

MA RUFEEI

The Tale of the White Snake
An Opening Section

I

Xu Xian went for a walk in spring to sweep the graves,
And he feasted his eyes on the ten miles of West Lake.

Who could have known that suddenly a shower would fall?
From the bank he hailed a little boat to take him back home.

Unexpectedly he met with a couple of mistress and maid,
Two glamorous charmers like a flower, resembling a jade!¹

These demons Blue and White were extraordinary beauties,
So he fell a hundred percent in love, a hundred percent joy!

Because he had been a virginal male for seven generations,
She wished to repay old karma, deeply moved by his kindness.²

They joined the boat and idly talked, chattering and laughing,
And they didn't hide from each other their name and village.

All three together, they went to the shrine of Lord Tin—
They served him tea, borrowed his umbrella, hung around.

The servant Little Blue acted as the Old Man of the Moon.³
They were united in wedlock that night in the bedroom!

She urged him to open his own drugstore selling herbs,
But he told her that he didn't have the money he needed.

She claimed to be the daughter of a regional commander,
With a private fortune of millions of cash at her disposal!

The young man believed her and took her story to be true—
How could he know she had dispatched five demons to get
The silver from the county strongroom, so creating disaster?

¹ In Chinese poetry, jade refers to white jade.

² Some versions of the legend include the detail that, as a snake, lady Bai had once long ago been saved from death by an earlier incarnation of Xu Xian.

³ According to a well-known classical tale of the Tang dynasty, the Old Man of the Moon ties prospective marriage partners together with a red thread. In later literature the Old Man of the Moon is a common designation for a matchmaker.

II

Xu Hanwen⁴ was a dashing and sophisticated young man, and his only remaining close relative was his elder sister. Once he returned home, she asked him where he had been: "You went for a walk to sweep the graves until this time?"

He said: "I met this precious daughter of a regional commander, willing one hundred percent, in love one hundred percent! Her servant girl Little Blue served as the Man of the Moon, so we became husband and wife in the bedroom last night. My ladylove also gave me silver of the highest quality. She has a private fortune of millions—I'll never be poor!"

Since time immemorial women show no understanding—Who'd think it was silver from the Qiantang County vault!

His sister's husband, a courtroom usher, had his suspicions: "He must have met some moonlight fairy or some demon!"

And when Xu Xian produced a silver ingot from his gown, He saw at first sight it was stolen goods—what a fright!

He immediately made a full confession to the authorities, and yamen runners took Xu Xian to the county office:

The stolen goods were evidence he was the true thief, and mistress and maid could only be a pair of robbers!

Immediately police officers were sent off to the shrine To arrest in one swoop that couple of mistress and maid! Who'd know they'd hide their true shape by some magic?

III

He had the goods but was not the thief; banished to Suzhou! The yamen runners who were his escorts did not tarry.

In a terrible mess, in rags and tatters, he arrived at the inn, So the first thing he did was deliver the letter he carried.⁵

In a new gown and shirt, shoes and socks, and silk scarf, He was cleansed of the misery and shame of a moment ago.

Then he met the women a second time in Strung Pearls Alley, The neighbors invited them in; they were beaming with joy!

⁴ Hanwen is the style or adult name of Xu Xian.

⁵ When Xu Xian was banished to Suzhou by the Hangzhou authorities for his complicity in the theft of government funds, his Hangzhou employer provided him with a letter to a friend in Suzhou, asking him to look after Xu's well-being.

Husband and wife had been parted after only a short time, so as soon they were reunited, their tears streamed down.

She immediately wanted to give him some silver again, but he was afraid it was stolen goods, so didn't touch it!

They opened a drugstore under the name of Baohetang, and he didn't have to worry about his food and clothing.

On the fourteenth of the Fourth Month, in the middle week, He went to the temple of Patriarch Lü of Undiluted Yang.⁶

And made a request to a Daoist priest trained at Mt. Mao.⁷ The amulet on a strip of paper startled mistress and maid,

Who only let go once they had strung him up in the sky!

On Double Fifth lady Bai made the mistake to drink realgar wine,⁸ and against her own will she had to show her original shape.

As soon as Xu Xian saw her like this, his souls all flew away.

So he collapsed on the floor, off to the Lands of Darkness!

Alas, in her own house she lacked the immortal medicine, so she decided to go and steal it on the top of the mountain.

As soon as she had run into the immortal lad White Crane, The Southern Pole Immortal Greybeard did her a great favor:

In his compassion he secretly gave her the numinous herb, and greatly satisfied with herself, she rode off on a cloud.⁹

Once he had taken the concoction, he returned to the living, and from this moment on, he secretly harbored suspicions.

But for the time being he played his part of a happy husband.

⁶ Patriarch Lü of Undiluted Yang (Lü Chunyang) is Lü Dongbin, one of the Eight Immortals. Lü Dongbin was widely believed to roam the world, killing demons with the sword he carried, and was venerated as a god.

⁷ Mt. Mao, to the south of Nanjing, is one of the holy mountains of Daoism. The mountain was said to have been the home of the three Mao brothers, who were venerated as founding fathers in the fourth-century Shangqing tradition of Daoism. During the Song dynasty (960–1278), Mt. Mao was home to a new set of revelations which emphasized exorcism. The Daoist priest deduces from Xu Xian's appearance that he is the victim of a demon and promises to provide him with an amulet that will subdue her. His magical skills are no match, however, for those of lady Bai.

⁸ Double Fifth was a summer festival celebrated on the fifth day of the Fifth Month. On this day, everyone was expected to drink wine laced with realgar, which was believed to have the power to expulse all evil powers.

⁹ As cranes eat snakes, the immortal lad White Crane, an acolyte of the Southern Pole Immortal Greybeard, is an implacable foe of lady Bai. The God of the Southern Pole Star determines longevity.

IV

When the Gu family of Kunshan recognized the stolen goods, He was arrested, and, by the magistrate, banished to Zhenjiang.¹⁰ For a third time he ran into this couple of mistress and maid, And for a second time they made arrangements to open a shop.

By the power of his compassion and wisdom the monk Fahai Knocked on his gate and on purpose asked for his sandalwood.¹¹ Because of the breath of the demonic blue and white snakes, He was concerned that Xu Xian eventually might lose his life.

He accepted him into Buddhism and made him his disciple; Now taking refuge with the Three Jewels, he would be safe.¹²

Mistress and maid ascended the mountain, asking him to come back, But all of a sudden, the Chan master displayed a heart of stone.¹³

Crab generals and shrimp soldiers all strengthened her forces, And Golden Mountain was all of a sudden inundated by floods.

But the power of Buddha and Dharma is indeed without limit; Meditation staff and cartil hassock undid mistress and maid! Fortunately she was pregnant with a future top-of-the-list!¹⁴

The number of her evil karma, it appeared, still was not filled;

By chance he was computing yin and yang inside his sleeves.¹⁵

"I have no idea where these two demons may have gone off to; Most probably they have already arrived at Broken Bridge!"¹⁶

¹⁰ On one occasion when Xu Xian wants to go out in Suzhou, White Snake provides him with beautiful gadgets to wear. It turns out these had been stolen from the Gu family, and when servants of that family recognize these articles, Xu is once again arrested for theft.

¹¹ The precious sandalwood had belonged to a merchant, whose boat was wrecked on purpose by lady Bai, so Xu Xian would be enabled to retrieve this treasure.

¹² The Three Jewels refer to the Buddha, the Dharma (the law, or the Buddha's teachings), and the Sangha (the monastic community of monks and nuns), constituting the totality of Buddhism.

¹³ Chan (*Dhyana, Zen*) means meditation. It also became the name of one of the most influential Buddhist sects, which in the West is better known by the Japanese pronunciation of the term, "Zen."

¹⁴ A top-of-the-list (*zhantop*) is the designation of the person who passes the triennial metropolitan examination for selection of candidates for official service with highest honors.

¹⁵ Broken and unbroken lines (yin and yang) make up the six lines of the hexagrams in the *Book of Changes*. Here Fahai is secretly, with his hands tucked into his sleeves, counting out the lines of the appropriate hexagram in order to understand the true nature of his opponents and their fate.

¹⁶ Broken Bridge (*Duanqiao*) is one of the bridges in the Su Dike in West Lake. Its original name was Duan Family Bridge (*Duanjia qiao*), and the actual bridge is not broken at all. The meeting of Xu Xian, lady Bai, and Little Blue at Broken Bridge, at which an enraged Little Blue tries to kill Xu and has to be

The old monk sent him off to be united with them once again, And set a date for a later meeting that was still some time off.

Little Blue gnashed her teeth as she was seething with hatred; She looked at Xu with rage in her eyes, like a highway robber:

"Such an act of treacherous perfidy is truly impossible to forget!"

V

"Congratulations! Your unicorn son already is one month old!"

Before her dressing mirror, lady Bai applies makeup, combs her hair.

The most dangerous thing in this human world is a man's heart:

A cruel husband without any feeling of duty, any feeling of love!

But in final analysis he didn't have any intention to harm her—

So what was the cause of the untied bows appearing in the mirror?¹⁷

They made their appearance at the order of Chan master Fahai;

The cause of this disaster was all due to this one old ascetic.

In one moment he wiped away all the love of those few years,

And now her remorse and regret were too late—in her panic

She could only jump up and down, grasp with both her hands:

Husband and wife, mother and son were cruelly torn apart!

She exclaimed: "My dear son!" she exclaimed: "My husband!

I realize I've committed a crime that is so big it covers heaven.

I raised the wind and waves that flooded the Golden Mountain!

By drowning these millions of lives I created a deep evil karma,

So when I will die on this day, where will I eventually end up?

From this moment on, we'll be unable to see each other again!"

Awash in tears, she lowered her head and exclaimed: "My son,

Your clothes for the next few years I made with my own hands,

Your own mother has spent quite some effort in making them.

Your aunt will nurse you and spoon-feed you like a mother,¹⁸

Her work and labor in raising you will far surpass that of me.

When you grow up into an adult you must filially serve her;

Do not become one of those who forget all love and all duty.

Make sure people won't call you as mean as an owl or a stag!"

¹⁷ dissuaded from doing so by the pregnant lady Bai, was very popular on stage; it was also often depicted in New Year's prints (*nianhua*).

¹⁸ The begging bowl of the Buddha is often seen as an object of great magic power, which is shared by the begging bowls of holy monks. Fahai apparently uses two begging bowls to capture the demon.

¹⁹ The aunt here refers to Xu Xian's elder sister.

VI

From his earliest youth Xu Mengjiao was extremely intelligent; He devoted himself to the study of books, and never grew tired. Other people made fun of him as the offspring of a snake-spirit, but he didn't distinguish between snake and demon as for family.

"Now the Black Dragon may well be the offspring of some snake, but it raises clouds and rides on them, drifting on seas and lakes."¹⁹ But he never had seen the kind face of the mother who bore him, and when he came home, he cried and cried all through the night.

When he was free he at once went to Thunder Peak Pagoda,

And, facing north, he burned incense and candles most sincerely.

He devoted all his effort and strength to the study of the books,

And all of sudden his name appeared at the top of the tiger-list!²⁰

As top-of-the-list he passed the exams, and came back home,

Bringing with him a patent of nobility for his original mother.

But when he personally tore down Thunder Peak Pagoda,

He did not find a single snake coiled up below its foundation.

How could he know that the Golden Mother already had ferried her across?²¹

She ascended the nine heavens, riding a cloud of compassion.

Xu Xian had shaved his hair and become a monk, day and night

Beating the bell and the drum, as part of his ascetic practice.

The filial son Mengjiao so found his father and his mother:

They disclosed the immortal design, then ascended the hills.

With the Three Teachings accomplished, all hatred was gone.²²

¹⁹ The divine Black Dragon is the rain god.

²⁰ If the emperor is a dragon, his ministers are tigers.

²¹ Golden Mother is one of the common designations of the Queen Mother of the West, as gold or metal is the element of the West in the scheme of the Five Elements. The Queen Mother of the West is one of China's most ancient female divinities. She is believed to hold court atop Mt. Kunlun, and to be the ruler of all female immortals. "To ferry across" originally is a Buddhist term, referring to the achievement of enlightenment, as nirvana is often designated as "the other shore." Here it refers to achieving immortality and ascending to heaven.

²² The Three Teachings refer to Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Xu Xian becomes a monk, and so achieves the teachings of Buddhism; lady Bai becomes immortal, which is a Daoist practice; and Xu Mengjiao passes the Confucian examinations and becomes an official.

THE PRECIOUS SCROLL OF THUNDER PEAK

武祥

李后甫



From left to right: Xu Xuan, Mrs. Li, and Li Jangfu

ANONYMOUS

*The Precious Scroll of Thunder Peak
in Qiantang County of Hangzhou Prefecture in Zhejiang*

Part One

Now *The Precious Scroll of Thunder Peak* is first opened:
Repaying a virtue, repaying a favor she comes to Wulin.¹
You good men and faithful women listen with reverence:
When you see your nature with a clear mind it turns true.

The story of *The Precious Scroll of Thunder Peak* took place during the years of Emperor Zhenzong of the Great Song.² Let me explain that Mr. Ernei in Jiating Prefecture of Sichuan is densely populated by demons born from the womb, from an egg, from moisture, and from magic, and that its grotesques are fully occupied by human beings of the nine classes and the divine immortals.³ Miraculous animals appear here again and again. In one of these grotesques lived a white snake. Because she had practiced self-cultivation for over one thousand seven hundred years, she did not desire anything immoral, and did not harm any living being. As she continuously absorbed the essence of the sun and moon, she could take on a human shape, ascend and travel on clouds and mists, and call and command the wind and rain. With a firm mind and sincere intention she consistently revered the bodhisatva Guanyin of the Southern Sea.⁴ Her heart and mind always recited her name, and

¹ Wulin is one of the alternative names for Hangzhou.

² The Northern Song reigned from its capital at Kaifeng from 960 to 1126. The reign of Emperor Zhenzong lasted from 998 to 1022.

³ Mr. Ernei in western Sichuan is one of the holiest mountains of Chinese Buddhism. See Hargett, 2006.

⁴ Guanyin ("Observing the Sounds") or Guanishiyin ("Observing the Sounds of the World") is the Chinese translation of the name of the bodhisatva Avalokitesvara, who became a widely venerated deity in China from the fourth century onward. According to a chapter in the popular *Lotus Sutra*, Avalokitesvara will come to the aid of anyone who sincerely invokes his name, and can take on thirty-three different shapes in doing so. From the tenth century onward, Avalokitesvara was increasingly revered in the shape of a beautiful young woman. It is in this shape that Guanyin became one of the most beloved divinities throughout East Asia. See Yu, 2001. The story of her incarnation as the princess

her mind and nature achieved supernatural intelligence. Now it happened to be the day of the great congregation of the peaches of longevity at Emerald Pond.⁵ Traveling on an auspicious cloud Guanyin followed the sounds, intent on saving creatures from suffering and greatly displayed her tender compassion. When she saw this white snake, she called her and took her along.

