Their joy will shake the heavens when I take you, as my wife, to visit your honored father and mother. As for a go-between, Sister Stone will serve.

BRIDAL: But why so impatient, sir?

Through how many dusks

have we already waited side by side?

LIU: "What night is this?"³

BRIDAL:

So amorous a student!

LIU: Little demon!

BRIDAL (*laughs*): The demon is in you, sir! It is not I

2. An act proscribed in *Mencius*, III, part 2, III, 6.

3. From a song of courtship in the classic *Book of Songs*.

emerged from ghostly state
to bewitch with deviltry!

LIU: But why this waiting?

BRIDAL (*bashfully*):

Returned from death's bourne
I fear the shock of "clouds and rain."
You have my living self before you
yet you must grant my body
a spell of rest.

(*She turns aside*)

If only for a moment
I could calm my loving thoughts!

TUTOR CHEN (*enters*):

va Empty steps to secluded court,
flower shadows deep across green moss.

(*He knocks*)

Anyone there?

Chen Zuiliang seeks Scholar Liu.

LIU (*startled, like BRIDAL and SISTER STONE also*): Here's Tutor Chen,
what shall we do?

BRIDAL: Aunt, we must retire at once.

(*Exeunt*)

CHEN:

Curious
this sound of women's voices from gauze window
and someone holding the door shut from inside.

(*Knocks again*)

LIU: Who is it?

CHEN: Chen Zuiliang.

LIU (*opens the door and greets him*):

Your visit honors me,
my pardon for delay
properly to adjust headdress and gown. . . .

CHEN:

Something peculiar. . . .

LIU:

What's so "peculiar"?

CHEN:

vb Not Heaven's portals these
yet there in the court the breeze seemed to bring
angelic voices to my ear?

SISTER STONE (*reenters*): Ah, Tutor Chen!

LIU: Tutor Chen says he heard ladies' voices within. It must have
been you.

SISTER STONE: Yes,

on errand transcendental
comes a young nun to our lotus land.

CHEN: The same one who was here a few days ago?

SISTER STONE: No, another one.

CHEN: Very good, our Apricot Blossom Shrine is flourishing, surely
the beneficent influence of Miss Du from the shades. This was the
purpose of my call, to invite Master Liu to share a hamper with me
at noon tomorrow by the young lady's tomb. I'll take my leave now.

Time presses, but
today we plan tomorrow's meeting
to drink a cup by the young lady's grave.

LIU:

An honor, sir,
since barely a cup of tea does the Abbess offer.
I shall attend you.

CHEN:

In your own good time.

(*Exit*)

LIU: Good, Tutor Chen has gone, please ask Miss Du to come back.

(*BRIDAL reenters*)

SISTER STONE: What now, what now? Tomorrow Tutor Chen intends
to visit the young lady's grave. If all comes to light, number one
Miss Du will be labeled a demon, number two Commissioner Du
will be accused of failing in her upbringing, number three you, sir,
will be ridiculed for allowing yourself to be bewitched, and number
four I shall have to take the blame for opening the grave. What's to
be done?

BRIDAL: Sister Abbess, what do you suggest?

SISTER STONE: Lady, Scholar Liu will soon be leaving for the exam-
inations in Hangzhou. Your best course is to go along with the
wedding he proposes, have the lad find a riverboat for you, set sail

late in the night, and disappear from here. What do you think?

BRIDAL: Let it be so.

SISTER STONE: There is wine ready here. The two of you must make your prostrations before Heaven and earth.

(They do so, and take the winecup in their hands)

LIU:

via Three lifetimes, a single union,
for harmony all our days
we share this loving cup,
offer the golden chalice
swifter than spring wine drunk by graveside
to flush the cheek with peach bloom.

BRIDAL *(grieving)*:

Spring longings interred my body
like his who slept three years in drunken dream.⁴

Now one thought distresses me:

what match for your dragon-like, phoenix-like bearing
is this poor body of wood and clay?

LIU: How can you ask this?

vib Though strange the road to our union
yet what doubts could I have
on this our wedding night?
One blissful night
more precious to this "willow"
than the three locust trees of the ducal court;
my study graced by the nymph Orchid Fragrance,
why fear comparison with the romantic Liu Yung?⁵

BRIDAL *(sighs)*:

Hidden longings possessed my ghostly form
too feeble to resist
the surge of the male force.

Master Liu, I am still a virgin.

LIU: We spent nights of love together: how could your precious body have remained intact?

BRIDAL: That was my ghostly form: only now do I bring you my real self.

4. One of the early "tales of marvels" tells how Liu Xuanshi drank "thousand-day wine" and fell so drunk he was presumed dead. After three years in the grave he was roused from his slumber by the wine seller.

5. The fairy maid Orchid Fragrance had the same surname as Bridal; Mengmei has the same surname as Liu Yung, a Sung lyricist celebrated for his many loves.

It was my wandering soul visited my lover,
my body remains virgin as before.

BOATMAN *(enters, and sings two ditties)*:⁶

Lively lass courts tavern wight,
home at dawn with never a care:
"Goodwife made me stay the night,
needed my help to dress her hair."

Autumn asters, blooms of spring,
gossips all must have their tea.
Lock your storeroom, don't let 'em in,
or with your stock they'll soon make free.

SCABBY TURTLE *(enters)*: Hey boatman, boatman! Passengers for Hangzhou!

BOATMAN: Right here, right here! *(He mimes the act of rowing across)*

SCABBY: There's a boat ready outside the gate, please step aboard sir.

SISTER STONE *(preparing to take her leave)*: Master Liu, mistress, please take care on your journey.

LIU: There is no one to look after my wife, won't you come with us, Sister Abbess? I will see that you are rewarded when I receive my official appointment.

SISTER STONE: But I have made no preparations. *(Aside)* Yet when the truth comes out I shall be implicated—flight is the best plan! *(To LIU)* Very well then. If you will give my nephew something and tell him to tidy up after me, I will come with you to serve your lady.

SCABBY: Suits me.

LIU: Then I will give him this jacket.

(Removes his jacket and gives it to SCABBY)

SCABBY: Thank you, sir. But who's to take the blame if the truth comes out?

LIU: Just say you know nothing about it.

SCABBY: Very good then, I'll leave you.

Shaven-headed kid masquerades as a Daoist
while the Abbess acts as maid!

(Exit)

LIU, BRIDAL, SISTER STONE *(boarding the boat)*:

6. Based on two "Servants' Poems" by the Tang poet Li Changfu.

viiA A solitary sail leaves Nan'an in the darkness
in flight to Hangzhou, lovers' goal.

LIU (as BRIDAL weeps): But why these tears?

BRIDAL:

To leave for earth's far corner,
to leave for earth's far corner!
Three years I dwelt here,
three years this was my grave;
unable in death to return home
only now, living, may I rejoin my parents.

BRIDAL, LIU:

"What night is this?"
Endless our thoughts,
boundless our joy.

LIU:

viiB Like Qiannü's wandering soul⁸
I bear you back to life,
hibiscus flower fresh-plucked.

(BRIDAL sighs)

But why fresh tears now?

BRIDAL:

So helpless, so alone,
so helpless, so alone,
a perfume sachet lost in deep woods,
a gold hair ornament crusted in clay:
where in Heaven or mortal world
would my heart find its desire?

BRIDAL, LIU:

"What night is this?"
Endless our thoughts,
boundless our joy.

SISTER STONE: The night grows late, tell the boatman to moor, time
for you both to sleep now.

