

immediately died, so that no one dared to take her as a wife. Chen Ping, however, decided that he wanted to marry her. It happened that there was a funeral in the city and Chen Ping, being poor, acted as one of the hired attendants, helping out by arriving before the guests and leaving after the rest. Dame Zhang noticed Chen Ping at the funeral and was much impressed by his unusual good looks. Aware that he had attracted her attention, Chen Ping purposely waited until the other guests had left before leaving, and when he did Dame Zhang followed him to his house. His home was at the far end of a lane and backed against the city wall, with some old worn matting hung up for a gateway. Yet outside the gate were many tracks made by the sort of carriages ridden in by people of means.

When Dame Zhang returned to her own home, she said to her son Zhong, "I wish to marry my granddaughter to Chen Ping."

"Chen Ping is poor and does nothing to earn a living," objected her son. "Throughout the whole district people just laugh at his ways. Why should you want to marry this girl to him?"

"Anyone as good-looking as Chen Ping will never stay poor and despised for long," said the old lady, and in the end she gave him the girl for a wife. Because Chen Ping was so poor, she also lent him money to use for the betrothal gifts and sent him supplies of wine and meat for the wedding celebration. The old lady cautioned her granddaughter, saying, "You must never be inattentive in serving your husband just because he is poor! Treat his older brother as you would your father, and his brother's wife as you would your mother."

After Chen Ping had married the daughter of the Zhang family he found himself enjoying increasing prosperity and day by day broadened his circle of acquaintances. He was made steward of the local shrine and put in charge of the sacrifices, and he divided the sacrificial flesh among the worshippers with such fairness that the elders all remarked, "What an excellent steward young Chen is!" Chen Ping sighed and said, "Ah, if I could only become steward of the empire I would divide it up in the same way as this flesh!"

When Chen She began his uprising and became king of Chen, he sent Zhou Shi to seize and conquer the region of Wei and set up Wei Jiu as king of Wei, encountering the Qin armies in an attack on Linji. Chen Ping had earlier taken leave of his older brother and gone with a group of young men to Linji to serve the new king of Wei, who made Chen Ping his master of carriage, but paid no attention to his suggestions. When someone slandered Chen Ping to the king, he escaped and ran away. After some time, Xiang Yu invaded the region and reached the Yellow River, whereupon Chen Ping became a follower of his,

accompanying him through the Pass to the destruction of Qin. He was awarded a noble rank for his services. When Xiang Yu returned east to rule from the city of Pengcheng and the king of Han marched back from his territory to conquer the three kingdoms of Qin, Sima Ang, the king of Yin, revolted against Xiang Yu. Xiang Yu gave Chen Ping the title of lord of Xinwu and sent him to lead the followers of King Jiu of Wei who were in Chu in an attack on the king of Yin. The king of Yin surrendered and returned to the side of Xiang Yu, whereupon Xiang Yu sent Xiang Han to make Chen Ping a colonel and award him twenty pieces of gold. Before any time had passed, however, the king of Han attacked and won control of the region of Yin. Xiang Yu was furious and set about to execute the generals and officers who were supposed to have conquered Yin for him. Chen Ping, fearful that he would be among those executed, sealed up the gold which had been awarded him and sent it back by messenger to Xiang Yu, while he himself, bearing only his sword, fled by a secret route into hiding.

As he was crossing the Yellow River, the boatman ferrying him began to wonder why such a fine, good-looking man should be travelling alone. Suspecting that he was a military leader in flight and would be likely to have gold or jewels or other precious goods concealed about his waist, he began to eye him with thoughts of murder. Chen Ping, afraid of what the man might be thinking, stripped off his clothes until he was naked and began to help the boatman with his oar. The man realized then that Chen Ping had nothing concealed on him, and gave up the idea of murder. Eventually Chen Ping reached Xiuwu, where he surrendered to the king of Han.

Chen Ping asked Wei Wuzhi to arrange an audience for him with the king of Han and as a result was summoned by the king. At this time Shi Fen (later known as "Lord Ten Thousand Piculs"), who was acting as page to the king of Han, took Chen Ping's calling card and led him in to the interview. After Chen Ping and six other guests at the interview had come forward and received gifts of food, the king announced, "You may return to your lodgings now."

"I have come on special business," said Chen Ping, "and what I have to say cannot wait until another day." Accordingly the king began to converse with Chen Ping and was much pleased with him. "What was your position under Xiang Yu?" he asked. "I was a colonel," replied Chen Ping. On the same day the king honoured Chen Ping with the rank of colonel, and made him one of his carriage attendants and a superintendent of the army. At this the other military leaders began to grumble vehemently. "The king gets hold of some runaway