If only a single drop falls down from her willow wand,
 One is seated on a lotus flower here in this world of man.
 The bodhisattva Guanyin displayed her tender compassion,
 And took along Bai Suzhen who had cultivated her mind.⁶
 Even though this demonic creature was no human being,
 She had created merit by a thousand years of self-cultivation.
 That's why Guanyin took her along with her to Emerald Pond—
 Her tender compassion ferries us across the ford of delusion.

Just look how all the many assembled immortals together came out to welcome the bodhisattva. Each and every one kowtowed and, arranged according to rank, they went to the site of the banquet to offer their congratulations on this happy occasion of the birthday. In truth:

Tender compassion surpasses reciting the Buddha's name a thousand times;
 Committing evil destroys all merit acquired by ten thousand sticks of incense.
 At the edge of the world the many immortals congregate,
 As her phoenix-carriage descends from the ninth heaven.
 One only has to spend seven days here on this mountain,
 And thousands of years have passed in the world of man.

Miao-shan provided the materials for one of the earliest preserved precious scrolls, viz. *The Precious Scroll of Innate Mountain* (*Xiangshan baojuan*). For a translation, see Idema, 2008. Putuoshan, a small island in the Zhoushan archipelago off the Ningbo coast in Zhejiang, became a major pilgrimage site for Guanyin devotees. Guanyin, as she manifests herself on this island to her worshippers (seated on a rock next to a bamboo grove, and holding a vase of pure water and a willow wand) is known as Guanyin of the Southern Sea.

⁵ Emerald Pond atop the mythical Kunlun Mountain at the western edge of the world is the dwelling place of the Queen Mother of the West, the ruler of all female immortals. In her paradisaical garden the peaches of immortality ripen once every three thousand years. The anonymous author of this text seems to associate the banquet of the peaches of immortality hosted by the Queen Mother of the West with the birthday of Guanyin. In some texts of this period, however, Guanyin and the Queen Mother of the West are identified, or one is considered to be a manifestation of the other.

⁶ Bai Suzhen ("Blanche White") is the name given to lady Bai in many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century versions of the legend.

"Dear immortals, please sit down, sit down!" Now on the occasion of the birthday of the bodhisattva, they all came to the banquet to congratulate her.

The loftiest virtue by far is the merit of extending life:
 A white crane carrying a flower reaches the ninth sphere.
 The Old Man of Eternal Longevity offers her his blessings;
 The Queen Mother of the West presents her with magic peaches.
 Han Xiangzi // plays his jade flute—⁷
 Determined to practice cultivation he abandoned his wife.
 When snow locked Indigo Pass and no horse could proceed,
 He converted Han Yu, who so ascended to the ninth sphere.
 The emperor's brother-in-law Cao // loves to roam freely—
 Not caring for riches or glory he rejected his brocade gown.
 Of all things in this world practicing self-cultivation is the best—
 He beats the execution-ground, immortal dappers in his hands.
 Zhongli of the Han // is short by nature—
 Understanding the depraved character of the ways of the world,
 He practiced the miraculous Way in the Zhongnan Mountains,
 And his achievements are the loftiest of all Eight Immortals.

Li Dongbin // is a dashing fellow—
 On his back he carries his dragon-sword to behead all monsters.
 Compassionate, he saves from suffering, transmitting the Way—
 For all eternity, to this very day, he is the most famous of all.
 The Immortal Maiden He // looks most charming—
 Wearied of accompanying the red dust, she preferred solitude.
 She firmly practiced true self-cultivation for thousands of years,
 And returned to the realm of immortals to enjoy its freedom.
 Lan Caihe // is by far the youngest of them all—

He rejected all riches as he loved to practice self-cultivation.
 Practicing on famous mountains he achieved the true fruit;
 Holding a corbasket in his hands he rides the ocean's flood.
 Iron Crutch Li // bellows and roars—
 A dark face and thick eyebrows; he limps because of his leg.
 With full devotion he cultivated the methods of life eternal;
 Leaning on his crutch he ascended the clouds to float about.
 Old Gardener Zhang // is most advanced in years—
 His hair and his beard are all gray, and his locks are thinning.

⁷ The first line of this four-line stanza has been broken into two short lines of three characters each, and the division between these two short lines is indicated by "//". This is also the case in the following seven stanzas.

As he is riding backward on his donkey he laughs out loud,
Having abandoned this world with all its riches and splendor!⁸

The immortals all came to the peaches of longevity meeting,
And they all had a drink at this immortal birthday gathering.

Mushrooms at the grotto entrance displayed their lucky colors,
Cranes and deer before the steps presented auspicious jades.

The Greybeard of the Southern Pole enjoyed a game of go,⁹
And Patriarch Dongfang's desire was still to steal the peaches.¹⁰

Chen Tuan suddenly woke up after sleeping a thousand years,¹¹
Patriarch Peng reached the advanced age of eight hundred.

These all at one time had been no more than some dry bones,
But once they achieved the elixir, they ascended to heaven.¹²

The immortals offered their congratulations to Her Majesty,
Wishing her continuous happiness and limitless longevity.

Her Majesty the Queen Mother thereupon gave the order
To bestow on them eight of the big peaches of longevity.

The immortals thanked her for the gift of the immortal peaches,
And riding their auspicious clouds they followed the winds.

I will not expound on the circumstances of these immortals,
But let me disclose the White Snake's karmic background.

⁸ The preceding thirty-two lines provided snapshots of each of the Eight Immortals, who enjoyed great popularity from the thirteenth century onward; see Kwok and O'Brien, 1990. The legends of each of these immortals were first collected in the sixteenth century as a vernacular novel entitled *Journey to the East* (*Dongyue ji*), which is available in a French translation by Nadine Perronn; see Wu Yantai, 1993. The tale of Han Xiangzi—the grand-nephew of the famous Tang dynasty confucianist Han Yu (768–824)—who refused to consummate his marriage and is said to have converted his great-uncle to Daoism after the latter was banished to Chaozhou in 819, was developed in the early seventeenth century by Yang Erzeng into another vernacular novel, *The Complete Tale of Han Xiangzi* (*Han Xiangzi quanzhuan*); Philip Clart translated this novel; see Yang Erzeng, 2007.

⁹ The Greybeard of the Southern Pole Star determines the length of one's life.

¹⁰ The historical Dongfang Shuo lived in the second half of the second century B.C.E. He served at the court of Emperor Wu of the Han, and enjoyed a reputation as a poet and wit. Legend made him an immortal; it is said that he once stole some of the peaches of immortality.

¹¹ Chen Tuan lived during the tenth century. He lives on in legend as an immortal who could sleep for one hundred days on end.

¹² The process of self-cultivation resulting in immortality is often described in alchemical terms. Through a strict regimen of physical and meditational exercises the practitioner develops, through the fusion of contradictory but complementary elements in his or her body, the elixir or medicine of immortality.

The story goes that Her Majesty the Golden Mother of the Western Pond noticed the girl by the side of the mahasarva Guanyin, and promptly asked where she came from. The Golden Mother¹³ then disclosed her karmic background: "All who want to become an immortal have to pay back the virtues and favors shown to them in the past before they can join the ranks of the immortals. Seventeen hundred years ago you were a tiny little snake, and a beggar was about to cut you in half with one stroke of his knife in order to take out your gall. Fortunately there was a timber merchant by the name of Lü Tai who was filled with tender compassion. He bought you for a hundred copper coins and set you free, and that's why you could practice self-cultivation to this day. But this man has been reborn in Hangzhou, and his name is now Xu Hanwen. You should go there and repay his favors, and then you can come back to join the congregation." When lady Bai had heard these words of the Golden Mother, she immediately took her leave, and after she also had kowtowed to the mahasarva Guanyin, she returned to her mountain.

Our story also tells that in her grotto there also lived a black carp fish demon, who was called the Seven Stars Daoist.¹⁴ He had practiced self-cultivation for many years, and the two demons had become sworn siblings. The white snake greeted her sworn brother, and said: "I once made a religious vow, which I have not yet fulfilled, so I have to take my leave of you to go to the Tianzhu Monastery in Hangzhou in order to venerate Guanyin."¹⁵ The Daoist replied: "In Hangzhou, I remember, you have West Lake with its superior scenery. If you go there, my sister, I am afraid you will be ensnared by the red dust.¹⁶ The merit of your seventeen hundred years of self-cultivation has not been easily obtained, and one misstep will be enough to lose it all!"

The bond of marriage is determined by one's former life—
She had attended the feast of the peaches of immortality,
The Seven Stars Daoist told her original karma, and said:
"Dear sister, please listen to what I will clearly explain.

Now West Lake is a place of great splendor and beauty,
All people there are dashing romantics, without a care!
When you go there, I fear your mortal heart will return,
So you will fall into transmigration and lose your merit!"

¹³ Golden Mother is an alternative designation for the Queen Mother of the West, as the West is associated with metal in the Five Elements correlation theory.

¹⁴ The "black carp" is the northern snakehead. The Seven Stars are the stars of the Dipper (Ursa Major), a powerful divinity.

¹⁵ Hangzhou's Tianzhu Monastery is to this day a major center of Guanyin veneration.

¹⁶ "Red dust" is a common metaphor for the mortal world and all its sensual attractions.

When lady Bai had heard him, she replied as follows:
 "My dear brother, please listen to what I will have to say.
 In going there I, your sister, have no other intention but
 To venerate Guanyin in Tianzhu with greatest sincerity.
 I am determined to go and visit the Spirit Vulture Peak!¹⁷
 To pay homage to the Buddha and beg him for a miracle.
 Your little sister definitely will not tarry on the road;
 I will come back and practice self-cultivation with you.
 I definitely will not pay attention to splendor and beauty,
 So, dear brother, please be not worried on my behalf!"

The Seven Stars Daoist said: "Dear sister, if you have made up your mind to go, I certainly will not stop you. But please make sure to return quickly, so I will not have to be anxious all the time." Lady Bai said: "Well, let me then say good-bye!"

When painting a dragon or tiger, it's hard to paint their heart;
 When you know a person, you know his face, not his karma.

When Suzhen had said her good-bye to her dear sworn brother,
 Who was more to her than a real brother, she wanted to leave.
 Now as soon as she pointed her fly whisk to the sky above,
 A magical cloud had formed within a moment, within a blink!

Riding on that cloud she ascended the sky—indeed, the fame
 She enjoyed for her magical arts was not unfounded at all!
 "A hundred mountains and thousands rivers I cross at will;
 The Long River and also the wide ocean I pass at liberty!"¹⁸
 In one single journey she traveled to the city of Hangzhou,
 But our scroll now first expounds on the Dharmas King!

Sakyamuni Buddha, seated on his precious throne of nine kinds of lotus flowers,
 was explaining the sutras and preaching the Dharmas to the arhats and Buddhas
 and heavenly kings, when suddenly he observed this demonic cloud, and said: "Just
 look at that white snake! She has practiced self-cultivation for seventeen hundred
 years and now she goes to Hangzhou to repay a favor from a former life, but she
 will harm millions of living beings! I will immediately dispatch a Divine Guardian!"¹⁹

¹⁷ The Spirit Vulture Peak is frequently mentioned in sutras as the place where the Buddha preached that particular sutra.

¹⁸ Long River is a literal translation of the common Chinese name for the Yangzi River.

¹⁹ In traditional Chinese vernacular fiction Divine Guardians (*jishi*) constitute a special class of fierce supernatural warriors protecting the Buddha, the Dharmas and the Sangha. More literally, *jishi* might be translated as "divine upholders of the truth."

to block her way. I want her to swear an oath, so there can be no mistake." Once the Divine Guardian had received this order, he went forward and shouted: "Evil demon, where do you plan to go? Your punishment will not be light if you bother or harm any living being! Quickly return to your mountain, and then I will forgive you. But if you disobey this order of the Buddha, your life cannot be spared!"

Hearing these words the white snake trembled with fright,
 She had her cloud set her down and knelt down in the dust.
 She begged and implored the tender god to do her a favor,
 She pitcously prayed him to be kind and show compassion.

"My only intention is to travel to Hangzhou, so I may
 Pay homage to the bodhisattva Guanyin and then return."
 The Guardian blocked her way: "You cannot be forgiven!
 Everything you say is an empty lie, not one word is true!"

Lady Bai could do little else but swear, awash in tears,
 A binding oath that was as weighty as a thousand pounds:
 "If there is anything that goes amiss during my pilgrimage,
 You may pin down my body and make me bitterly suffer."

Hearing these words, the Guardian allowed her to go on,
 And returned on his cloud and reported to the Buddha.

Only when lady Bai saw that the Divine Guardian had left after she had sworn this oath did she feel relieved: "I wanted to go to Hangzhou and find that Xu Xian to repay his favors,²⁰ and to finish up this bit of karma." She thereupon ascended her cloud and went straightway to Wulin.

Flying through the air lady Bai at last arrived in Wulin,
 And near the West Lake she had her cloud set her down.
 "I've no idea whatsoever where that Xu Xian may live,
 By the looks of it, this Hangzhou is quite a large place!"
 In her heart she also was secretly pondering to herself:
 "Where am I going to hide my body tonight? Far away
 I see a mansion with its storied buildings and rooms,
 So let me go there and see what the situation may be."

When lady Bai drew closer to the mansion to observe what was going on, not a soul was stirring. But suddenly she saw in an empty spot some demonic ether:
 "That is quite terrifying! I wonder which evil demon this may be. Let me go forward to have a look, so I will know what is going on."

²⁰ The original text uses both Xu Xian and Xu Xuan as the name of Bai Suzhen's predestined lover, but this translation uses Xu Xian consistently.

As soon as she saw the blue demon she was frightened: Her two eyes bulged as big as two giant bronze bells.

Her merit great after a thousand years of self-cultivation: Often changing into human shape, she mixed with men.

In ancient times living in the foundations of Wu's palace,²¹ She transformed herself either into a human or a demon.

As soon as she saw lady Bai, she opened her mouth,

Saying: "What kind of demon dares enter my gate?"

The two demons barked fiercely for quite a while,

But eventually the blue demon's merit was too shallow.

With sweet and friendly words she now hastened to say:

"Please accept my apologies, please forgive my crime!"