LIU: Romantic setting of moonlit deck, bliss of wedding night, how
to describe this joy?

7. See above, note 3.

8. Qiannü, heroine of a Yuan play from which *The Peony Pavilion* draws much
inspiration, wandered in spirit to join her lover, leaving her body apparently at
death's door until spirit and lover returned together.

viii Moonlit breeze at Blue Bridge,
ancient scene of faery love,
dispels the shadows of Hades' stream.

BRIDAL: My love, never before today did I understand what happi-
ness this mortal life can bring.

Three stars of the "Heart,"
two starry lovers
overcame the seven-starred coffin board.⁹
Tonight I come to you
whole in body, full of love,
yours in every desire.

SISTER STONE:

Out on the river
you swathed yourselves against the cold,
now you may take your ease.

LIU:

How could so small a boat
bear burden of anxious frowns?
Happy slumbers await us
far from the terrors
of Mount Tai's "Ghost-scaring Cliff."

ix Our mutual debt of love
withholds us from the Birthless Realm.¹⁰

BRIDAL:

Where now the grave of my long waiting
like her who turned to rock, so long she gazed
for sight of absent husband?

Ah my love,

the sea from whose dark depths
you drew me back to living world
is still no deeper than my love for you.

9. An elaborate conceit: Antares and its two companion stars (part of Scorpio)
form the "Heart" constellation, projected in a poem in the classical *Book of Songs* as
propitious for lovers. The "lovers" are Herdboy and Weaving Maid, Altair and Vega,
star-lovers who are permitted an annual meeting (seventh day of the seventh month)
across the Milky Way. The "seven-starred" board is the floorboard of the coffin, in
which seven holes were drilled.

10. Buddhist concept of a realm beyond birth and death. By her return to life Bri-
dal has of course renounced any such goal.

Envoi:

LIU:

In secrecy departing
beneath the shifting moon

SISTER STONE:

fair breezes blow on purpose
to escort the nuptial pair

BRIDAL:

no onlooker understands
the mystery of this barge

SISTER STONE:

only the happy bride
knows all there is to know.

SCENE THIRTY-SEVEN: *The Alarm*

TUTOR CHEN:

"Treetop catkins
motionless in light airs
humming verses on a spring stroll,
how late the shoots this year.
In the end, a hundred years
nothing but a dream,
blossoms fair as Western Maid
buried by last night's storm."¹

My gratitude to the former Prefect Du compelled me to undertake
the care of his daughter's burial place. Yesterday I arranged with
Scholar Liu to pay a visit to the grave, and that is my errand now.

(He walks on)

Grotto gate unlatched
still wrapped in cloud;
no matchmakers, yet the wild grass
multiplies apace.

I'll call for admittance. (He does so) Ha, this gate has always been
kept tight shut, yet today it stands open. I'll pay my respects to the

1. Pastiche of lines from four Tang poets.

bodhisattva. What's this? Cold and neglected, no incense lit, no
lamps burning. And where is Miss Du's spirit tablet? I'll see what
Sister Stone has to say about this. (He calls her name three times)
Gone home. I'll call my friend Liu. Friend Liu! Master Liu! Still no
answer. (He searches about) Tchah, Scholar Liu gone too, as soon as
his sickness was cured. No respects on arrival, off again without a
word of farewell. Not the way to behave, not the way to behave! I'll
have a look in the living quarters. Ai-yo, Sister Stone's moved out
as well! Ceremonial chimes, pots and dishes, bed and bedding, all
gone without a trace! A mystery! (He reflects for a moment) That's it.
The other day there was talk of some young nun, and yesterday I
heard voices. Liu Mengmei has been up to something here! They
must have left in the night. Not the way to behave, not the way to
behave! But let him be, I'll go through to the rear garden and pay a
visit to the young lady's grave.

(He walks on)

I Moss thickens and ages on secluded path.
Moon-watching kiosks, sheltering pavilions
long shuttered up.
Here long ago we laid our jewel to rest.

(He looks about him)

Oh, but where once the grave mound was piled high now all is
level! How is it that

no trace of tomb remains?

Have foxes, rabbits burrowed and brought it down?

These Taihu rocks have shifted to one side, only the apricot tree
stands as before. (He starts in alarm) Ai-yo, grave robbers have vio-
lated the young lady's tomb! (He weeps and cries aloud) Ah Heaven,
my young mistress!

II What scoundrel hardened his heart to break this tomb?

What buried treasure prompted this cruel scheme?

Ah young mistress, if only you had been pledged in marriage years
ago, then your body could have found its resting place!²

But no jade mirror given as betrothal pledge
could light the shades for her.

Solitary she lay,
worms threading her skull,

2. In the burial ground of her husband's family.

GUO (*yells*): You knocked me flying! I'm dead!

SECOND COLONEL (*grabs GUO by the neck*): How come, just as we're calling for Liu Mengmei, you're calling for Liu Mengmei as well? We're taking you to court.

GUO (*kowtows*): Very well, I can see the Apricot Shrine affair has come to light. I know nothing about it.

TWO COLONELS (*laugh*): Then it's obvious you *do* know about it! What's your relationship with him?

GUO: Sirs, I'll tell you:

 His family's orchards were in my care,
 his family's orchards were in my care
 and I've come all this way in search of him.

TWO COLONELS (*eagerly*): And you've found him?

GUO:

 Nowhere in the red dust of this world
 can I find a glimpse of my master.

TWO COLONELS: You must know where he is.

GUO: Have pity on me, sir, I heard tell he reached Nan'an, after that I've no idea.

TWO COLONELS: What a joke! He came here to Hangzhou, took the examinations, and ended up winning the title of Prize Candidate!

GUO (*amazed and delighted*):

 He is named Prize Candidate,
 he is named Prize Candidate!
 He has trampled the vegetable garden⁵
 and is gone to pluck the cassia blooms
 in the Imperial demesne.

Sirs, how can there be any problem finding him if he's been named Prize Candidate?

TWO COLONELS: How indeed!

 Ah Heaven, Liu Mengmei!
 Ah Heaven, Liu Mengmei!
 So many twists and turns
 and still no sign of you!

All right then, old fellow, we'll let you off and you can come along and help us search for him.

5. From an old joke about a poor scholar, long condemned to a diet of vegetables, who once ate a dish of mutton. He went to bed and dreamed of the Spirit of the Entrails, who told him, "That sheep is trampling your vegetable garden."

Envoi:

FIRST COLONEL:

 The road to advancement in the world
 a single examination.

SECOND COLONEL:

 The dragon's scales⁶
 lost in storms of dawn.

GUO:

 From the red dust I've gazed my fill
 down path to royal court.

TWO COLONELS, GUO:

 Where is the man
 who dwells now in alien land?

SCENE FIFTY-THREE: *Interrogation under the Rod*

LIU MENGMEI:

 I Beaks of malicious sparrows
 landed me in jail:
 what kind of treatment this for one
 who would hit the painted peacock's eye!¹
 For son-in-law-to-be, a cup of thin gruel,
 a palliasse of straw for head that should rest
 on hibiscus-embroidered pillow!

Ah Heaven, when

 one who at the Inn of Betrothals was linked
 by red thread with phoenix partner²
 now is trussed as prisoner;
 one who should tryst at Blue Bridge³
 is dragged along, a captive;

6. Dragon (metamorphosed from fish) symbolizes Prize Candidate.

1. The founder of the Tang dynasty won his bride by accepting her father's challenge to shoot an arrow into the eye of a peacock painted on a screen.