Lady Bai opened her mouth and spoke as follows:

"Having been born and raised on Mt. Emei, I have

Practiced self-cultivations for seventeen hundred years;

My transformations are many; my magical powers great."

The blue snake said: "I have heard about you for a long time, but now I have the good fortune to meet you. Hearing Mlady's words, it is my greatest desire to serve you, so please allow me, mistress, to become your maid!" When the white snake heard the blue snake say these words, she was very pleased, and said: "If that is the case, I will change your name and call you Little Blue."

Throughout the night, from evening time till early dawn,

The two of them kept on talking, becoming close friends.

That morning they made their toilette, and then they went

Together to Tianzhu Monastery so as to pray to Guanyin.

When lady Bai arrived in front of the Jingci Monastery, she asked Little Blue: "What is the name of this pagoda?" Little Blue replied: "This is Thunder Peak Pagoda." Lady Bai exclaimed: "Damn it! When I swore that oath in front of the Divine Guardian,²² I had no idea there was a pagoda with this name at West Lake. Could it be that my fate is predestined?" Little Blue said: "Mlady, don't be frightened! We have already arrived at Golden Sand Harbor. Let's rest here for a while, and then go on."

²¹ The palace of Wu refers to the palace of the kings of Wu-Yue who ruled Hangzhou and the surrounding area as an independent kingdom for most of the tenth century.

²² While our text does not say so, apparently the oath of the White Snake included a line stating that if she sinned she might be imprisoned under Thunder Peak Pagoda.

As soon as she saw Thunder Peak, she was frightened:

"Only now do I know the weight of the oath I swore!"

Filled with regret, her brow was now locked in a frown:

"How I fear that that Thunder Peak will pin me down!"

"Never for one moment I forget the virtue of Heaven and Earth. / With every thought I wish to repay the favors of father and mother. I am Xu Xian, and my style is Hanwen. I've just turned twenty-three. My family originally hails from Cixi County in Ningbo Prefecture, but at a very young age I was brought by my father to Hangzhou. Because later my father and mother died, my elder sister and I were left as orphans. My sister is married to Li Junfu as his wife, and her husband serves as a police agent of Qiantang County. He was so kind as to recommend me to Millionaire Wang of Great Peace Bridge, so I could become a clerk in his pharmacy for a living. The millionaire treats me as kindly as one of his own kin. Today is the Clear and Bright Festival,²³ so I have prepared some sacrificial foods to take to my parents' grave to offer to them. I have called the boy Little Two to come along and carry them for me."²⁴

The two of them set out and left through the city gate,

At Clear and Bright, to sweep the graves and sacrifice.

Having set out the sacrificial foods, he lit the incense;

He deeply bowed down in front of his mother's grave.

The paper money having been burned, they cleaned up,

And then he told Little Two to go back ahead of him.

I will not show how Xu Xian went and enjoyed a walk;

I will tell again about that couple of mistress and maid.

As soon as lady Bai saw Xu Xian, she secretly thought to herself: "That fellow is quite out of the ordinary!" And she whispered: "If I could tie the marriage knot with such a man, I would not in vain have been roused to passion." Little Blue said: "Mlady, what is so difficult? Let me play a little scheme to ensure that Xu Xian will come to our gate tomorrow so he and Mlady can consummate their marriage."

She arranged a clever scheme to catch the golden carp:

Lady Bai's miraculous trick was not something simple!

The merit achieved by Little Blue was still too shallow,

So how could she understand the hidden secret plan?

²³ The Clear and Bright Festival takes place on the 105th day following the winter solstice. On this spring day, relatives visit the graves of the deceased relatives and clean them, offering sacrifices to their ancestors.

²⁴ This first-person self-introduction, which starts with two lines of verse, resembles the self-introductions in traditional Chinese plays.

That same moment black clouds arose in all directions, and a fierce wind and heavy rain drenched his clothes. In this fierce storm of lightning and hail where to flee? So Xu Xian came up with the idea of hailing a boat.

Even though Xu Xian had an umbrella with him, it was still impossible to walk. When he suddenly saw a little boat by the bank of the river, he promptly hailed it to take him back. On the bank Little Blue called to them: "Captain, where are you going? Can you take us aboard?" The boatman said: "This boat has been hired by this young gentleman, who wants to go to the Qiantang Gate." Little Blue said: "The Lord of Heaven sends down such a heavy rain! Sir, please do us women a favor!" Xu Xian replied: "Where do you two girls want to go?" Little Blue said: "We want to get off at Double Tea Lane." Xu Xian then said: "Please come on board, you ladies, and we will go there together." Little Blue said: "Many thanks for your kindness. We are causing you so much trouble. But, sir, please tell me where you live? And what is your name? Please tell me in detail." Xu Xian then told her: "I live in this city and my name is Xu Xian—my style is Hanwen. At present I work as a clerk in the pharmacy of Millionaire Wang of Great Peace Bridge. But where do the two of you live? And what are your names? Please tell me in detail." The two of them replied: "Sir, please allow us to inform you."

The two of them worked their plan with clever words: As soon as she had met her man, her passion ran deep. Little Blue opened her mouth and told the situation: "As for her ancestors, her family hails from Jiaqing. The late master her father was as a military officer, and he served as a regional commander at Tong Pass. But alas, he got into a conflict with a crafty official, who accused him at court of most heinous crimes, even stating that her father was planning a rebellion. That he was in secret communication with foreigners. Our lord and king believed this scoundrel's accusation, and his imperial edict ordered the whole family killed. His wife just wept and died and went to the shades. The only one to escape this disaster was their daughter. The young lady had studied magic arts since her youth—The transmitted teachings of the immortals are no lie! She collected some gold and silver and some clothes, and since she escaped she has been living in Hangzhou. Here on Double Tea Lane, now already for three years—Alone and lonely, orphaned, wretched: lacking a man."

Xu Xian said: "So she is an upper-class young lady! Please forgive my rudeness!"

The boatman shouted: "We've arrived at Great Peace Bridge!" Little Blue then said: "Sir Xu, I have a request. You see that it is still raining like before, and from here to Double Tea Lane is still quite a distance, so could we perhaps be allowed to borrow your umbrella?" Xu Xian said: "Of course, no problem! Please take it!" Little Blue said: "Many thanks! But the issue is that there is no male person in our household, it's just the two of us, mistress and maid, so there is no one to bring it back. So tomorrow you must come to our place." Xu replied: "That is no problem either." Thereupon they each went their way.

When Little Blue had come home, she said to her mistress: "Tomorrow Xu Xian definitely will come early to fetch his umbrella, and then you can entrust your future to him. But what to do about the fact that Xu is so poor that he does not have the money for engagement gifts?" Lady Bai said: "That is no problem.

With magic arts I'll steal the silver from the vault,
Demons will carry it across, so I can tie the knot!"

Her oh-so-tender fingers grasped her phoenix sword,
She spit out magic water and recited incantations.

She summoned her five demons who arrived en masse,
And told them: "Steal the silver in the Qiantang vault!"

They stole the twenty pristine ingots from the vault,
And moved them to her house—nothing remained.

The next day she prepared for the arrival of her guest,
But in our scroll we now will turn again to Xu Hanwen.

Back home throughout the night he could not sleep,
As secretly he pondered—he was overcome with joy.

"If I could get this woman to become my wedded wife,
She'd make a nice and proper, fine and perfect partner!"

When Xu Xian arrived at the gate of lady Bai's, Little Blue invited him inside with a smile as soon as she saw him. When lady Bai saw him, she was very pleased, and said: "Sir, please come inside to have a cup of tea." Xu Xian replied: "You are too kind!" But when lady Bai insisted, Xu accepted her invitation. When the three of them arrived inside, they greeted each other formally and sat down, whereupon lady Bai said: "Yesterday we made bold to borrow your boat, and you also were so kind as to lend us your umbrella. Even though it truly was a chance encounter, you really were very nice to us." Xu Xian replied: "Why would you have to be concerned about these trifling matters? But I am afraid I have to take my leave." Little Blue at his side then said: "Sir Xu Xian, please take your time. Our young lady would like to offer you a cup of wine, so

please don't refuse!" Xu Xian said: "We have never had any interaction before, so how can I cause you so much trouble?"

One cup of fine wine repaid the favor of the umbrella;
The three of them were filled with love in their heart.
That smart and clever, oh-so-intelligent Little Blue
Set out the wine and the food in the blink of an eye.
The young lady sat down at the other side of the table,
While Little Blue very ardently poured him his wine.
When Xu Xian had finished off three cups of wine,
Little Blue immediately started to ask him questions:

"Dear sir,

Have you by any chance already taken a main wife?
When were you born, in what year and what month?"²⁵

Xu Xian promptly replied in the following manner:

"Your servant now has reached the age of twenty-three,²⁶

The month of my birth was a *jiyou*, the day a *xinwei*;

I was born at the end of the day, at the hour of *yow*.²⁷

To my misfortune my parents passed away early,

And because I am poor, I could not yet find a bride.

I only have one elder sister, who is a full sibling,

And she is married to Junfu, who lives in this city."

When Little Blue heard this, she spoke as follows:

"So you were born in the same year as my mistress!"

Hearing these words lady Bai could not but blush:

²⁵ As part of regular marriage ceremonies, the dates of birth of the prospective partners are compared in order to assess their compatibility.

²⁶ Twenty-three is also the age at which Student Zhang falls in love with Yingying in *The Story of the Western Chamber* (*Xixiang ji*). This play probably was traditional China's most popular love comedy. Until the age of twenty three, Student Zhang has refrained from all sexual intercourse because he has never met a woman of his liking, but then, when both of them happen to be staying at the same monastery, falls head over heels in love with Yingying. When he first sees her, she is dressed in white, because she is in mourning for her father.

²⁷ The characters *jin*, *yi*, *bing*, *ding*, *wu*, *ji*, *geng*, *xin*, *ren*, and *gui* constitute the ten "Heavenly Stems." The characters *zi*, *dou*, *jin*, *mao*, *chen*, *si*, *wu*, *wai*, *shen*, *yow*, *xu*, and *hai* constitute the twelve "Earthy Branches." By combination of one of the characters of the first cycle and one of the characters of the second cycle, a new cycle of sixty combinations is produced, which from ancient times was used for the consecutive counting of years, months, days, and hours. Soothsayers used the combination of the "eight characters" specifying the year, month, day, and hour of birth to assess the compatibility of prospective marriage partners. In traditional China, a day was divided into twelve hours, each double the length of a Western hour. The hour of *yow* corresponds to 5:00–7:00 p.m.

"I cannot disobey the Buddha and repay his favors!"

"The young lady here is an orphaned, single maiden, Her parents have both died and she has no relatives.

If a man has no helpmate, he cannot be said to be noble;

If a woman has not husband, her lotus heart is pained.²⁸

A pair of mandarin ducks²⁹—you should be a couple:

My mistress is young of years, you're greening spring.

Dear sir,

There's no reason why you should refuse my proposal:

Both parties will benefit, so let's have this wedding!"

When Xu Xian had heard this, he said: "Dear sister, what kind of nonsense are you talking now? Your mistress is the pampered daughter of a noble family, so how could she become my bride?" Little Blue replied: "A marriage is determined in a prior life: five hundred years ago you were tied together. Discuss it with your elder sister, but don't miss this opportunity." Xu Xian said: "I am very grateful for your kindness, but how can I not be flabbergasted? And I don't have the money for the engagement gifts and the wedding preparations, so what can I do?" Little Blue replied: "That's no problem. Just wait here for a while and I will take care of that matter for you." Little Blue went inside and explained the matter to lady Bai. She then took out two silver ingots which she wrapped in a handkerchief, and which she offered in both her hands to Xu Xian, saying: "I've discussed this with my mistress. Here you have two silver ingots. Take them home with you and discuss the matter with your sister. Select a lucky day for the engagement, and then we will finalize the marriage."

To take a widow as one's wife is not the proper way;

Money that one hasn't earned is followed by misfortune.

"To give the guy these silver ingots wasn't a good idea;

When the authorities find out, he will suffer disaster!

Xu Xian will be punished, suffering torture and shame,

Police officers everywhere are investigating this case.

The magistrate is sorely upset about the stolen silver,

So this fine marriage karma will be cruelly ripped apart."

When Suzhen heard the people outside talking about it,

She made careful computations, counting on her fingers:

"Fortunately the magistrate is very pure and honest, so

He will only be punished oh so lightly and not be killed.

²⁸ Lotus (*lian*) has the same pronunciation as one of the Chinese words for love (*lian*).

²⁹ The monogamous mandarin ducks are a widely used symbol for mutual love and devotion.

Husband and wife will meet again at some later date—
He'll suffer some empty fight, not some dire disaster."

Lady Bai said: "I made a mistake! I should not have given him those ingots. But fortunately the official is pure and honest, so he will only suffer a fright. And according to fate he and I will meet again some other day."

Now tell that when one day this Li Junfu saw that his brother-in-law had silver from the vault, he went and reported him to the magistrate: "I've found the criminal and the booty." The county magistrate asked: "So where are they now?" Junfu replied: "The criminal is called Xu Xian, and he is my brother-in-law." The magistrate then said: "You scoundrel! You must have been unable to get to the bottom of this case, and now try to get out of it by offering up your brother-in-law! Get out the ankle-presses!" Junfu reported: "My lordship, this is indeed the truth! I have seen two ingots of his that carry the stamp of Renhe County."³⁰

When the magistrate had summoned Xu Xian for questioning, he said: "When I see your fine features, you don't seem a criminal to me. So where did you get these ingots? You must tell me the truth!" Xu Xian told him the full story in all detail, and the magistrate then asked the yamen runners: "Whose mansion is this in Double Tea Lane?"³¹ The yamen runners reported: "Your lordship, that place was originally the location of the palace of the Prince of Wu. Now, we hear, it is a haunted place frequented by demons, and at present no one is living there." When the magistrate had heard this tale, he promptly took out a red slip, and dispatched ten yamen runners: "Quickly arrest those demons and bring them to this office for interrogation." "Yes!"

The yamen runners then went to Double Tea Lane,
But the main gate was closed with no one around.
When they knocked on the gate, nobody answered;
Together they broke it open, and entered the hall.
There they observed charming girls, two in number,
Who looked like immortals descended to this world.
When these runners had stared at them for a while,
Little Blue explained the situation to them as follows.

Little Blue said: "You guys act quite brazenly without any reason! This is the house of a family of officials, and yet you break down the gate to enter! Do you know what punishment you deserve?" The runners replied: "We have come here today at the order of His Lordship the magistrate, for the very purpose of arresting two demons for interrogation. Friends, let's take action!"

³⁰ The two counties of Renhe and Qiantang shared the administration of the city of Hangzhou.

³¹ The yamen is the office of a Chinese official.

In a flash the two demons suddenly had disappeared!
There was a huge flare of light—then they were gone.
The runners stood there and watched for quite a while:
These two indeed turned out to be demonic creatures!
But in one of the rooms they found a wooden chest,
Which they carried off to the yamen hall for inspection.
They reported this to the magistrate who took his seat,
In order to see what the contents of the chest might be.

When the magistrate immediately took his seat he found in that chest nothing else but the eighteen pristine ingots, so all the silver from the vault had been fully recovered. He had the silver stored in the vault as before, and then instructed Xu Xian: "You still are not awakened from your delusion! If you stay here, I should have you executed. And these demons too are bound to harm your life. I therefore will banish you to Suzhou to avoid such a disaster." Xu Xian could only express his gratitude to His Lordship.

A pure judge's sentence—his fame was well-founded!
He dearly loved the common people—great was his grace!

A document was dispatched to the city of Suzhou:
Xu Hanwen was to serve as a soldier for three years.
The document did not state he had committed a crime;
But he had to avoid his own house to ensure his safety.
Now when Junfu came back home to his own house,
And explained the whole situation to Xu's elder sister,
The latter flew into a rage when she heard this story,
And she cursed her husband as a man without morals:
"You have no shred of decency, you are so vicious!
A human face but the heart of a beast—you are no man!
Our father and mother only had the two of us as children;
If hand and foot must separate, it will break my heart!"³²
The more she thought and imagined, the more she cried,
The sound of her wailing and grief—quite heart-rending!
Junfu thereupon addressed her in the following manner:
"My dear wife, please don't cry, please wipe your tears!
At present he may be banished to the city of Suzhou,
But after the three years of his sentence he'll be back."
But the wife did not listen to what her husband said,
But cried and wept throughout the day, awash in tears.

³² "Hand and foot" is a common metaphor for siblings.

[Old male:]³³ "Amassing virtue I do not damage the grass before the steps, / Perfecting blessings I cultivate the flowers in my heart. As soon as I learned that Xu Xian had encountered this disaster, I hurried to the county yamen." After he had greeted Xu Xian, he asked: "Now you have encountered this great misfortune, I am very distressed. But fortunately the magistrate is pure and honest, so you were not subjected to shame. When you get to Suzhou, I have there a good friend, by the name of Wu Zhaofang. His residence is the pharmacy in Zhan Zhu Lane, and he is a very generous man. I will give you a letter for him, in which I have provided a detailed description of the injustice you have suffered. When he sees my handwriting, he is bound to give you a job. I also have here some taels of silver for you to use on the road. When you get there, send me a letter at the earliest opportunity so I won't have to worry. And then I have here yet another tael for this officer to buy some wine." Xu Xian replied: "Many thanks, Mr. Wang! When will I ever be able to pay you back for this large gift? Now I have to say good-bye."

When Xu Xian eventually arrived in the city of Suzhou,
 He presented himself at the pharmacy to deliver the letter.
 Upon reading the letter the millionaire told him to stay,
 He took care of him very well, providing wine and food.
 He entertained Xu Xian with great respect and kindness;
 A banquet to welcome the traveler was set out in the hall.
 While the two of them were drinking and talking merrily,
 A servant came forward to report on some urgent matter.

He informed the millionaire: "There are two ladies outside who say they are the womenfolk of this young gentleman and have come to see him." The millionaire said: "Let me come outside and have a good look. According to his story they must be some demons." But he only saw two girls whose features had a hundred beauties and a thousand charms, and whose faces obscured the moon and shamed the flowers; their bearing was gracious and their behavior most proper. When Little Blue saw the millionaire come out, she stepped forward, made a curtsy, and said: "You must be Mr. Wu." The millionaire replied: "Indeed, I am. May I ask you two ladies what brings you here?" Little Blue said: "We have learned that our master is presently here in your mansion. First of all we would like to pay our respects to you, sir, and your noble wife. Secondly we came here to find our master." The millionaire then said: "Young ladies, please come inside." Lady Bai and Little Blue followed the millionaire inside. On seeing them Xu Xian shouted: "Mr. Wu, why did you allow these demons to come

³³ "Old male" is the designation of a role type in drama, so one can surmise that our anonymous author worked on the basis of a play text, but the term is also used to specify a type of delivery in *lanzi*. The following short speech is by Mr. Wang, Xu Xian's employer in Hangzhou.

inside?" The millionaire said: "Dear Mr. Xu, you shouldn't be so frightened. How can there be any demons in the bright light of day? There must be some explanation. Young ladies, please be seated." The two young ladies then said: "Dear Mr. Wu and Mr. Xu, please listen as I give you a report.

"Dear sir,
 In winter one knows the quality of pine and cypress—³⁴
 How difficult it has been to see you, my dear husband!
 I implore you, my dear husband, do not harbor doubt,
 This all must have been due to some earlier evil karma.
 The one hundred tael of fine silver which I gave you,
 Were only meant to defray the costs of the wedding.
 I had no idea that the county vault had been robbed,
 And that Junfu would become so vicious at first sight.
 When my late father was still alive and holding office,
 The money at his disposal all came from official vaults,
 Each ingot of silver would carry its own local stamp,
 And I have come to see every prefecture and county!
 When the magistrate saw the ingots, his greed arose,
 And he sentenced you, irrespective of the situation.
 When he banished you to the distant city of Suzhou,
 Day and night I was filled with worry, had no peace!
 Little Blue and I then knew no better plan of action
 Than to collect my gold and silver and make this trip.
 It is not that I have no sense of decorum and shame,³⁵
 It's all because of the great affair that settles my future.
 But how could I know that you would be so perverse
 As to declare, against all reason, that I am a demon!
 Under these conditions I don't want to be your wife,
 I'll be happy to shave my head and to become a nun.
 From this very moment you and I will separate—
 Please take good care of yourself, don't feel sad.
 There's no other reason why I want to become a nun
 Than that you, darling husband, will enjoy a long life.
 If we cannot be a couple in this present existence,
 I hope in a coming existence to become your wife."

³⁴ Pine and cypress are symbols of fidelity and loyalty in adversity, as they stay green in winter.

³⁵ A young lady of the upper class was not supposed to show her face in public, let alone travel without a proper escort.

When lady Bai had come to this point in her speech, she was awash in tears, enough to soak her clothes. When the millionaire had listened to this sad tale, He also immediately joined in to convince him.

The millionaire shouted: "Mr. Xu, where in the world do you find virtuous women like these? Her story has cleared everything up. I will tell a boy to go to her boat and carry the luggage of Mrs. Xu to your room." He also called for his wife to join the banquet. Her Ladyship said: "I have been standing behind the screen for quite some time already!" Lady Bai cursed to Mrs. Wu, and they took their seats as host and guest. Mrs. Wu said: "Behind the screen I could only hear how virtuous you are. But you are so talented and beautiful too!" And she said to Mr. Xu: "You cannot wrongly believe those slanderous words, be filled with doubt and blame her without reason! Young lady, you shouldn't blame him either. He is a young man who has just suffered a grievous wrong. But now the case has been cleared up, and the two of you should celebrate the ritual of happy reunion!" The millionaire also said to his wife: "Today is a lucky day of huge dragon virtue and happy phoenix heaven, so let the two of us act as the hosts, so they can consummate their marriage here in our house." Xu Xian said: "The favors you bestow on me are like a mountain, and surpass even those of parents who give us a second life!"

After they have lived at the mansion for a while, Xu Xian proposed to his wife: "I want to open my own drugstore, so I will ask the millionaire to pay attention and find me a suitable building. What's your opinion?"

The millionaire said: "Leave it all to me if you want to open a drugstore. I will take care of this for you."

Out of the kindness of their hearts the millionaire couple then hurried to make all preparations without any delay. Red and green lanterns were hung, and candles were lit. The Three Stars of Longevity were displayed in the hall. Bands of musicians played mouth organs, fifes, and pipes. Instruments mixing in harmony as drums were sounded. The love of husband and wife was like fish and water; The whole family enjoyed priceless joy and harmony. In all tasks she fulfilled, Suzhen wanted to be perfect—Carefully considering all aspects she managed affairs.

When lady Bai had been his wife for over two months, she brought out three thousand tael of silver, and said to her husband: "Two thousand five hundred should be invested in drugs, and three hundred should be kept for small expenses. With these two hundred we should thank millionaire Wu for

arranging our wedding."

When Xu Xian had heard her speak in this manner, He promptly hired two laborers to carry the silver. They delivered the silver to the mansion's high hall.

To thank the millionaire for all his help and favors.

"We, husband and wife, enjoyed your kind care.

A lasting gratitude for this is engraved on our hearts."

When the millionaire saw the silver, he first refused; Refusing to accept it lightly, he said many phrases.

The millionaire said: "When you stayed at my humble dwelling, we often treated you shabbily, so why should you bother to waste such effort? How could I in good conscience accept such a large gift? Dear Mr. Xu, please make sure to express my thanks to your wife. May I ask you, Mr. Xu, which day have you chosen to open your store? It will be my pleasure to take care of all minor matters."

Xu Xian immediately replied in the following way:

"The grand opening is set for tomorrow at noontime."

Husband and wife had spent three days getting ready;

In the kitchen wine and food had all been prepared.

They then invited the millionaire and also his wife,

And Xu Xian and his wife expressed their gratitude:

"We enjoyed your hospitality while staying with you;

You helped the two of us out in matters large and small.

We have no way to repay this virtue and these favors,

So we can only wish you two a long and happy life."

The millionaire answered them both, saying: "We thank you very much indeed! When they took their leave from Xu Xian and his wife, lady Bai said: "Mr. and Mrs. Wu, please take your time."

After Xu Xian had expressed his thanks to the millionaire, the business of his drugstore became quite flourishing. When the Double Fifth festival had arrived, our story tells that Xu Xian himself had fetched a charcoal burner, and when he came upstairs, he saw that his wife was not feeling too well, so he said: "Milady, please get up, and I will go down to the kitchen to get us some wine, so you and I can celebrate Double Fifth." But lady Bai said: "I should keep you company, but because I am feeling so tired, you must go to the shop without me to have some drinks [with the assistants]. It is your duty as their boss to treat them well, you cannot slight them." Without answering her, Xu Xian promptly went downstairs, but came back with the wine. As he put it on the table, [he said:] "Milady, please get up, so you and I can drink a few cups. Don't disappoint your husband." At this

time it was exactly noon. Lady Bai finally had to give in to Xu Xian's entreaties, and even though she had no desire to do so, she could not but force herself to get up. Xu Xian poured her a cup of realgar wine,³⁶ which he handed her with both hands. When lady Bai had drunk only half a cup, she was overcome by the force of the alcohol, but as he kept on entreating her to drink, she could only finish her cup. Xu Xian then went downstairs to drink merrily with his assistants.

When lady Bai had drunk this one cup of realgar wine, it seemed to her as if her belly was carved by a knife. This had hurt her womb energy, whereupon she lost womb blood.³⁷ Struck by the blood glare, she had, before she could suppress that impulse, manifested her original shape and turned into a white snake, lying all coiled up on the bed. When soon thereafter Xu Xian's drinking party with the assistants in the shop had come to an end, he thought to himself, "Little Blue has some illness, so there is no one who looks after Miliady. Let me go upstairs to see how she is doing."

Xu Xian walked over and came to the second floor, arriving in front of the bed he called his wife's name. He called her a number of times but got no response, so he pulled the gauze curtains aside to have a look.

He did not see his own wife, that very lovely woman, but he saw a white snake—what a frightening sight! The body was long and huge and coiled up on the bed; the head was as big as a bucket, the eyes bronze bells. Her beautiful face and fine features had disappeared. It scattered his spirits and souls, set his gall a-tremble.³⁸

Giving a cry he collapsed then and there on the floor; His limbs were as cold as ice: gone off to the shades! When Little Blue heard the bumping sound upstairs, She promptly ran upstairs to see what had happened. She saw there her master flat on the floor, passed out; His limbs were as cold as ice, his face was all blue. When she lifted the bed-curtains and so had a look, She saw her mistress showing her serpentine shape. Her man was scared to death, gone to the shades, And she had not noticed it at all, not in the least.

³⁶ Realgar is a sulphur-arsenicum compound.

³⁷ Blood shed in menstruation and childbirth (or a miscarriage, as in this instance) was believed to be extremely polluting. It was therefore believed to have the power to defeat magic, as magic requires purity.

³⁸ The gall was considered to be the site of courage.

Our story goes that Little Blue struck her a few times in the face and called a number of times: "Miliady!" When lady Bai had resumed her original human shape, Little Blue said: "Miliady, you practiced self-cultivation for seventeen hundred years and your merit is huge, so why did you manifest your true shape? What has happened to all your merit?" Lady Bai told Little Blue: "My husband pestered me to drink a cup of realgar spirits. That hurt my womb energy, so I showed my original shape. Luckily my merit is huge, because otherwise I would have lost my life." Little Blue said: "Miliady, if you had wanted to show your shape, you should have called for me, so I could have locked the door to the room, and then you could have shown your shape. Now your husband has been scared to death by you. So what to do now?" When lady Bai heard this, she got up and had a look. "Oh my dear husband! My husband! What do I have to do now?" Little Blue said: "Miliady, there's no time for grieving and wailing, we first have to come up with a plan to bring him back to life."

Once she had seen in what shape her husband was, Suzhen cried and wept, and her tears coursed down: "A moment ago you urged me to have wine with you, So how come you passed out and do not come to?"

In an earlier life you were so kind as to rescue me, That's why I wanted in this life to repay your favor. Because of you I have suffered many tribulations; Two or three times I have suffered bitter hardship.

This disaster today is because of that realgar wine, You yourself are to blame for this fatal misfortune. How do you want me now to bring you back to life? Alas, when I see you there it really hurts my heart!"

Little Blue addressed her with the following advice: "We'll have to find a plan to bring him back to life. The merit of your self-cultivation must be sufficient To go and fetch the immortal herb to save his life."

When Suzhen heard this, she answered as follows: "Little Blue, what you said makes no sense at all! Where in this mortal world do I find a miracle herb? It's nowhere to be found on this whole wide earth! It is only to be found in the Southern Pole Palace: You revive from nine deaths and come back to life!" When Little Blue heard her tell this story, she thought: "There is no way you can go to the Southern Pole!"