2. The Inn of Betrothals is where an old man links with red thread the feet of those predestined to marry.

3. Blue Bridge was the site of a legendary tryst between mortal man and fairy maiden.

one who should mount the dragon⁴
is made a common convict!

(He recites a Tang pastiche)

Spirit, in dream, south of the river,
body fettered to lonely inn,
this youth hiding in shame
covered in disgrace.

That my own wife's father
should behave like this—
ask a passing stranger,
what could he tell you?

Here I came, Liu Mengmei, at Miss Du's command, to pay my respects to her father the Commissioner in Huaiyang. Displeased by my appearance as a penurious scholar before his assembled staff, he deliberately declined to recognize me and ordered me back to Hangzhou under escort as a convict. But he is now on his way to his new appointment, and when he sees his daughter's self-portrait he cannot fail to acknowledge me. Until then, what a miserable situation!

JAILER (enters, accompanied by TURNKEY, each with rod in hand): "Summon Gao Yao, the Prison God, and you'll learn the jailer's might!" So, where is the new prisoner from Huaian prefecture?

(LIU salutes him with folded hands)

How about my introduction fee?

LIU: I have nothing.

JAILER: Entrance money?

LIU: Likewise.

JAILER (annoyed): Ha, nothing to offer, yet you have the impudence to salute me! (He beats him)

LIU: Don't hit me, just see what you can find in my baggage.

TURNKEY (searches baggage): Penniless bastard—one raggedy blanket wrapped around a little painting scroll. (He unrolls the painting) It's a bodhisattva Guanyin, I'll give it to Mum to make her offerings to.

LIU: It's all yours, but please leave me the painting.

4. "Mounting the dragon" refers both to Liu's examination honors and to his successful marriage.

(TURNKEY tries to make off with the painting; LIU holds him back)

MESSENGER (enters): "Dragon-riding son-in-law bound hand and foot, sorely wronged in the meeting with His Excellency." Where's the turnkey?

TURNKEY (bows): So it's our brother who attends the Minister of State.

MESSENGER (shows his warrant): One criminal required for delivery to the office of the Minister of State, to attend with baggage for investigation.

TURNKEY: Here's the prisoner, no baggage.

LIU: The jailers took it all!

MESSENGER: What did they take? To the Minister's office with these dogs of flunkies too!

JAILER, TURNKEY (frantically kowtowing): It's just this scroll and this blanket.

MESSENGER: Give them back to this scholar, you creatures, and let's be on our way at once.

(JAILER and TURNKEY assent, and MESSENGER starts to lead LIU off)

Better move a little faster, sir. "He who knows something of Confucian rites won't transgress the laws of Xiao He."⁵

(Exeunt. Enter DU BAO with ATTENDANTS)

DU BAO:

II Girdle of jade, crimson robe serpent-patterned,
I take my station here at center of universe.
Clear as autumn frost
I have rested my sword against the Kongtong Mountains
yet now that I return
as Chief Minister to the court
my hair no longer gleams a glossy black.

(He recites a Tang pastiche)

With autumn we spent the last of our strength
to break the besiegers' lines
to take charge of "Silver Terrace and Crape Myrtle Court"
in our office of Chief Minister.

5. Xiao He instituted the first code of laws at the beginning of the Han period.

But looking back, the sighs that fall
for sorrows of this floating life
and the constant disputation
before the east wind's blowing!

Chief Minister Du Bao, appointed to this lofty post by Imperial favor for my pacification of the Huaiyang rebels. But here comes some strolling vagabond, just the other day, with a tale of being my son-in-law. I committed him to detention in the Hangzhou prefectural jail, and today must have him brought in for interrogation.

(Enter JAILER and TURNKEY, escorting LIU, fettered)

GATEKEEPER: Prisoner from Hangzhou prefectural jail, enter!

LIU: My respects to you, esteemed father-in-law! (DU remains seated and laughs scornfully) The rites, and music, should come foremost in men's estimation! (ATTENDANTS bellow at him. He sighs)

III Mere timid student
though his talents like a rainbow arch overhead
faces the awful majesty,
the overbearing pomp
of the Chief Minister's court.
How can I bring myself to compromise
to bow and scrape
while he makes not a move
but sits there proud and stiff?

DU: You, penniless bookworm, what sort of a man are you, dragged here as a criminal yet refusing to kneel before the seat of the Chief Minister?

LIU: I am the scholar Liu Mengmei from South of the Ridge, and Your Excellency's son-in-law.

DU: Tchah, my daughter died three years ago. She had known neither exchange of betrothal gifts of silks and teas, nor any "pointing to the belly" of a prenatal match: so where would any son-in-law of mine come from? Ridiculous! Disgraceful! Guards, take him away!

LIU: Who'll dare to take me?

DU:

IV A daughter I had, but partnerless
and dead in the flower of her youth.
Your tale is a baseless slander

for how could you claim even the most distant kinship,
you from South of the Ridge,
myself from far Sichuan,

too widely separate to breed
even our livestock in heat?
Where did it happen that you attached yourself
like a climbing vine to our house of Du?
A vagabond in search of patronage
babbling of relationship
to deceive the citizenry!

LIU: I am such a son-in-law of yours as has studied day and night, taking the light reflected from snow, to establish his name on the cloudy heights of the examination lists! Would I be so bereft of all resource as to come before Your Excellency with a tale of deception?

DU: Still answering back! Search this man's baggage, it is sure to contain some forged document or seal and we shall take thief and booty together.

TURNKEY (opens LIU's baggage roll): One tattered blanket, one Guanyin scroll.

DU (examines scroll and starts in surprise): Ha, here's proof of robbery, this is my daughter's likeness! Have you ever visited Nan'an, and are you acquainted with a certain Sister Stone?

LIU: I am.

DU: And Tutor Chen?

LIU: Yes.

DU: Heaven is all-seeing! It's you who plundered my daughter's tomb! Take him away and beat him!

LIU: Who'll dare to beat me?

DU: Have this thief brought to a speedy confession.

LIU: Who are you calling thief? You speak of "thief and booty together," when what you should be seeking is lovers "in flagrante"!

V You call this portrait "proof . . ."

DU: The portrait was obviously buried in my daughter's grave!

LIU: . . . but you must learn how
from fissure between mossy rocks
a trace came into view . . .

DU: A confession, at once!

LIU:

. . . and my "confession" must be a riddle
of resurrection's bliss
that "warded off evil only to court disaster"!

DU: And did the vault contain also jade fish and golden bowl?

LIU: Indeed, a golden bowl
from which two lovers drank in celebration,
a jade fish

whose twin eyes symbolized
our happy union in the shades!

DU: Anything else?

LIU:

Tinkling jade roller,
clinking golden chain.

DU: This was all the work of that Sister Stone!

LIU:

Ah, Sister Stone in her wisdom
helped the lovers on their way
while His Excellency Du cares only
to shine as a thief taker!

DU: He has openly confessed. Have my clerk bring a sheet of good, sturdy official paper, and indite thereon his confession: "The criminal Liu Mengmei, for opening of coffin and theft of contents, sentence: to be beheaded." When this has been drawn up let it be presented to the convicted party and have him sign below the word "beheaded." Completed document to be placed on file.

CLERK (*enters, bearing charge sheet*): May Your Excellency be pleased to indite the sentence.

(DU does so; CLERK orders LIU to sign; LIU refuses)

DU: What a scoundrel, born for the executioner's sword!

VI Thief born and bred, every inch a villain
up to every wicked scheme.

You still refuse to sign?

LIU: Who am I, to sign such a thing?