Little Blue said: "When you go to the Southern Pole Palace, you'll find there the two boys Crane and Deer, who guard that grotto-mansion. They are quite terrifying, so how could you go there?" Lady Bai replied: "If I want to save my husband's life, I will have to risk my own. I hope I will be able to return safely so we can meet again. If I am captured by Crane and Deer, not only can my husband not be saved, but I also will lose my life! Oh my dear husband, how I've harmed you!" She also said: "Little Blue, move my husband onto the bed. And quickly fetch me some water, so I can bathe myself and put on another set of clothes. Quickly hang up an image of the bodhisattva Guanyin. I will go to the Southern Pole Palace, and you will light candles and burn incense and on my behalf most devoutly pray that the bodhisattva Guanyin may protect me and my husband!"

All she could think about was how to save her husband,
She didn't fear a hundred mountains or thousand rivers.

She wrapped her body in a full set of new clothes,

And on her head she wore a scarf like Miaochang.

On her back she carried a pair of miraculous swords;

In her oh-so-tender hands she grasped a fly whisk.

She thereupon knelt down on the cartail hassock,

And prayed to the bodhisattva with sincere devotion.

She also turned around and instructed Little Blue

To spare no effort in taking care of her husband.

"And if someone outside asks you what's going on,

Just say he has some disease and is staying in bed."

When Suzhen, riding on her magic cloud, had arrived at the Southern Pole Palace, she saw Deer asleep and blocking the gate, so she could only jump across him to get inside, and when she looked all around, she only saw in the courtyard just one immortal herb. It was as big as an official bushel and more than thirty feet high. All around it was thickly covered with green leaves, and at the very top one red flower had opened. The flower displayed all colors, and its brilliance was extraordinary. It sparkled and glowed with an auspicious brightness, and richly exuded a lucky fragrance. In the First Month,³⁹ it opened one flower, and for each month it produced one petal. If there was an intercalary month, it produced one additional little petal. On the first day of the month the flower bloomed, and at the end of the month the flower fell. That is why Old Greybeard collected these flowers and distributed them to the immortals. Once you had swallowed this flower, you would live forever and never age. You

³⁹ The First Month is the first month of the traditional Chinese calendar. As Chinese New Year falls on a date between January 20 and February 20, the First Month on average starts more than one month later than January 1.

would even revive from nine deaths. At this moment lady Bai thought: "There is only this immortal herb in this palace, so this must be it!" She immediately flew up to the very top, and plucked two petals. When she put them in the bosom of her gown, she was overwhelmed by their exceptional aroma. When she came back to the entrance of the grotto, she wanted to leave by jumping across Deer. But who could have known that the latter would suddenly wake up from his slumber and dream? He immediately shouted: "What kind of demon are you that you dare enter this grotto-mansion? Secretly stealing the immortal herb—what punishment do you deserve?" Lady Bai replied: "I am a disciple of Old Mother of Black Mountain.⁴⁰ But because my husband was struck by a disease and may die any moment, and because in the mortal world there is no magic herb to be found to save his life, I came here to seek this immortal herb. I would have asked Old Greybeard, but he has not yet come back, and I saw that you were still asleep and didn't dare disturb you, and therefore I had the temerity to go inside, and it is indeed a fact that I took two petals. Dear brother, I pray you to show some mercy. Since ancient times it is said that it is better to save a man's life than to build a seven-story pagoda. So please, brother Deer, do me a favor and inform Old Greybeard of my situation. I am sure he will show compassion!" Lady Bai implored him most piteously, and her tears coursed down like a flood. When Deer saw her in this sad condition, [he said:] "If you did it to save your husband's life, get out of here as fast as you can!" Lady Bai said: "Many thanks, brother, and good-bye!" Deer replied: "I am just afraid that brother Crane will come back, and then it will be impossible to escape, so get out of here now!" Just look how lady Bai kowtowed and left—she flew off, riding her clouds, like a bird escaped from its cage!

At this moment lady Bai felt extremely relieved:

She got the magic herb and was out of the palace.

She only thought bad fortune had turned to good,

And she hurried back home to save her husband.

But behind her brother Crane now loudly shouted:

"You demon from nowhere, where are you going?"

Promptly turning her head, lady Bai had a look:

Her heart was so scared her gall started to flutter!

Riding on a cloud she suddenly lost her footing;

Showing her original shape she fell into the dust!

When brother Crane saw this, he was filled with joy:

All his life he never had tasted any savory meat.

Widely opening his great beak he swooped down,

⁴⁰ Old Mother of Black Mountain (*Zishen laomu*) is a Daoist divinity with great magical skills.

Leaving no way for Suzhen to escape with her life!
 In this moment of imminent danger what was best?
 Who would be able to save her from certain death?

Now this White Crane had practiced self-cultivation for several thousand years, so when he saw this huge white snake, he was overjoyed and he spread his large wings, wishing to swoop down and swallow her! How could he know that Old Greybeard was looking all around him, and when he did not see brother Crane, he immediately took his leave of the other immortals, and once outside the grotto-mansion, he looked everywhere from his cloud. "Great! If I don't save her, for whom should she wait? I have known for quite a while that the white snake would come and steal the immortal herb, and that's why I ordered brother Deer to guard the gate, and ordered brother Crane to accompany me to the meeting. But just as I was expounding the classics and preaching the Dharma with the other immortals, that brother Crane suddenly disappeared, so I was afraid he left to hurt the White Snake. She and Xu Xian will later eventually achieve the fruit, so how can I not save her? I will have to get on my cloud and pursue him to save her!"

The immortal said good-bye to the other immortals,
 And set off on his cloud in pursuit of brother Crane.
 The White Snake had just shown her original shape,
 And brother Crane was all set to gobble her down,
 When Old Greybeard loudly shouted the order:
 "You're not allowed to commit such dire violence!
 Set her free to go home so she can save her husband,
 Whatever happened, take it easy—you have to relax!"
 When brother Crane heard this order, he could only
 Settle down, show restraint, and not commit murder.

Old Greybeard said: "This White Snake and Xu Xian are united by fate as husband and wife. Her husband at home was frightened to death, and that's why she came to my palace to steal the immortal herb to save her husband's life. You will accompany me back home. At some later date she will be subdued by someone else." How did he know that the White Snake had collapsed in fright on the ground and still had not come to? So Old Greybeard nudged her with his staff saying: "Don't be scared, but quickly go back to save your husband's life!" When she eventually slowly regained consciousness, she once again assumed a human shape, and left after having kowtowed to Old Greybeard.

Old Greybeard all along had known her intention;
 He had divined the demon wanted to save her husband.
 When lady Bai came to, having regained consciousness,
 She kowtowed to thank the immortal for saving her life.
 Tears coursed down her face at this moment in time;
 The more she pondered this, the more she was pained.
 "If this old immortal had only arrived one minute later,
 I would have been destined to die and to lose my life!
 I have been saved by an intervention of the bodhisattva,
 By Guanyin who saves from suffering and from disaster!"
 When Suzhen thought of this most heartrending event,
 Her tears coursed down like a river, soaking her clothes.
 We've spoken at length about lady Bai on her journey,
 So let's tell again of Little Blue in the city of Suzhou.
 "My mistress has been gone now for quite a few days,
 So what is the reason she still has not come back home?"
 When Little Blue thought of this heartrending situation,
 Her eyes were filled with tears, which wetted her cheeks.
 She turned around and showed her respect to Guanyin,
 As she knelt down on her knees on the dust of the floor.
 "I hope that the mahasattva will respond to my prayer
 By protecting my mistress so she can come back home."
 All of sudden she heard the sound of a gust of wind;
 A strange fragrance hit her nose, in a quite scary way.
 Just when she thought her mistress must have returned,
 She heard someone outside the window call "Little Blue!"

When lady Bai arrived in front of the window, she put down her cloud and called: "Little Blue, I'm back!" When Little Blue heard this, it was indeed her mistress who had returned. She immediately opened the gate, and invited her mistress to come inside, as she asked: "M'lady, how come your face looks like this?" Lady Bai replied: "I have suffered no end of tribulations! I have only barely escaped with my life, and I was almost not able to see you again!" When she thereupon arrived in front of the bodhisattva, she burned incense, lit candles, and expressed her thanks with a bow. She then hurried to the bed to see how her husband was doing, and exclaimed: "My dear husband, going to Mt. Song I suffered no end of tribulations,⁴¹ and I

⁴¹ Mt. Song in Henan province is the center of the Chinese world. The four directions and the center each were marked by holy mountains (also called marchmounts) that were widely revered as deities. For instance the deity of Mt. Tai in Shandong, the holy mountain of the East, was revered throughout China as a ruler of the underworld.

almost lost my life, but thanks to the protection of the bodhisattva I have been able to come home with the immortal herb, so now I am here to save you so you will revive!" She also said: "Little Blue, quickly heat some water!" And she handed the immortal herb to Little Blue, who looked at the herb in her hand and said: "This is indeed something divine!" She hastened to make a decoction of the herb, which she handed to her mistress.

When lady Bai had received this immortal elixir, she told Little Blue to come along, but the latter said: "Just wait a minute, Milady! Already earlier he suspected that we are demons, and now you have shown your original shape, which scared him to death when he saw you. When he regains consciousness, he'll surely be filled with suspicion toward the two of us. So what will we say to him to silence him? We must come up with a plan!" Lady Bai thereupon took out a white handkerchief, which she placed on the floorboards of the upstairs room. She loudly recited a magical formula, and once she had spit out a mouthful of blessed water, the handkerchief turned into a white snake. She then took out her precious sword and cut it into seven pieces, saying: "This plan will do, won't it?" and Little Blue replied: "Milady, that's a marvelous trick!"

When they arrived in front of the bed, they pulled the gauze bed curtains aside. "Little Blue, please support my husband," Lady Bai tasted the elixir, and then fed it into Xu Xian's mouth. You could see him slowly regain consciousness, and once his cheeks eventually had regained their color, he said: "Aiyai! That really scared me to death!" Lady Bai voiced her gratitude to Heaven and Earth, and urged her husband to recover: "Your wife is here to save you!" But Xu Xian still seemed to be dreaming. When he opened his eyes wide, he only saw these two demons and shouted: "Leave me immediately!" Lady Bai said: "My dear husband, don't say things like that! I hurried to Mr. Emci to request help from my teacher. Old Mother of Black Mountain gave me an immortal herb that brings people back to life from nine deaths, and I sped back to save your life. If you talk about that white snake, then it is still to be found in the courtyard, but I have already cut it into seven pieces. If you don't believe me, my husband, you have only to go and look for yourself." Xu Xian replied: "I still don't believe you. Let me go and have a look." Lady Bai then said: "My dear husband, just take a good look." Xu stepped down from his bed, and supported by the two of them, he walked to the courtyard to have a look. Only then did he feel at ease, and he said: "Indeed, you are right!" He promptly called workers to remove the carcass and bury it, and he exclaimed: "My dear wife, if you had not come to my rescue, how could we have met each other again face to face?" Lady Bai said: "My dear husband, it's windy outside, so take a nap in your room. You must slowly recover."

Only then did Xu Xian finally feel at ease again.

And he exclaimed: "My dear wife, my precious darling, I'm so grateful for your great favor and your deep love: Risking your own safety you went all out to save my life.

You were so kind as to go and fetch the long-life herb, Suffering thousands, myriads of tribulations on the road! When I will have fully recovered, am the old me again, I will show my gratitude for this exceptional virtue."

Suzhen addressed him then in the following words: "My husband, there is no need at all to mention this.

As your wedded wife, I am not some ordinary woman, It is only my proper duty to save my man and master."

From this moment on the couple lived in harmony: The husband led, the wife followed, devoted to him:

"My only wish is that divine Heaven will protect us, So we may live together all our life till a ripe old age."

Our story goes that lady Bai computed yin and yang, and one day at night she went with Little Blue to the middle of the Yangzi and snatched three hundred loads of sandalwood, the full load of the large boat of some merchant. The next day she ordered workers to go to the bank of the river and transport all the sandalwood to the shop. The merchant wailed and wept, and wanted to commit suicide by jumping into the river, but he was saved by the monk Fahai of the Golden Mountain Monastery, who gave some money to the merchant so he would have enough to go back home. Now let's talk again about the monk. He then ordered his acolyte to go to the drugstore of Xu Xian, and there to sound his fish-drum⁴² and ask for a donation.

Xu Xian opened his mouth and came forward to ask,

Addressing the monk as reverend he came forward:

"May I ask you where your monastery is to be found?

Why do you go from house to house, asking donations?"

The monk kowtowed and then addressed him thusly: As he opened his mouth he addressed him as Milord:

"I want to erect full five hundred statues of arhats,

Of Good-in-Gifts, Dragon Daughter, and Guanyin.⁴³

⁴² The fish-drum is a hollowed-out piece of wood in the shape of a fat fish; it is used as a rhythmical instrument in Buddhist liturgy.

⁴³ Good-in-Gifts and Dragon Daughter are, in popular religion, the acolytes of Guanyin, and they often accompany her in popular iconography.

I want these statues to be carved from sandalwood;
The merit will be huge, the work's hard to accomplish!
I've been begging for donations for over a month,
But I still haven't met a man whose heart is good.⁴⁴

Xu Xian [said:] "I've been told that your monastery is an ancient institution, which was founded during an earlier dynasty, so why are there no officials and gentry who protect the Dharma?" The monk replied: "I am not allowed by my teacher to lightly open the register of donations. The person to be listed as the first donor has to be someone who has a karmic connection and agrees to sponsor the project all by himself." Xu Xian thought to himself: "It is no mean merit to carve the statues of the five hundred arhats and the bodhisattva Guanyin all from sandalwood, but where will one find such a great donor?" The monk said: "This can be accomplished if I only find a good man with the right karmic connection who can gladly donate three hundred loads of sandalwood." Xu Xian then thought to himself: "Now if he wanted silver, it would be a different matter, but if it comes to three hundred loads of sandalwood, I have the goods right here. We pulled them from the river, so as long as they are here in this house, it is illegally acquired wealth, so what is its use? But if I can donate them to the Golden Mountain Monastery to be carved into statues, they will create a huge merit. Now I should first discuss this with my wife, but I'm afraid she would not agree. So I will all by myself first put down the sandalwood in the register of donations, and later explain it to my wife."

Lifting his brush with his fingers, he opened the register;
Each character and every line was written quite clearly.
First he wrote that he hailed from Ningbo Prefecture,
From Cixi County and that he was named Xu Hanwen.
He gladly donated three hundred loads of sandalwood
To be carved into statues of the arhats and of Guanyin;
He did so praying for ample good fortune for his family,
So husband and wife would both enjoy health and peace;
He did so hoping the Buddha's light would shine on him,
So husband and wife would both enjoy health and peace.
When the monk saw this, he was overcome by joy, and
Thanked this donor with a kowtow for his compassion.
"On the many fields of blessing your merit will be great,
Your sons and grandsons will become dukes and nobles!"
When the monk had said good-bye to return to his temple,
Xu Xian turned around and went up to the upstairs room.
There he explained to his dear wife what had transpired,

Which gave quite a start to lady Bai when she heard this.
"If we talk about three hundred loads of sandalwood,
The price easily amounts to several thousand of silver.
It's not easy at all to acquire such a large sum of money,
Why did you so easily give it all away to some monk?"
Xu Xian immediately replied in the following manner:
"My dear wife, please listen now to what I will tell you.
It's for the sake of Guanyin and the five hundred arhats;
He wants to have their statues carved from sandalwood.
In the conviction that you too love to do acts of charity,
I have shouldered this burden to show my compassion.
If in this life you have such fine and beautiful features,
It must be because you adorned statues in a prior life.
We, husband and wife, love goodness—don't be upset:
High Heaven never betrays those whose heart is good!"
When Suzhen had heard this, she could only smile:
"Whatever you do, think three times before you act."
If one makes a donation, it should be honestly done;
The Buddha will not fail sincerely devout believers.
Let's not expound on this oh-so-harmonious couple;
Let's return to the monk who entered the monastery.
He delivered the register of donations to the abbot;
The Chan master smiled as soon as he saw the list.
After waiting a few days he descended the mountain,
And transported the sandalwood to the monastery.
It came to the exact figure of three hundred loads;
A lucky day was chosen to start the carving project.
They started on the third day of the Ninth Month,
In the Third Month of the next year it was finished.
They settled on the first day of the Fourth Month
To open the eyes, and so they invited the sponsors.⁴⁴
First of all they invited the most important donor,
The one who provided the sandalwood, Xu Hanwen!
They also invited the officials serving in the region;
They also invited the local gentry who were donors.
On the day of the ceremony it was quite a crowd,

⁴⁴ When new statues are consecrated, the final act of enlightenment consists in "doting the eyes" (painting a black pupil in the white eyes).

As one after the other arrived outside the monastery, Lady Bai knew about this already well in advance, And she prohibited her husband from making the trip. But our Xu Xian was repeatedly invited by the monk, And his heart was set on going to Golden Mountain. When he had espied a moment when he was alone, He outwitted his wife and escaped from the house. And when he arrived at the monastery for his visit, The Chan master housed him in a hall at the back. When the noon meal was over and all had dispersed, Xu too said good-bye and wanted to go home. But the Chan master insisted that he should stay, And completely refused to allow him to go home.

Now the story tells that the monk Fahai told Xu Xian: "You originally were a disciple of the Buddha, so how come you have fallen into the hands of these demons?"⁴⁵ Moreover, you have seen with your eyes how at the Double Fifth Festival she showed her original shape. Now you have arrived here, you should not go back!" But Xu said: "My wife knows many magic arts, so please be so kind as to quickly let me go home. If you keep me here for another minute, the two of them will follow me to this monastery and vent their spite by killing me!" Fahai then replied: "Mr. Xu, if you take me as your teacher, and shave your head to leave the household, I can protect you from all harm."

Now let's tell that lady Bai, when she didn't see her husband come home, computed yin and yang on the palm of her hand, and exclaimed: "Little Blue, a disaster! My husband is kept at the Golden Mountain Monastery by Fahai, who says that we two are demons and refuses to let him go home. What to do now?" Little Blue said: "What's the problem? You and I will hurry to the monastery and bring your husband back." The two of them thereupon by magic produced a boat and set off.

This couple of mistress and maid left the house;
Their heart was set on bringing the husband home.
On their back they carried two black-wind swords,
To fight a decisive battle against the monk Fahai!
Arriving at Golden Mountain they quickly embarked,⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Some other versions relate that Xu Xian in his earlier incarnations had been a monk for seven lives, and that he had remained a virgin in each of these seven lives.

⁴⁶ Golden Mountain Monastery was built on a little island in the Yangzi River. In the nineteenth century the island became connected to the riverbank.

And walked as fast as they could to the monastery. Little Blue then stepped forward, saying: "Master, Please be so kind as to ask Mr. Xu to come here."

When lady Bai and Little Blue arrived at the Precious Hall of the Great Hero,⁴⁷ they stepped forward and exclaimed: "Reverend monk, I have been told that my husband Xu Xian is here in this monastery, so why do you keep him here? Quickly tell him to come here so he can go back with us." Fahai replied: "You evil monsters! Xu Xian is a disciple of the Buddha, but he was bewitched by you two, and against the rules you have harmed him! Now he is here, but as he has shaved his head and become a monk, he cannot go back anymore." Lady Bai replied: "Reverend monk, you make no sense. Even if my husband wanted to leave the household, he should first come home for a while and make provisions for his possessions and his family, and then it still would be early enough to leave the household. Now you keep him here and force him to leave the household, cruelly separating husband and wife, and decisively cutting off the Xu lineage. Is this the behavior of a proper monk?"

Lady Bai piteously implored the reverend monk:

"Quickly allow my husband to leave this temple!

He is the sole heir of the Xus and still has no son;

Terminating a lineage is a crime against the norms!

I implore you, dear abbot, to show me some mercy;

Please forgive me my crime and let him go home!"

The monk didn't pay any attention to her request,

He ignored her completely, he showed no reaction.

Lady Bai repeatedly implored him most piteously;

Suppressing her anger, she spoke with great humility.

But when she had implored him in a heartrending way,

Suddenly the fire of blind rage set her body ablaze.

She now called him a demonic monk, a bald donkey;

Someone who wrongly recited the Buddha's name:

"Now be a good boy and allow him to leave, and

Everything will be fine and I will forgive you here.

But if you dawdle yet another minute, you will die:

I will chop you to mince-meat and turn you to dust!"

Lady Bai and Little Blue implored the monk most piteously for his compassion, but after a number of times they could no longer suppress their rage, so they

⁴⁷ The Great Hero is a common designation of the Buddha. The Precious Hall of the Great Hero refers to the main hall of a Buddhist monastery, with its large statue of the Buddha.

loudly shouted: "You bald donkey, how come you refuse to change your mind? You are completely devoid of compassion!" And [Lady Bai] said: "Little Blue, let's kill him!" The two of them grabbed their double swords, but Fahai promptly ordered his acolyte to counter them with his nine-dragon meditation staff. This meditation staff was a magical treasure of Buddhism: as soon as you started to wield it, the heavenly gods descended to come to your rescue!

Upholding the Buddha the monk subdued the demons;
Magic of demons cannot defeat the Buddha's Dharma.

The divine warriors descended from the empty sky,
Great heroes in their golden helmets and golden armor.
But Little Blue and Lady Bai were terrible demons, and
The evil energy fling their breast angrily rose up high.

The monks throughout the monastery were in a panic,
Each and every one of them had lost his soul and his gall.
Lady Bai commanded all demonic creatures of the water,
The shrimp troops and crab generals with their armies.

Then she suddenly mobilized the Long River's waters
To swell up wide and far, and to rise in huge waves.
Millions of living beings were the victims of this flood;
This was determined by fate and could not be averted!

The whole prefecture's population suffered this disaster,
As these two demons created evil they could not escape.
All the monks of the monastery ran to the abbot, saying:
"This flood will submerge the monastery with its waves!"

The Chan master thereupon took off his robe, with which
He covered the mountain's top, and the waters receded.
After a while the waves calmed down, no storm arose,
And the floods returned to their source, without waves.

Then out of the blue one saw one flash of bright light:
The Pagoda-Bearing King subdued the White Snake;⁴⁸
A Guardian raised a demon-quelling pestle in his hands,
But the Star of Literature showed up to block his way.

Now when the monk secretly pondered this matter,
He eventually noticed the tiny sprout in her sleeve—
The God of Letters had entered the womb of the snake:
Only after his birth would he be able to capture her!

Lady Bai shouted: "Little Blue, ahead of us stretches one endless expanse of flooded houses, and no field or farm is anywhere to be found, so let us quickly by magic produce a little boat and row back. Let's collect our money and luggage and quickly make our escape back to Hangzhou. I've been told that my sister-in-law is a good woman, so let's go and stay with her. I could not have imagined that you and I today would suffer such an ugly defeat. Let's forget about him and get out!" Little Blue said: "Mildly, in view of the situation there is no time for remorse or regret. Let us go to your sister-in-law in Hangzhou and then come up with some other plan."

Xu Xian was staying in the sutra building and filled with sadness, so he went to see Fahai and told the monk: "When I saw your acolyte who had left the monastery to beg for donations, I acted out of compassion and was the first man to write down his contribution so you could accomplish your great undertaking. I did so in the hope that I might live in ease and at peace for all eternity. I never imagined that once I had been invited to this monastery you would force me to leave the household, and separate me from my wife so we cannot be together anymore. When I come to think of this, I am overcome by sadness." Fahai answered as follows: "If that is the case, I cannot keep you here any longer. You still have evil karma that has not yet been paid off, but I am not at liberty to disclose it to you. Come and see me once she has given birth. Today your wife has returned to Wulin, and you will meet her at West Lake's Broken Bridge."

The Chan master saw him off at the monastery gate;
He helped Xu Xian out by employing a little magic.
He had him ride on a cloud, with both eyes closed,
And a favorable wind came blowing through the air.
He didn't know, he didn't notice he rode on a cloud;
Only now did he know the master's magical powers.
It did not even take him an hour to arrive in Wulin,
And he stepped down from the cloud at Broken Bridge.

When Xu Xian opened his eyes and had a look, he said: "So here I am at Broken Bridge! This is strange. But I remember that Fahai told me I would meet her at Broken Bridge, so let me wait for her."

As Xu Xian sat down, his heart was overcome by pain;
As soon as he thought of his wife, his tears gushed forth.
"From Golden Mountain to here is quite a long journey,
But in one quarter of an hour I've arrived at this bridge!
The supernatural powers of the Dharma are unlimited;
It's an extraordinary miracle which is really quite rare."

⁴⁸ The Pagoda-Bearing King is Li Jing, a major general in the founding of the Tang dynasty (617-906), who was deified after his death as a mighty warrior god.

He was pondering the power of the Buddha's Dharma,
 And then suddenly saw a little boat appear before him.
 When the two women in that boat walked up to him,
 It turned out that his darling had arrived at this bridge!
 When Little Blue noticed him sitting on that bridge,
 She was at first sight overwhelmed by a towering rage.
 She promptly reported his presence to her mistress,
 And on these words the latter's eyebrows twitched.
 "Why on earth has my lover now arrived at this place?
 Much better if all that transpired had long been erased!"

Xu Xian immediately stepped forward, and exclaimed, "My dear wife, today we are reunited by Heaven! A favorable wind brought you here. I have caused you so much trouble—it has all been my fault!" Lady Bai said: "My dear husband, how often didn't I warn you earlier? I told you not to go outside! But why did you have to keep us, mistress and maid, in the dark and sneak off to Golden Mountain Monastery, where you were bewitched by that evil monk? It even went so far that my maid and I had to fight him in battle. It was good for him that he had some magical skills, and so we did not kill him. He said that you wanted to leave the household and didn't want to be trapped in the red dust. If you indeed love the Gate of Emptiness,⁴⁹ why didn't you tell me earlier, so I wouldn't have had to confront him! Now Heaven has sent down a huge rain that drowned numberless people and animals. When I went back to the shop, nothing was left of our house, as if all had been carried off by the easterly stream. I could barely gather enough money to come to Hangzhou. On your account I have suffered time and again these many tribulations, but I will never hold it against you." She then asked Little Blue: "Which place is this?" Little Blue answered: "This is the meeting at Broken Bridge!"

Suzhen was overcome by rage and anger this time,
 And awash in tears she wept in a heartrending way:
 "I must conclude that you have a heart that is evil—
 A man who forgets love and duty, bereft of feeling!"
 Xu Xian urgently tried to comfort her, as he said:
 "My darling wife, please do not cry so profusely!
 It was only that monk who was the root of all disaster,
 He invited me for the ritual of the opening of the eyes.
 How could I have known that that monk was so evil!"

He insisted on keeping me there and did not let me go!
 My wife, we have been married now for three years,
 How could I ever agree to be separated from you?
 Every day again I bitterly argued with that monk,
 And only then did he allow me to go back home.
 He told me to stand on a cloud, and in a moment
 I had arrived here in Hangzhou at Broken Bridge.
 All other people were drowned in that huge flood,
 But only we were lucky to be saved by that monk!"
 Little Blue then addressed her mistress as follows:
 "What your husband just said, is not mistaken at all!
 Actually it is that old monk who has saved his life,
 As otherwise he would have drowned in the flood.
 I think that this must have been ordered by Heaven
 In order to rescue the three of us and save our lives.
 Now if he hadn't gone to Golden Mountain Temple,
 He definitely would not have escaped with his life.
 If it hadn't been for the monk and his clever trick,
 How could he have guided us to that monastery?
 It must be that the bodhisattva aids and protects us,
 And guards the three of us from all kinds of danger.
 It's not in vain that your husband does good deeds:
 He who accumulates virtue will move the divinities!"

When Xu Xian had heard these words of Little Blue, he exclaimed: "Little Blue, what you are saying is right! If it hadn't been for the protection of Guanyin, we would not have gone to Golden Mountain Monastery, and we all would have lost our lives." Lady Bai said with a smile: "If you look at it from that angle, I wrongly blamed you. My dear husband, please don't be angry with me!" Xu Xian replied: "My dear wife, you and I are united in love as husband and wife, so why should I blame you? Shouldn't we be overjoyed now today we have met each other again?" Lady Bai then said: "My dear husband, if that's the case, where are we going to stay?" Xu Xian said: "My dear wife, let's all go to my elder sister and stay at her place for a few days in order to find a house. Tie the boat to the quay!"

Xu Xian went ahead to the house of Li Junfu, and when he met his sister he told her everything that had happened. He then ordered a sedan chair to go and fetch his wife and her maid, and with their luggage and money they moved to the house of Mrs. Li. The latter came outside to welcome them and invited them inside. After they had formally greeted each other, they sat down as guest and host. Lady Bai said: "My dear sister-in-law, I will not hide from you that I went with your brother to Suzhou. For almost two years we ran a pharmacy,

⁴⁹ The Gate of Emptiness is a common term for Buddhism, as it teaches that all beings are bound to change, to die, or to disintegrate, and therefore are insubstantial or empty.

and we also made some money, but because of the heavy rains lately the whole city was flooded and everything in the shop was carried off by the easterly stream. Thanks to the protection of divine Heaven we were so fortunate as to escape with our lives, and that's why we have gathered some luggage and money, hoping to stay with you. You really must despise me." But Mrs. Li said: "Dear sister-in-law, why do you say that? It's thanks to you that my little brother could have his own business. Millionaire Wu from Suzhou often sent us letters, and also in the letters to Millionaire Wang he always said that you are such a capable wife. Now that we finally meet today, I can confirm that that is true. Ever since my brother suffered that injustice and had to leave, I have thought of him day and night, so now we are reunited today, I am filled with joy!"