DU:

A painter, used to brush and paper,
ink and inkstone—
use them now to make confession.

LIU: I have committed no theft, no villainy.

DU:

Your villainy was the fruit
of false, malicious scheming.

LIU: My actions were for your esteemed daughter's sake.

DU:

Such ingenuity, and stubborn with it—
all to deceive and cheat.

LIU: Your daughter lives!

DU: Lives, does she, when you

have scattered her jade-like bones
and stabbed my heart with pain!

LIU: Scattered them where?

DU:

There in the garden pond,
setting her lonely spirit
to grieve in the moon's cold light.

LIU: Who's witness to all this?

DU: I have the report of Tutor Chen.

LIU: The lengths I went to for my lady Heaven witnessed and earth witnessed, but what could Tutor Chen know of all this? For love's sake I

VII worshipped her portrait, called her name aloud,
awaited in dread our ghostly assignation,
burnt holy incense, broke the grave's strong seal,
revived her heart with magic elixir,
bestowed my warmth upon her quickening flesh,
bathed her cheek to new luster,
infused love's stirrings in her heart,
raised her jade limbs, gently supported her;

for love's sake I

battled with breath of life for her dear fragrance,
rescued her, mortal, from the dark paths of Hell.
With love's own magic
I healed this maiden, brought her to breathe and move—
does it make sense
that now our romance,
all our "moonlit breezes,"
should come to nought?

DU: What kind of rambling tale is this thief telling? He is possessed by demons. You there, bring peach-wood rod to beat him, fresh-flowing river water to spurt over him, and we will exorcise these demons once for all.

TURNKEY (*exits, and returns, bearing peach-wood rod*): "To rid your gate of demons, first plant peach trees in your garden." Peach-wood rod, ready and waiting.

DU: String him high and beat him.

(ATTENDANTS string LIU high on a frame and mime the motions of beating him. As LIU yells and writhes in pain, ATTENDANTS go through a comic routine of beating and spurting water over the imaginary "demons" that flee from his body)

TWO COLONELS (*enter, bearing regalia, and followed by CAMEL GUO, supporting himself with his staff*):

What a commotion, early and late—

no one can find the Prize Candidate!

We've spent all this time seeking Liu Mengmei; if today goes by without our finding him we'll just have to beat Camel Guo!

CAMEL GUO: You mean I have to stand in for him? Here, I'll buy you some wine and we'll go on calling for him. (*He shouts*) Prize Candidate Liu Mengmei, where are you?

(*DU listens intently as they exit, still calling, then turns to question the TURNKEY*)

TURNKEY: They can't find the Prize Candidate from the recent examinations, and His Majesty has ordered them to search the streets calling his name.

LIU: Brother, tell me the results—who is the new Prize Candidate?

DU (*annoyed*): Inquisitive scoundrel—slap his face!

(*TURNKEY does so; LIU yells in protest*)

TWO COLONELS (*reenter, still accompanied by GUO*): Voices from the Prime Minister's mansion, still no sign of Prize Candidate. Eh? What's all the fuss in the Chief Minister's mansion? (*They listen*)

GUO: That voice from within—sounds like my master! (*They enter the mansion; GUO recognizes LIU, and bursts into tears*) It's my master they've strung up and beaten!

LIU: Help, save me, all of you!

GUO: Who ordered you beaten, sir?

LIU: This Chief Minister here.

GUO (*beats DU with his staff*): Then I'll beat the Chief Minister if it costs me my old life!

DU (*furious*): How dare you behave like this?

TWO COLONELS: We are under Imperial command to seek the Prize Candidate Liu Mengmei.

LIU: Brothers, I am Liu Mengmei.

(*GUO releases LIU from his bonds;*

DU tries to stop GUO but falls to the floor)

Camel Guo, how did you get here?

GUO: I've been looking for you all this time, sir, and now here you are, Prize Candidate, I'm overjoyed!

LIU: Can it be? Quickly, hurry out by the Qiantang Gate and report this to Miss Du!

TWO COLONELS: Now that we've found the Prize Candidate we must leave also to report to the Grand Chamberlain. "Before Imperial audience, first we must bother you, sir." (*They exit*)

DU: Now that that pack of scoundrels has left we can proceed with our interrogation of this fellow. You men, string him up again for me.

LIU: Let me say a word in my own defense—don't you believe I am Prize Candidate?

DU: Whosoever may be Prize Candidate, there will be a list of successful entrants as evidence. What proofs can you show me? Tie him up again, beat him, and there's an end of it.

(*LIU yells again in protest*)

MIAO SHUNBIN (*enters, followed by ATTENDANTS bearing ceremonial headdress and robe*):

Straw sandals worn through, still no sign—

here was our quarry all the time!

Stay your hand, sir, here is the list of successful candidates.

VIII See now this name, inscribed in first place,

by the vermilion Imperial brush:

Liu Mengmei, the very peak and ridgepole.

DU: Must be someone else.

MIAO: My humble self examined and proposed him.

LIU: Tutor Miao! Save me, save your student!⁶

MIAO (*laughs*):

You have strung up and beaten

a giant of the world of letters

making too free with your peachwood rod!

Now that the Chief Minister is aware of the situation, make haste, you officers, to invite the Prize Candidate down from his bonds!

(*ATTENDANT releases LIU, who yells "It hurts!"*)

Poor fellow, poor fellow!

A gentle scholar's pain

by scholarly gent inflicted,

sensitive soul in agony

from the insensitive rod!

LIU: He is my father-in-law!

6. The successful examination candidate regarded his examiner in the light of teacher.

MIAO: So, then,

the fledgling phoenix crushed
beneath the weight of Mount Tai!⁷

ATTENDANT: Scholars of old tied their hair to a beam to keep from nodding off, pricked their thighs with an awl to stay awake, but the Prize Candidate hurts worse than these!

MIAO: Enough of this, clothe him now in his robe of honor.

DU: What robe of honor, strip it off him! (*He tries to do so*)

LIU: Ha, so you would dare

ix resist Imperial proclamation,
rail against His Majesty's hand,
rip apart the royal gift that cloaks me!
The visit from a son-in-law should be
a solemn occasion of "mounting the dragon"
yet here in bridegroom's finery I call in vain,
the blooming peach trees of my marriage
all ruined by your peachwood rod!

(ATTENDANT adjusts LIU's headdress and sticks a flower in it)

Now feast your eyes, Your Excellency,

on headdress decked with flowers
in token of the weight of royal favor!

DU: This Liu Mengmei must be some other person. And if this is really he, attending the examinations as a mere first-degree scholar, then surely he should have been awaiting publication of the results. What was he doing, examinations over but the lists still unpublished, to go stirring up a fuss in Huaiyang?

LIU: Your Excellency was not to know. Publication of the lists was delayed by the insurrection of Li Quan. Your daughter, learning that you were engaged in action against the rebels, bade me come to you: first, to present myself, second, to bring you the glad word of her return to life, and third, to offer my services as your aide. These good intentions have been sadly betrayed, but I am still your son-in-law!

DU: No son-in-law of mine!

MIAO, ATTENDANTS:

x Shame on Your Excellency, judged capable
of service as Chief Minister

7. Mount Tai, in the sense of prop or support, was a metaphor for father-in-law.

yet ignoring this worthy Lü Mengzheng
in the poverty of his disused kiln!⁸
Such stubbornness, such wrath
we find among our elders!

(*They laugh*)

Up on Mount Tai

the Father-in-law Peak is toppling!

DU: I regret only that I did not jail this grave robber until his sentence was confirmed!