Mrs. Li addressed her then in the following manner:

"When my brother left for Suzhou, it hurt my heart! Ever since I have been separated from my brother, I worried about him, every hour and every minute!

But last year, on the occasion of Mid-Autumn,⁵⁰ The millionaire was so kind as to send us a letter,

And now, thanks to the protection of Blue Heaven, Brother and sister fortunately are reunited again!"

Xu Xian thereupon addressed her as follows:

"My apologies, sister, for the worries I caused.

Fortunately my dear wife is quite a smart woman, So we opened a pharmacy and made some money.

The silver we saved amounts to a few thousands, And now Heaven has granted us to return home."

Lady Bai once again wanted to add a few words:

"Dear sister-in-law, I'm grateful for your concern.

I lost my capital and suffered my tribulations, But good followed bad: I found this fine husband! Today husband and wife have come back home,

And brother and sister are happily reunited again."

Little Blue also quickly joined the conversation:

"Our master that time was treated quite wrongly!"

The two sisters-in-law got along marvelously: They agreed in all matters, and each was pleased.

Junfu busied himself making all arrangements,

And he found them a house where they could live.

On a lucky day they moved into their new house;

The two families went there together, each happy. Inseparable during daytime, these sisters-in-law! Only at night each went back to her own apartment. They also bought a number of servants and maids: A formal hall and high rooms, a grand gate and walls!

A few months after Xu Xian had returned to Hangzhou, it happened to be the Mid-Autumn Festival. As the osmanthus flowers were blooming, they set out wine and food in the back garden. Junfu and Xu Xian shared one table, and lady Bai and her sister-in-law shared another table. While they were all talking, lady Bai said: "My dear sister-in-law, you and I have been pregnant since the same month. It would be the greatest joy if we both would give birth to a boy. But if we would give birth to one boy and one girl, we should engage them to be married while they are still in the womb. In that case we would add kinship to kinship,⁵¹ and they could continue the ancestral sacrifices of both families. How does that sound to you?" Mrs. Li said: "To be honest with you, I have had the same idea, and I have already discussed it with my brother, but I was afraid that you might object." Lady Bai exclaimed: "So we both had the same idea!"

Lady Bai thereupon secretly was filled with joy:

"In this way I will have accomplished my desire!

And if this heir will be able to achieve success,

Our families both will enjoy the emperor's grace!"

Mrs. Li, her sister-in-law, addressed her, saying:

"My dear sister-in-law, please listen to my words.

If he can pass the examinations in the jade palace,

He'll glorify the ancestors and enhance our status."

Little Blue consulted the gods, asked an oracle:

"Sister-in-law, the child you carry will be a girl.

Yesterday at midnight I had a dream, in which

Immortal Zhang came and delivered a boy to us.⁵²

My mistress hurried forward to receive the boy,

And the little baby had a happy smile on his face.

When I woke up, it had only been an idle dream,

But my mistress, I'm sure, will give birth to a boy.

And when he will have made a name in one try,

⁵¹ Cousins of the same surname could not marry, but a marriage of cousins of a different surname was quite acceptable. In many parts of China this was even a preferred form of marriage.

⁵² Immortal Zhang is venerated as a purveyor of children. He is depicted as a white-faced, long-bearded man with a little boy by his side.

⁵⁰ Mid-Autumn Festival is celebrated on the night of the fifteenth of the Eighth Month.

He will bring along as his maid this Little Blue!"

When the ten months of lady Bai came to a term,⁵³

The little baby turned its body around in the womb.

This pain in her belly felt as if carved by knives,

But neither heaven nor earth offered her an escape.

Little Blue served at her side and supported her,

As she bit on her black hair during the labor pains.

The Star of Letters descended to the earth below,

And Immortal Zhang brought a boy to the gate.

Innumerable gods and deities offered protection;

Holding his brush, the Star of Literature appeared.

Suzhen gave birth to a boy, and on the same day

Mrs. Li gave birth to a girl. As a result of this

Both families were filled with joy at this time

As the lineage would be gloriously continued.

Lady Bai said to Xu Xian: "When I was about to give birth, I dreamed that a

dragon encircled my body, so let's call the boy Mengjiao."⁵⁴ Her sister-in-law

Mrs. Li on the same day gave birth to a girl, and they called her Bilian. The two

families were overwhelmed by joy!

But light and shade pass by like an arrow, and soon the day of the Full Month

had arrived, so the sister-in-law and the brother-in-law were discussing the head-

shaving and preparing wine and food, as the next day they would sacrifice to the

gods and entertain guests. When the fifth watch had come, lady Bai felt the blood

in her heart well up. She hastily made a computation on her fingers, and exclaimed:

"Alas, this is not good! Today my disaster arrives, and it will happen by my husband's

hands. Oh my dear husband, the sky is not yet even bright, so why have you risen

so early?" Xu Xian replied: "Today is the lucky day of our son's head-shaving, so I

am afraid we will have visitors who come to offer their congratulations." Lady Bai

said: "If there are guests, your brother-in-law can entertain them. Just stay here in

this room, and wait till I will have done up my hair, and dressed our son in pretty

clothes. Then we can go downstairs together with the baby to pay our respects to

the deities and ancestors." Now lady Bai had computed yin and yang and learned

that she would die by the hand of Xu Xian, and that's why she wanted to detain

her husband, hoping in this way to survive the evil hour. But a servant came and

said: "Outside a guest has arrived." Xu Xian called: "I'm coming!" Lady Bai said:

"Your wife is waiting here. Please come back quickly!"

⁵³ In traditional China, a pregnancy was said to last ten months, counting from the month in which the woman became pregnant to the month in which she delivered the baby.

⁵⁴ A *jiao* is a kind of dragon and *ming* means "to dream."

When Xu Xian went outside to welcome the guest,

He discovered that Fahai had come to his mansion.

Fahai addressed him in the following manner: "Sir,

You are acting in a way that lacks all intelligence!

You are a fine true disciple of the Buddhist school

To let your sorry life be harmed by a demon wife!

I now bring this begging bowl, given by the Buddha,

And it is my intention to capture your demon wife."

Xu Xian thereupon secretly thought to himself:

"The actions of this old monk are inspired by evil

Even if my wife may act like a witch or a monster,

It is absolutely of no concern to you, not even a bit.

Don't try to come here today and to create trouble

By separating husband and wife, rearing them apart.

If I look at this little bowl, there's no reason for fear—

It definitely will be unable to harm my wife's body!"

As he stood firmly outside the door to her room,

She suddenly called from inside: "My dear husband,

I've been waiting for you now for quite some time,

So why have you still not come back to our room?"

Xu Xian immediately answered her as follows:

"I am standing outside the gate for a good reason!

You just stay in the room and keep waiting for me,

It is impossible right now for me to come inside.

If I would come inside, that might well harm you,

Because I'm afraid your star of disaster has come!"

How did he know how terrible that bowl could be—

A ray of a golden light pierced and entered the gate!

Suddenly there had been a movement of her sleeves,

And as soon as it saw demon energy, it soared high.

Lady Bai at this moment was terrified and scared,

So a white light escaped from the crane of her head.

The two lights, white and golden, battled each other,

But soon the golden bowl turned into black clouds.

She loudly exclaimed: "This I cannot withstand—

The full weight of Mt. Tai is pressing on my head!"⁵⁵

Xu Xian at this moment was at a loss what to do,

Scared out of his wits he hastily entered the room.

⁵⁵ Mt. Tai in Shandong is the holy mountain of the East.

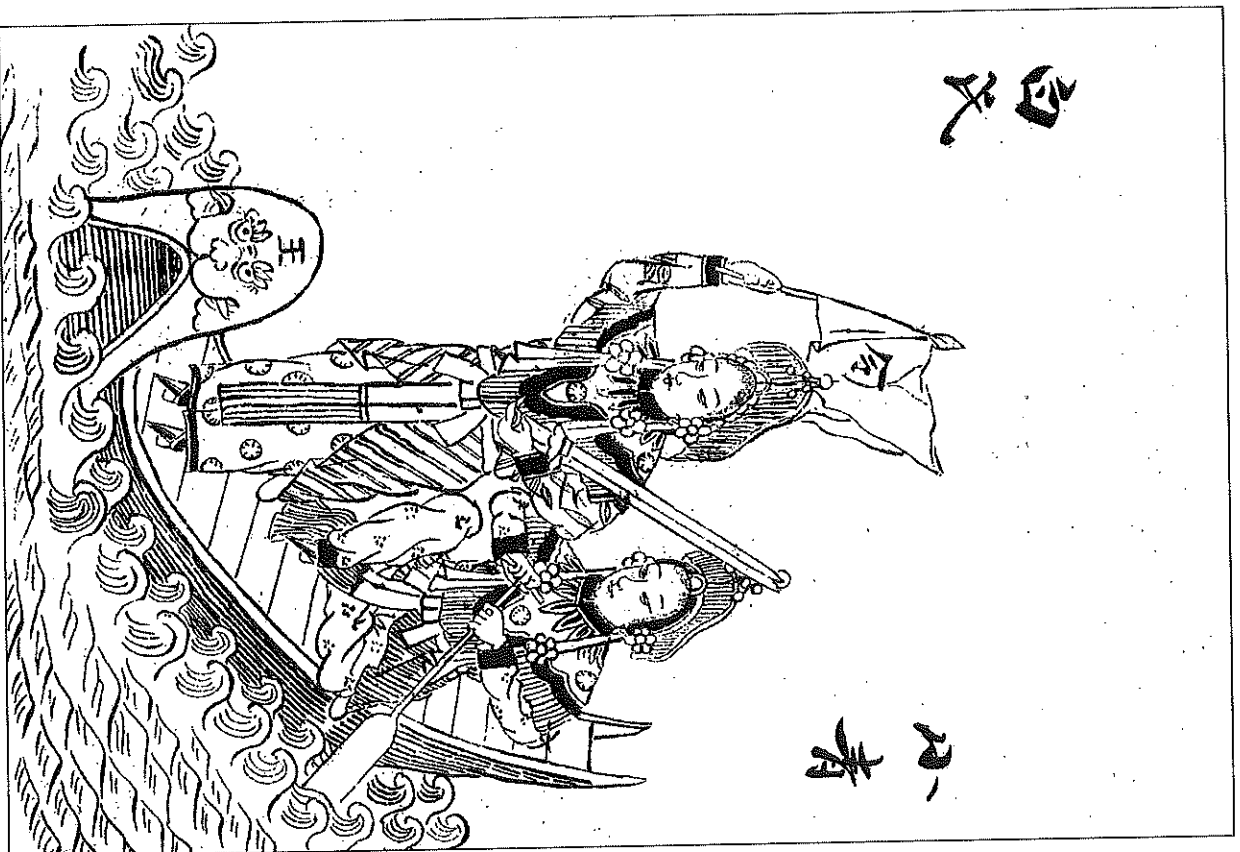
Xu Xian saw that the flying begging bowl had entered lady Bai's room and now covered the top of her head. His wife loudly shouted: "Ayra, my dear husband, I'm done for!"

Covered by the bowl she suffered unbearable pain:
The Buddha's begging bowl was a thousand tons!
Still polluted by blood, her computations were off:
She had mistaken the hour of noon for the afternoon.
That's why she was well prepared for the later hour,
But how did she know disaster would strike so soon?
Immediately she called out to her darling husband:
"Today is the day that I will be separated from you."

When Little Blue saw her mistress in this condition, she was overcome by sadness, and her tears gushed forth like a rain. But as there was nothing she could do, she scolded Xu Xian: "You depraved creature, how can you bear to see my mistress in this situation? It is all because of your vicious actions! How could I be willing to forgive you and let you off? I will have to take revenge on behalf of my mistress. That will be the only way to appease the rage in my bosom. Oh, my dear mistress!

Xu Xian, you really are a man with an evil heart!
This is all due to his evil and vicious machinations!
You fully forgot the three years as husband and wife.
My mistress treated you like some precious treasure,
Atravive and considerate she wanted you to be fine!"
When Little Blue imagined this heartrending scene,
She hastily shook her head a number of times, and
Her head turned as big as a bushel, her eyes were bells,
And she manifested her shape as a blue-tipped snake!
Xu Xian was so scared his souls were all scattered,
But from under the bowl lady Bai loudly shouted:
"My darling husband, now please don't be afraid,
But just come and stand here by my side for a while."
With her left hand she grasped her husband's hand,
And with her right hand she restrained Little Blue:
"You have kindly served me with greatest devotion,
Our love and affection far surpassed that of siblings.
So I implore you not to do my husband any harm,
As you still will have to take care of my little boy.

That monk Fahai, who is now seated in his study,
Also wants to harm you, so your life will decay.
I urge you to run for your life as fast as you can—
If you wait for another minute, you lose your life!"
When Little Blue had heard her mistress' words,
She said good-bye to her mistress, weeping loudly.
Next all of a sudden a demonic twister arose, which
Soared into the distant sky, and she was gone.
Let's not tell how Little Blue made her escape;
Let's return to the subject of lady Bai's sufferings.
The begging bowl was resting on her shoulders—
When Xu Xian saw this, he was greatly afflicted.
He called "My dear wife!" but he got no answer:
Then his lovely wife had completely disappeared.
Fahai, seated in his study, practiced meditation,
And his divine true nature penetrated the heavens.
A golden arhat appeared on an auspicious cloud,
And at the order of the Buddha arrested lady Bai.
When Chan master Fahai came and lifted the bowl,
The bowl hung in the air, and it shook some times.
After a while it fell down on the boards of the room:
The body of lady Bai had completely disappeared!
Xu Xian that moment was overwhelmed by grief,
But his throat was blocked and he could not speak.
All of a sudden he collapsed in the upstairs room,
A sigh escaped from his throat, his souls dispersed.
If you'd want to know how she did at the pagoda,
Please read the next part, and I will explain it all.



From left to right: Lady White and Little Blue

ANONYMOUS

The Precious Scroll of Thunder Peak in Qiantang County of Hangzhou Prefecture in Zhejiang

Part Two

He saved her life by a donation of a hundred coins,
While she repaid him by a marriage of three years.
The karmic debt is finished, and each goes his way,
But it is her body that is crushed by sin and guilt!