LIU:

xi Confucius bestowed his daughter's hand
on Gongye Chang, held prisoner though innocent—
but you would place me in bonds of your own accord!
Liu Daozhi was antiquity's worst thief—
but Liu Mengmei stole to win himself a bride!
Your Excellency has powers of life and death
to "regulate yin and yang"—
yet faced with this task, you would have stayed
"speechless before the spring breeze."
I thought to be welcomed in gilded hall
with singing and music of pipes,
to flourish my silken whip
along the capital's boulevards,
to feast like Liu Yi in the Dragon King's Palace—⁹
but like old Fucha you scorned
this suitor for your daughter's hand.¹⁰
What pride will be mine on the day
when Your Excellency bows before me
ushering the Prize Candidate
to the bridegroom's place of honor!
Ah, then we shall see the fruition of
cuckoo's fading dream
by peony pavilion!¹¹

8. A classic instance of the man of worth in straitened circumstances, Lü Mengzheng has already been alluded to by Tutor Chen in scene 22.

9. Liu Yi, hero of a famous Tang tale, rescued the daughter of the Dragon King and received her hand in marriage.

10. See scene 36, note 1.

11. For the connotations of the cuckoo, see scene 10, note 2.

Your Excellency must excuse me now—your son-in-law is off to attend his banquet!

XII Be careful lest you
sweep from the astronomers' view
the star of the God of Letters
or melt with the flames of your fury
a talented son-in-law pure as ice!

It seems to me the time is close at hand when all will recognize
the worth of a bridegroom "at home with
flowers and willows"—

if only there could come
some understanding from Your Excellency
overaddicted to peachwood rod!

(Exit)

DU: A strange, strange affair! A thief—or a demon? Attendant, I should like a word with Chen, the newly appointed Grand Chamberlain.

ATTENDANT: Very good, Your Excellency. "It's chamberlains look like demons—the Prize Candidate's quite human!" (He exits)

CHAMBERLAIN (enters; he is of course none other than TUTOR CHEN, newly dignified):

Sleepless in old age, bustling about my duties,
thrice cracks the whip at every morning levee.
Now court emoluments from our Sacred Master
replace the petty fees of village school!

Chen Zuiliang at your service, but Grand Chamberlain now, appointed by His Imperial Majesty in recognition of my services against the rebels. All this I owe to the gracious patronage of His Excellency Du Bao, to whom I am even now on my way to express my gratitude.

ATTENDANT (reenters and greets CHEN): I was just in search of you. Please wait while I announce you.

(He does so. CHEN greets DU)

DU (smiles): My best congratulations! "Yesterday a tutor, simple and plain, now behold our Grand Chamberlain!"

CHAMBERLAIN CHEN: "New favors I cannot repay, but old griefs may be swept away." —These recent days have brought three causes, sir, for your rejoicing: number one, appointment as Chief Minister; number two, your daughter once more among the living; number three, your son-in-law named Prize Candidate.

DU: Fine lessons you must have given the girl, to turn her into a demon like this!

CHEN: Your Excellency should overcome such scruples and accept her.

DU: No, sir, you are mistaken. This is some evil witchcraft. My duty as a leading servant of the throne is to expose and exorcise it.

CHEN: If that is your intention, will you permit me to submit the matter to His Majesty at once and inform you of the Imperial will?

DU: That will be best to do.

Envoi:

DU:

Night studies at Cangzhou
and the monsters listening too.

CHEN:

Is it the breath of demons
that dims the Star of Letters?

DU:

What man can determine
the affairs of this world?

CHEN:

Hang high the magic mirror
to banish a hundred sprites.

SCENE FIFTY-FOUR: *Glad News*

SPRING FRAGRANCE:

I Dew strikes chill to timid soul,
plane tree trembles by painted well
and like the windlass, round and round
endless turns love's karma.

Ah me, three years now since my young mistress dreamed of a handsome scholar, took sick and died. The master and mistress grieved over and over for her solitary spirit—never realizing that there she was, alive and well, settled in with her penniless student-lover down by the Qiantang River! Now mother and daughter are reunited: of all the strange and wonderful things in Heaven and here on earth, nothing is impossible! Today my young mistress

SCENE FIFTY-FIVE: *Reunion at Court*

TWO GENERALS OF THE GUARD (*bearing Imperial orb*):

"Sun and moon radiate Heaven's virtue,
hill and stream secure the royal dwelling."

The Lord of Myriad Years gives audience, and we take up our stations here.

CHAMBERLAIN CHEN (*enters*):

1a Clouds lift over jeweled palace
from royal censers haze of smoke ascends
in universal peace.

(*He prostrates himself in the direction of the Emperor, offstage*)

As sun throws shadows over steps of gold
accept, Majesty, your Chamberlain's prostrations.

(*He recites a Tang pastiche*)

Phoenix pennants wave
at first touch of dawn
now be the royal wisdom
conferred on all his subjects.
A beneficent prince has power
to cleanse all impure vapors:
ask not after mortals
but after ghosts and spirits.

Chen Zuiliang at your service, newly appointed Chamberlain in the court of the great Song Empire. Your servant began his career as a learned but lowly scholar in the prefecture of Nan'an. When Liu Mengmei opened the tomb in which the daughter of His Excellency Du Bao lay buried, I hastened at once to Yangzhou to report. Out of consideration for his former employee, His Excellency commissioned me to negotiate the surrender of the rebel Li Quan. My success in this was reported to His Majesty, who graciously rewarded me with appointment as his Chamberlain. Who could foresee that prior to His Excellency's return to the court he would receive a visit from Master Liu? He seized him at once and sent him under escort into custody in Hangzhou. But, strange to relate, Master Liu had already submitted an examination essay that secured him the honor of Prize Candidate. Court officers sought this Prize Candidate—and

discovered him strung up for interrogation under the rod in His Excellency's mansion! The officers burst through the gates of the residency, released the Prize Candidate, and bore him away, mounted in triumph. But so much for all this. Next people were saying that Bridal Du, whom formerly I tutored, had returned from the dead and was in the capital. His Excellency the Chief Minister was enraged by the notion that his late daughter had turned into some lustful harpy, and asked me to present his memorial requesting the extermination of demon and grave robber alike. In his submission he accused Liu Mengmei of plundering the tomb, and some malevolent sprite of posing as his late daughter, and he insisted that both be executed. This memorial of His Excellency's was a succinct exposition of the facts of the case. But right on its heels came Liu Mengmei with his own memorial in his own defense. The Imperial edict came down: "We have perused both submissions and find subtle mysteries therein. This woman returned from the dead shall appear in audience to present her case for our Imperial verdict." I began to wonder whether Miss Du might not truly have returned from the dead, and so I had court officers inform her of the edict and summon her to audience at the fifth watch. Truly,

by the Rock of Three Incarnations¹

see them pass and repass

before the Dais of Myriad Years

discriminate true from false.

But here as I am addressing you come the Chief Minister and the Prize Candidate in person.

(*Enter DU BAO, followed by LIU MENGMEI, each dressed in court hat and robes, and carrying the long ceremonial tablet for recording Imperial instructions*)

DU BAO:

1b Disgruntled I don my robes of state,
bewildered attend in audience
a most mysterious case.

LIU MENGMEI:

Riddle hard to solve
we submit for His Majesty's decision.

My respects to you, father-in-law.

1. See scene 1, note 3.

DU: No father-in-law of yours!
 LIU: My respects, then, Chief Minister.
 DU: No minister to you, either!
 LIU (*laughs*): As the old poem says,
 "Apricot bloom and snowflake
 vied to crown the spring
 and the poet laid down his brush
 to administer their dispute."²

Here come I, Dream-of-Apricot, vying for recognition: it is for you, Chief Minister, to lay down your brush!

DU: Ha, a criminal who can twist a literary allusion!

LIU: What crime have I committed? It is you, Chief Minister, who are the criminal.

DU: I, who have achieved the pacification of the rebel Li Quan, what crime is mine?

LIU: Li Quan, "Li the Whole"? That's something the court was not informed of: you never pacified "Li the Whole," only his better half!

DU: What do you mean, "only his better half"?

LIU (*laughs*): All you did was offer Dame Li a pacifier to trick her into withdrawing her men—that's why I say, only the half, not the whole!

DU (*enraged, makes to tussle with LIU*): Who says this? We'll argue this out in court!

CHEN (*rushes forward*): Who dares create such a commotion before the Imperial gate?

(*They confront each other*)

So, it is Your Excellency! And this is the new Prize Candidate. Please desist!

(*DU releases LIU*)

What has the Prize Candidate done to annoy Your Excellency in this way?

DU: He has called me a criminal—what crime have I committed?

LIU: You ask what crime: three major faults in your treatment of your daughter.

DU: What faults?

2. The quatrain, by the Song poet Lu Meipo, concludes that though the snowflake excels in whiteness it must yield on the point of fragrance. The punning relates to "apricot" (Liu's personal name) and "minister" (Du's title).

LIU: Fault number one: as Prefect in Nan'an you permitted your daughter a spring stroll.

DU: True!

LIU: Fault number two: upon your daughter's death you failed to ensure the return of her body to her native place for burial, but built instead a private shrine.

DU: Enough!

LIU: To reject a son-in-law in disdain of his poverty, to string up and beat a Prize Candidate Imperially appointed—does this not make a third major fault?

CHEN (*laughs*): But the Prize Candidate has committed faults of his own in the past. Make peace between you now, for the sake of your humble servant and our past relationship.

LIU: What past relationship dare I claim with the esteemed Grand Chamberlain?

CHEN (*laughs*): I believe you are unaware, sir, that your lady wife once engaged me as her tutor!

LIU: What—a ghost engage a teacher?

CHEN: You are unmindful of past connections, sir.

LIU (*remembers*): Then you, Sir Chamberlain, are none other than Tutor Chen of Nan'an?

CHEN: None other.

LIU: Then, sir, we have a past relationship indeed, and no slight one! What possessed you to spread false reports of me as a robber? If as a tutor you made false report, then I fear for the truth of your submissions as Grand Chamberlain!

CHEN (*laughs*): Today my submissions shall be the truth. I see your lady approaching, it is time for you two gentlemen to make your kowtows in preparation for audience.

VOICE (*from within*): Let the supplicants present themselves.

(*DU and LIU advance together and perform their kowtows*)

DU: Your Majesty's servant Du Bao craves audience.

LIU: Your Majesty's servant Liu Mengmei craves audience.

CHEN: Rise!

(*DU and LIU take their stations to left and right*)

BRIDAL DU (*enters*):

Bridal, maiden from the springs below
 restored to light of sun, enters the court.

II On all sides, halls of gold,

spreading roofs of emerald glaze,
tiles paired as mandarin ducks;
crack of ceremonial whips
filling the ear.

TWO GENERALS (*shout*): What woman is this, blundering up the steps to the throne? Seize her!

BRIDAL (*alarmed*):

Ruffians so fierce
screaming at me:

ah, in Yama's palace in Hades were
blue-faced demons, jutting tusks,
yet not so fearful as these!

CHEN: Is it my student Miss Du who approaches?

BRIDAL: This Chamberlain looks very like Tutor Chen; I'll call him:
Tutor Chen! Tutor Chen!

CHEN: Here!

BRIDAL: Blessing on you, Tutor Chen!

CHEN: My pupil, now a ghost—take care lest you affright His Majesty!

BRIDAL: No more of this! Say not
some third-ranked devil
of a "Blossom Seeker" pretends to highest honors³

but rather

the wife of the Prize Candidate
presents herself for audience.

(*Exit GENERALS*)

VOICE: Let the supplicant approach with ceremonial posturings.

(*BRIDAL does so, and cries "Myriad years to His Majesty!"*)

Rise!

(*She does so*)

Hear our decree: let her father, Du Bao, and the Prize Candidate, Liu Mengmei, advance and declare whether this be the true Bridal Du or an impostor!

LIU (*gazes at BRIDAL, and makes a gesture of distress*): Bridal, my wife!

DU (*gazes at BRIDAL, and makes a gesture of rage*): Diabolical! The liv-

3. "Blossom Seeker" (*tanhua*) was the title given to the candidate who placed third in the palace examination, behind the Prize Candidate.

ing image—what impudence! (*Turns again to face backstage, kneeling to make his submission*) Your Majesty's servant Du Bao begs reverently to submit: my daughter died three years ago, but this woman is her very likeness. Beyond all doubt this is a false impersonation by some fair-featured harpy or seductive fox-spirit. Hear my plea, my prince:

III Years, now, since my daughter perished:
by laws of yin and yang, of light and dark
how could she live again?

One stroke from Your Imperial Majesty
here on the golden steps to the throne
and this demon will stand revealed.

LIU (*weeps*): How hard this father's heart!

(*Kneels in turn to make his submission*)

The very pattern of stern fatherhood
with his Five Thunders he would obliterate⁴
my wife's fair name and history.

DU, LIU (*rising*):

Not the earthly Yama, Judge Bao himself,⁵
could crack this mystery
that only the Imperial will can mediate.

VOICE: Hear our decree: it is our understanding that a human being will cast a shadow, and a demon fear its own reflection in a mirror. In the possession of our court astronomers is the magic mirror of the First Emperor, which reveals internal structure. Let our Chamberlain place Bridal Du before this mirror, and report also whether her form casts a shadow or her feet leave footprints when she walks by the blossoming trees.

CHEN (*assents, and shows BRIDAL the mirror*): My pupil, are you truly mortal or ghost?

BRIDAL:

IV Mortal or ghost—how to reply?
Let my image fall now
on flower-patterned mirror's face.

CHEN: No change in the mirror image, this is indeed a human form. Now we must walk by the blossoming trees to report upon your shadow.

4. Five Thunders is a formula used by Taoist priests in exorcism.

5. Bao Zheng, incorruptible and sagacious judge of the Song dynasty, was known as the mortal Yama (King of Hades), and is the hero of many stories and plays. The infernal Judge of scene 23 alludes to him toward the end of his long second aria.

(They walk, and CHEN observes BRIDAL's shadow)

BRIDAL:

Fresh tribulation:
but here in flower-filled shade
lotus-bud feet in swaying gait
leave as they must
their shallow imprint on the earth.

CHEN (in response to the Emperor offstage): Bridal Du leaves footprints and casts a shadow, she is indeed of human mold.

VOICE: Hear our decree: Since Bridal Du is of human form, let her now report the circumstances of her death and resurrection.

BRIDAL: Myriad years to Your Majesty! Your servant in the sixteenth year of her blooming painted her own self-portrait, after a dream in which a young scholar appeared amid the willows and flowering apricots. Your servant sickened of longing, died, and was buried beneath an apricot tree in the rear garden. Then came in truth this scholar, surnamed Liu for "Willow," and with the name Mengmei, "Dream-of-Apricots." He found my portrait and gazed on it longingly morn and eve. From this cause your servant appeared to him and became his bride. (She grieves)

Ai-yo, the desolation!

Here was in truth my death and resurrection
and such the reversal
of yin and yang, of dark and light.

VOICE: Hear our decree: Let the Prize Candidate Liu testify whether these words of Bridal Du be true or false. And how did it come about that he bore in advance the name Mengmei, Dream-of-Apricot?

LIU (bows and shouts "Myriad years!"):

v Your servant from the southern shores
drifted far in search of partner
until in dream before a smiling beauty
he bore a branch of blossoming apricot.
Waking, your servant
set out to attend examination
and rested from a sickness in Nan'an
to him unreal as Nanke's anthill kingdom.⁶

6. In a well-known Tang story, the Prefect of Nanke served a king who proved to be an ant, his kingdom an anthill under an old tree stump.

Your servant found temporary lodging in the Apricot Shrine of Nan'an prefecture. There in the rear garden he discovered Bridal Du's self-portrait. Moved by compassion for this mortal soul, he was successful in restoring her to living human form.

DU (kneels): This man who dares to lie in Your Majesty's very presence has already debauched my daughter's memory. For your servant's daughter

was buried a virgin maid
among the springs of Hades—
how should she consent to wild liaison
with this adventurer?

DU, LIU:

Not the earthly Yama, Judge Bao himself,
could crack this mystery
that only the Imperial will can mediate.

VOICE: Hear our decree: We have heard the saying, "One who waits not upon the command of father and mother and the ministrations of the matchmakers will be disdained by parents throughout the land." What is your justification, Bridal Du, for yourself negotiating your own betrothal?

BRIDAL (weeps): Myriad years! In return for the grace of Liu Mengmei by which your servant returned to life, she was indeed
vi betrothed without matchmaker's intercession.

DU: Who was your guarantor?

BRIDAL: My guarantor was
the baleful funeral star.

DU: And your attendants?

BRIDAL: My attendants were
female yakshas, sprites of Hell.

DU: Preposterous!

LIU: All was in proper form for union of yin and yang, of dark and light.

DU: Proper form! Fine words from a red-lipped southern barbarian!

LIU: You mock me, Chief Minister, as a betel-chewing barbarian from South of the Ridge—but Liu Mengmei's red lips, white teeth are nature's own.

BRIDAL: No more of this! Father, your daughter stands living here before you and you refuse to acknowledge her, yet Liu Mengmei took me in marriage though three years a ghost!

Your spite bitter as wolfsbane
to one returned to world of light

yet you revile the mildness
of betel-red on my husband's lips!

Father, will you not acknowledge me, even in the presence of my mother? (*She points offstage*) Admit now

my mother, gentle as lily-herb,⁷
to free the throat's obstruction!

MADAM DU (*enters*): Observing that my daughter is still in audience before His Majesty, I make my way through the palace gates to plead her case. (*She enters the audience chamber, performs salutations, and kneels*) Lord of Myriad Years! Zhen, Lady of the First Rank and wife of Chief Minister Du Bao, presents herself in audience before Your Majesty.

DU (*reacts in astonishment, as does CHEN*): Where can this lady have come from? Surely it is my wife! (*He kneels*) Your Majesty's servant begs to submit: Madam Du died at the hands of the Yangzhou rebels, your servant has already besought the Imperial grace of posthumous honors. This is beyond doubt some malicious sprite to complete the imposture of mother and daughter, daring the light of day to deceive Heaven itself! (*He rises*)

LIU: This lady I have never seen before.

VOICE: Hear our decree: Since Madam Du died in rebel hands, how could she be accompanying her daughter here in Hangzhou?

MADAM DU: Myriad years! (*She rises*)

vii On the Yangzhou road
beset by rebels raping and plundering
what course for us
but to seek refuge in the capital?
To Hangzhou we came by night
there to encounter Bridal in the darkness
startling our very souls to flight.
Then mother and daughter, hearts as one
from death released found a new life together.

VOICE: Madam Du's submission places her daughter's return to life beyond question. But the maid Bridal, three years in the shades, must have been witness to many mysteries of karma. Those princes

7. In this song Bridal alludes to her father's condemnation of her southerner husband as a chewer of betel nut (which is in fact a mild aid to digestion) and puns on two medicinal herbs, wolfsbane (*fuzi* "attached child"), a harsh drug that she associates with her father, and a kind of fritillaria, *beimu* "cowrie mother," a mild sedative that represents her mother.

and ministers of former days who lacked virtue: what punishment was theirs? Let Bridal Du make true submission of these things.

BRIDAL: These matters might be left untold, but there is much to tell.

CHEN: My pupil, "the Master never talked of prodigies, feats of strength, disorders or spirits."⁸ In the world of men, the records of every prefecture and county are carefully checked to guard against misrepresentation, but what kind of safeguards can they have *there*?

BRIDAL:

viii In the courts of Hell, each case
is precisely documented—
no possibility there of libel or falsehood.
The panoply of princes there is halved
and ministers bear chains of jade
and golden cangues about their necks.⁹

CHEN: The word of a girl pupil, not to be taken as serious proof. But if this is what you say—what treatment was meted out in Hades to the old Grand Tutor Qin Hui?¹⁰

BRIDAL: Of this I know something. What treatment indeed! No sooner did he step inside the gates than

thud, thud, black heart pounded with a thousand mallets,
squish, squish, purple liver ripped in three.

ALL (*startled*): Ripped in three?

BRIDAL: They said it was one piece for the great Song court, one for the court of Jin, and one for that long-tongued wife of his.

CHEN: And what was the treatment for the lady of the long tongue?

BRIDAL: The punishment for Madam Wang, on her arrival in the shades, was to strip off her phoenix headdress and robe of sunset gauze till she stood stark naked. Then out leaped bull-headed yakshas with fingernails seven inches, eight inches long, who softly raked her throat and

tore that long tongue from its roots.

CHEN: Why was this?

BRIDAL: Because

the east-window plot was exposed!

8. *Analects of Confucius*, VII, 20 (Waley's translation).

9. The cangue was a kind of portable pillory locked round the neck of a criminal, whose hands were clamped to the bottom of the frame.

10. Minister to the Song court and the most notorious traitor in Chinese history. Numerous stories and plays treat of the "east-window plot" which he and his malicious wife, Madam Wang, devised to entrap the patriotic General Yue Fei.

DU: Devil talk! But let me put this question to you, fiend: In the mortal world there is a punishment prescribed for elopement and abduction, is there such punishment also in the shades?

BRIDAL: Indeed, there is. The seventy strokes upon Liu Mengmei were given on your orders, Father, but won your daughter's ransom in the shades.

Blows fell from peachwood rod
on criminal condemned
and honored scholar
suffered at the hands of minions.
And if there be untruth in this, and your daughter
guilty of love's sweet crime—
still can you not find it in you to forgive
so gently nurtured a child?

VOICE: Hear our decree: Having given careful attention to the deposition of Bridal Du, we are no longer inclined to question her rebirth. Now let our eunuchs escort her past the Southern Gate, and let father and child, husband and wife acknowledge each other and all return home to resume their proper relationships.

(ALL shout "Myriad years!" and
move in procession round the stage)

MADAM DU: Felicitations, my lord, on your high advancement.

DU: How could I ever have hoped to find you safe and sound, my dear!

BRIDAL (weeps): Oh, my father!

DU (refuses to look at her): Here in broad daylight—keep your distance, demon, keep your distance! Tutor Chen, I'm beginning to entertain suspicions about Liu Mengmei, that he is a ghost also.

CHEN (laughs): Then he must be the Demon Kick-the-Dipper!¹¹

MADAM DU (joyously): Now that we find our son-in-law to be the new Prize Candidate, our daughter's return to life is doubly joyful! Come, sir, salute your mother-in-law.

LIU (bows): I was remiss in welcoming you, Mother-in-Law, on your arrival here. I humbly ask your pardon.

BRIDAL: Congratulations, sir, my best congratulations.

LIU: Who told you my news?

BRIDAL: I heard it from Tutor Chen.

11. See scene 22, note 2.

LIU: But I have been the victim of your father's rage.

CHEN: Let the Prize Candidate salute his father-in-law.

LIU: As my father-in-law I salute you, Yama, authentic King of the Ten Courts of Hell!

CHEN: Sir Prize Candidate, let me try to ease matters between you: now that

ix man and wife have ridden round
the transsubstantial wheel
and our lord the Prince
smiles on the course you have set.
I fear only that the Chief Minister
will disclaim his dowry obligation
so let us now see mother and daughter,
father and son-in-law
signed, sealed and delivered.

LIU: Sir Chamberlain, I am a criminal.

CHEN (laughs): You should make it easier for me—
not joke with me!

We hail your seizure of the cassia bough from Heaven
yet close-matched to this feat
was the snatching of a sweet flower from caverns of earth!

BRIDAL (sighs): Tutor Chen, if you had not set me to strolling in the rear garden, how should I ever have set eyes on this captor of the cassia bough?

DU: Diabolical! As if there were no suitors of matching rank and status—what is this nonsense about "setting eyes on" Liu Mengmei?

BRIDAL (laughs): It's the sight of his
x black silk scholar's cap
and court robes draped about him
gives a spark, spark,
sparkle to my eye.

Ah my parents, there are people who build high towers decked out with colored silks, yet even in broad daylight can't succeed in attracting a son-in-law of official rank. And here I, your daughter, from ghostly caverns of my dreams have made the conquest of no less than the Prize Candidate—what is this talk now of "family rank and status"?

Descendant of the great Du Fu
you are grown so used to browbeating your daughter

you fail to recognize the eminence
of a scion of Liu Zongyuan!¹²

Father, please acknowledge me as your daughter.

DU: Leave this Liu Mengmei, and I will acknowledge you when you return to my house.

BRIDAL:

You would have me return to my girlhood home,
quit my husband's house.
I'd be an azalea blooming still for you
but that would not stop the cuckoo's crimson tears.¹³

(She weeps)

Ai-yo, here before
the father I knew in life,
the mother who gave me birth
my dizzy soul loses its hold on sense.

(She faints away)

DU *(startled)*: Bridal, my daughter!

CHEN *(gazes offstage)*: Now what is this old Taoist sister doing here—and Spring Fragrance with her, still among the living? Curious, curious—what was I shown, then, there in the rebel camp?

SISTER STONE, SPRING FRAGRANCE *(enter)*:

XI A settlement in court,
a settlement in court.

(They look about them)

A whole host of high officers! And the Prize Candidate too, standing there pouting by our young mistress!

SISTER STONE:

Surely they've made
some crazy judgment in this case
if they've heeded the babblings
of that crazy tutor!

CHEN: So it's you, Spring Fragrance, my former pupil! But this old nun is a fraud.

SISTER STONE: Ha, Teacher Chen, fraud is it? When it was you who reported Madam Du dead, and Spring Fragrance dead as well!

12. See scene 2, note 5, and scene 3, note 1.

13. See scene 10, note 2.

You buried them in paper coffin
with your own tongue as shovel!

(She turns to LIU)

Greetings, Master Liu.

LIU: Greetings, Aunt Stone. But where have I met this servant girl before?

FRAGRANCE: I was there at the peony pavilion, sir, when you and my young mistress had your dream.

LIU: A living soul in living witness!

SISTER STONE, FRAGRANCE:

Beyond imagining
from spectral return to mortal union,
beyond conceiving
ghostly tricks forsworn for living fullness!

And you, our Master Du Bao,
were you King Yama in person
this would escape your judgment!

(Exeunt)

CHEN: Here within the Imperial palace, where men kneel in reverence and ghosts fall in submission, who dare show disobedience? Now, young mistress, it is for you to urge the Prize Candidate to acknowledge the Chief Minister as his father-in-law and thus bring all to completion.

BRIDAL *(smiling, she coaxes LIU)*: Master Liu, make your prostrations before your father-in-law!

(LIU refuses to budge)

XII How, how, how
can you be so stubborn?

(She tugs at his hands, then tries to press his shoulders down)

Please, please, please
straighten your girdle of jade,
bend your waist
cross jade-white hands in reverence!

LIU: Blows by the hundred from that peach-wood rod!

BRIDAL:

Blows, blows, blows
in penitence like King Wen in the old tale.

(She tugs at DU's sleeve)

Come, come, come
lay aside a father-in-law's
majestic wrath!

(She points to LIU)

This, this, this
is he who burnt paper cash
to invite me as his bride;
his, his, his
was the tea I drank on the Feast of Cold Food.

(She points to CHEN)

You, you, you
in search of office
babbled your tongue dry
with false reports.

(She points to LIU)

Let, let, let
his fault be absolved
in the opening of my coffin!

(She points to DU)

Now, now, now
you have railed enough, my father,
at your diabolical child!

HAN ZICAI (*enters, wearing headdress and girdle of office, and bearing the Imperial proclamation*): Kneel one and all for the reading of the Imperial decree: "In consequence of the marvels related to us we are pleased to bestow our Imperial blessing on this family reunion. The Chief Minister Du Bao to be advanced to the first rank of the nobility. His lady Madam Zhen to be invested as Dame of Huaiyin Commandery. The Prize Candidate Liu Mengmei to be appointed Scholar of our Imperial Hanlin Academy. His wife Bridal Du to be invested Mistress of Yanghe County. All to be escorted to their place of residence by our Courier Han Zicai." Kowtow, give thanks for the Imperial favor! (*He turns to LIU*) My felicitations to the Prize Candidate!

LIU: Han Zicai, old friend! How came you to this position?

HAN: After we two parted I was entered for examination by the

Prefect of my locality as a descendant of the sage Han Yu. I came here to the capital and won appointment as Imperial Courier, and this is how we are able to meet again.

LIU: A marvel to match the rest!

CHEN: So Scholar Han is your old friend!

(ALL move in procession round the stage)

ALL:

XIII Predestined match to astonish belief,
predestined match to astonish belief,
dreamer from the shades, from the Yellow Springs below,
so greatly blessed,
so greatly blessed,
her nuptial hall the Imperial court!
In audience all,
in audience all,
joyously rejoined,
joyously rejoined,
as edict from world of light
dispels the darkness of the courts of Hades.

LIU: Henceforth

XIV together we shall trace
our peony-pavilion dream.

BRIDAL:

My bridegroom, sun-warmed "southern branch"
whereon I, northern bloom, may rest—
did ever ghost in all the world
know such a love as mine?

Envoi:

BRIDAL:

So green the grass on Imperial tomb
in time of the Cold Food Feast;
all other music ceases
when deerskin drum beats loud.
Ah sorrow, when our fragrant souls
yearned but failed to meet
and springtime heart was tortured
by peony pavilion.
Thousandfold regrets
for the passing of the blossoms:

travelers leave, travelers come,
 a single cup of wine.
 New songs sung to an end—
 joy still unseen,
 birdcalls rising
 from the blossoming branch.

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