The Chan master once recited "Amitabha Buddha,"¹ and once stamped his meditation staff on the ground, and suddenly lady Bai had disappeared. When Xu Xian lifted the golden bowl in both his hands, he only saw a tiny little white snake as small as a lamp wick, and he exclaimed: "My dear wife, this golden bowl has the unlimited power of the Buddha's Dharna, and it is a magic treasure from the Western Paradise, so how can I save you? I, this miserable wretch, have done you in, and the pain is killing me!"

Xu Xian at this moment was wounded in his heart,
He stamped his feet, beat his breast, awash in tears.
He addressed the Chan master in the following words:
"What you did here today was really too cruel by far!
You and I shared no enmity in some earlier existence,
Why did you have to hurt me today in this painful way?"
Mrs. Li, her sister-in-law, did not yet know a thing.
But one of the maids went and told her what happened.
As soon as she saw this, her heart and gall shattered,
And she collapsed on the dirt and the dust of the floor.
She lifted the bowl of purple gold in both her hands,
As she cried and wept, wept and cried, awash in tears.

¹ Amitabha Buddha is the Buddha of the Pure Land of the West. All who sincerely invoke his name will upon their death be reborn in his paradise, where they will live in bliss, awaiting the birth of the future Buddha Maitreya.

"Who was the person who played this vicious trick? In just a moment he had her killed, leaving me alone!"

Xu Xian addressed her in the following manner:

"That monk who came here was the root of disaster! Who could have known that the bowl would fly off, and force my dear wife to show her original shape!"

When Mrs. Li had heard this story from her brother, she reviled him in the following way: "You bastard,

How did your wife treat you that you forgot her love and betrayed her affections? You have no conscience! My sister-in-law carried her karma from an earlier life, and then in this life she married you, a lowlife scum!

I've never known that you were such a lowlife scum, evil and vicious by nature, and far too cruel to boot! Few men in this world sink so low as to kill their wife! The Buddha's mouth, a snake's heart: you're no man!"

Xu Xian then exclaimed: "My dear elder sister, please consider the love between siblings born of one womb! I may have harmed my wife, but I did it unknowingly, and now her pitiful death really wounds my heart!"

Mrs. Li promptly replied to him in the following way: "What you have done here today shows no intelligence.

If you behave like this even toward your own wife, who knows what love you have for your own siblings? From this day on, I will cut all connections with you, like a sharp knife splitting bamboo: separated in two!"

Hearing this, the Chan master addressed her as follows: "Elder sister, there is no need at all for such blind rage!

Lady Bai was not a woman of the world of mortal men, but a snake that practiced self-cultivation on Mt. Ermei. And when she had practiced for seventeen hundred years, she changed herself into a girl so she could get married.

Her sins are many as she created havoc for the people: Golden Mountain was flooded, and many were drowned. At the behest of the Buddha I have captured this demon: I have no other intention at all, no desire to be cruel!"

Mrs. Xu said: "You evil monk, you don't follow the pure rules and show no compassion at all. The wife of my younger brother had no feud with you in an earlier life and did you no injustice in this existence, but you persisted in your

desire to take her life. Even if she had been an evil demon, what concern was that of yours, a monk? I'd think that Blue Heaven's virtue is that of fostering life! But now you had to use your black magic and come up with false pretenses to snatch her away! You evil monk! You may be filled with wanton desire, but I'm afraid that she is an upright and virtuous woman, so she will not give in to your lust. All your effort will be in vain! Why should I be willing to let you go off?"

When Fahai heard this torrent of abuse, he didn't know what to reply. After he had endured her curses for a while, he exclaimed: "Dear female patron, you don't have to be so enraged. True and false are so difficult to prove, and that's why you don't believe me. Please come with me to West Lake, and then I will let her out, so you can ask her yourself!" Junfu said: "That's a deal!" They promptly hailed some sedan chairs, and Xu Xian and his elder sister, who carried Mengjiao, and the maids and relatives and neighbors, all went.

When they got to the bank of the lake, they made a halt; at Thunder Peak Pagoda their sedans were put down.

The Chan master stepped down from his sedan chair. He placed the golden bowl on the ground in the middle.

He allowed lady Bai to appear, that lovely woman, just as before she was a beauty in hairpins and skirt.

Having taken refuge in the Dharma, her heart was pure; returned to the true root—not a trace of demonic rage!

She was reunited with her sister-in-law and her husband, and she also greeted her brother-in-law and his mother, and the relatives and the neighbors and all other people. They all came to see her and ask her what had happened. What a joy!

Her sister-in-law addressed her as follows: "Dear sister,

If I would tell you my feelings, my tears fill my cheeks! How sad that my little brother had no conscience at all,

Committed this vicious deed, and killed you, a woman! In my eyes you were such a smart and intelligent person,

Yet you suffered deceit and abuse—I am totally baffled! How I hate that evil monk, who's totally bereft of reason—

Why did he dare so abuse you and harm you, a woman?"

Lady Bai thereupon addressed her in the following way: "My sister-in-law, there's no need to harbor suspicions.

I am not a human being, but in the four classes of birth I do belong to those creatures that are born from an egg.

I practiced self-cultivation for seventeen hundred years, and I came here to repay a favor, to compensate a virtue. That is why I became the wife of your younger brother.

Due to his virtue I gave birth to a boy who will be his heir.
 But alas, in many actions I was reckless and disorderly,
 Creating havoc for the people who suffered a disaster.
 I cannot escape from my crime that fills all of heaven—
 I never should have swerved from the rules of reason!
 When I flooded Golden Mountain, many lost their lives;
 I secretly stole the sandalwood, and so created disaster.
 The Chan master came here at the behest of the Buddha,
 It was not his desire to pin me down, and bury me deep.
 The Buddha mind is compassion, saving us from suffering;
 He did not have any evil designs, seeking sex and money.”

Lady Bai urged her sister-in-law: “There is no need to worry or grieve! Set your mind at rest, because at some later date we will be reunited again. As soon as I was subdued by the Buddha, I took refuge in Buddhism. He has laid his hand on the top of my head and given me the prediction of my future buddhahood, and so now the six roots are pure and clean,² and my mind, converted to the right Way, is free from any evil thought.” Her sister-in-law said: “It’s better to live for one day than to be dead for a thousand years. Even little ants love life, so how can you not be saddened by death?” Lady Bai said: “My body has not died at all!”

Lady Bai addressed all present in the following way:
 “You all should cultivate the Buddha’s lotus terrace,³
 If I today do not once again practice self-cultivation,
 How can I at some later day escape the three disasters?⁴
 My body has not died but is buried deep in the earth;
 Quietly I practice self-cultivation, revering the Buddha.
 Today I must once again go the path of self-cultivation
 So at a later date I may visit the Isles of the Immortals.⁵
 My dear sister-in-law,
 There is one thing that I would like to entrust to you:
 I have to ask you to feed and raise my little baby boy!

² The six roots are the six sense organs: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The attachments originating from the senses result in sin.

³ The lotus terrace refers to the lotus-shaped seat of the Buddha. The expression here metonymically denotes the tenets of Buddhism.

⁴ The three disasters refer to rebirth at the three lower levels of existence (in hell, as a hungry ghost, as a demon).

⁵ The Isles of the Immortals are floating islands in the eastern ocean, on which the immortals spend their days in bliss.

If this son eventually achieves great glory and status,
 That will comfort your heart and you’ll smile for joy.
 Husband and wife will be reunited at some later date:
 My dear husband, you don’t have to worry for me.
 For this moment we will be separated, I must tell you.
 Relatives and friends, we must part, please all leave!”

Lady Bai exclaimed: “My dear husband, please ask Mr. Buddha to tell you your own original identity!⁶ I urge you to turn around quickly so you may soon achieve bodhi.⁷ Your wife now has to take her leave!” Xu Xian said: “My darling, can’t you come back?” Lady Bai replied: “How could I come back again now that I have arrived at this stage? My husband, there is no need for you to cry so sadly. Take good care of our son together with your sister, so he may grow up to become a man who will continue the ancestral sacrifices and ensure the survival of the Xu lineage.”

She also [said:] “Mr. Buddha, can I ask you until when I will have to practice self-cultivation before I can achieve the true fruit?” Fahai replied to her: “From this moment on you must cultivate the true mind, remove the six roots and discard the three karmas,⁸ and then you will be able to obtain a position among the immortals after twenty years. But if you don’t change your nature and don’t discard your passions and still give rise to evil thoughts, you will find it impossible to rise to a higher plane of existence even if the water of West Lake would dry up, Thunder Peak Pagoda would crumble, and the bore on the river would not rise anymore.⁹ So please descend!” Lady Bai answered: “I will promptly obey your holy instructions!” The Chan master stamped his meditation staff on the ground, as he shouted: “Caverns of the earth, open up!” Slowly a hole opened up in the earth. Lady Bai once again said good-bye to everyone, and she also once again implored her sister-in-law to take good care of her child: “Don’t worry about me! We will meet again later. I have to go!” And then Fahai pinned lady Bai down beneath Thunder Peak Pagoda. Xu Xian shouted: “My darling, I’ll come with you!” But the Chan master said: “Mr. Xu, there is no need to be so sad! Husband and wife will meet each other again, so I urge you to practice self-cultivation and convert to the right Way. I now have to take my leave.”

Xu Xian could only go back home with Mrs. Li and the others, and there he was once again reviled by his elder sister: “She was such a nice and capable woman! But you had the cruelty to play such a dirty trick! How can you live with yourself?”

⁶ Mr. Buddha refers to the monk Fahai.

⁷ Bodhi is the wisdom leading to enlightenment.

⁸ The three karmas are the karmas originating from deeds, words, and thoughts.

⁹ The bore on the Qiantang River to the east of Hangzhou was one of the city’s great sights. The bore was supposed to be most spectacular on the fifteenth of the Eighth Month.

His elder sister that moment again exploded with rage; she angrily reviled her younger brother as a scoundrel: "In what way and manner did your dear wife treat you? She honored her man and master like a fine guest!

A wise and virtuous, smart and intelligent woman! Threefold obedient, fourfold virtuous, full of love!¹⁰ But you in your cruelty had to play this dirty trick, and wounded and harmed the life of a fine woman! Pinned down below a pagoda—when will we meet? If you want to find her, you must seek her in dreams! You're a cruel and vicious man—the heart of a wolf! How were you ever able to obtain such a fine wife?"

Xu Xian was reviled by his elder sister till he burst out into tears, and filled with sadness he returned to his room. When he saw the belongings of his wife, his tears gushed forth like a rain, and he thought to himself: "How can I show my face in this world? I can only shave my head and become a monk in preparation for a next life." He promptly cut off his hair, and sneaking out of the gate, he left.

After seven lives of cultivation trapped in the red dust: One day he leaves the clan to go back to his true root! So Xu Xian cut off his hair and abandoned the family, Once he left the red dust, he practiced self-cultivation.

His mind at peace he practiced the Way as a monk, Hiding at Zhaoping Monastery, he lived an ascetic life. Inside the Gate of Emptiness he had no encumbrances; Practicing meditation he achieved true enlightenment.

When Mrs. Li came upstairs, the baby in her arms, She wondered why she didn't see Xu Xian anywhere. But when she then walked over to the mirror stand, She saw his black hair, and awash in tears she said:

"I only thought that my little brother was taking a nap! I'd no idea he might shave his head to become a monk!"
His elder sister wept till all her innards were broken:
"This feels as if random arrows are piercing my heart!"

Ever since Xu Xian had shaved his head and become a monk in the Zhaoping Monastery, he strictly observed the pure rules and firmly cultivated the Way. When quickly three years had passed, he suddenly conceived the desire to roam like a cloud all over the world, so he said good-bye to the other monks, and left the monastery.

Xu Xian said good-bye and left Zhaoping Monastery; He took his leave of West Lake and traveled all over. Roaming like a cloud he visited the famous mountains, Both by day and by night he continued his journey.

Then unexpectedly he encountered the Chan master: Hair like a crane, cheeks like a boy, bones very clear.

The Chan master long ago knew the meaning of this, And he came forward to guide him to his monastery.

When Xu Xian arrived at Golden Mountain Temple, Bells and drums harmonized with the voices of monks. He adopted the name of Daozong, and, seated in his cell, Reverting the golden body, he took refuge in Mahayana.¹¹

Our story goes that when Mengjiao had turned seven, he went to school and studied his letters. His intelligence was unequalled, and in smartness he surpassed all others. One day, when the teacher was not in the room, the older children at that school told him: "Mengjiao, you are the child of a demon, and, without knowing the truth, you call strangers your parents. Aren't you ashamed?" When Mengjiao heard these words, he had no answer at all, so he left the classroom and went back home, so he could ask his mother. When Mrs. Li saw her son come home, she said: "My son, at this time it is not even noon, so why have you been released from school so early? Or was the teacher perhaps absent?" Mengjiao answered her: "The others said something I didn't understand, so I have come back to ask mommy." Mrs. Li said: "So what did they say you didn't understand? Please tell your mother."

Before he had said a word, Mengjiao was awash in tears, And then he informed his mother of what had happened. "When I, your son, had taken my seat in the classroom, The other kids over there at school started bullying me. They said I was not a child that you had given birth to, And they even said that some demon was my mother! Dear mother, please tell me from whom I was born,

¹⁰ As a daughter a woman should obey her husband, as a wife her husband, and as a widow her grown-up son. The four virtues refer to chaste behavior, proper speech, modest appearance, and diligence in work.

¹¹ The golden body is the golden body of the Buddha. Mahayana or the "Great Vehicle" refers to the type of Buddhism practiced in East Asia.

And who are the true biological parents of your son!"
 When Mrs. Li heard this, she pondered his question,
 As she silently reviled those damned kids at school.
 She exclaimed: "How should I answer this question?
 When I open my mouth, I will have to tell him a lie!
 My dear boy, don't believe those slanderous words:
 You and your sister and twins, both are my children!"

Mengjiao thought: "How come other people are telling these stories if what you tell me is right?" Mrs. Li said: "You rascal! I carried you in my womb for ten months, and nursed you at my breast for three years. I suffered a myriad of tribulations, raising you, this unfilial little rascal. Now you have turned seven, we sent you to a school to learn your letters, hoping that when you will have grown up, you will have success in the examination, so your mother will not have suffered in vain. But now you listen to the words of these mean people, and come home to speak ill of your own parents! If this is not a reason to give you a beating, I don't know what is! I'll call a maid to bring over the rod, so I can beat you to death, you little rascal!" A weeping Mengjiao cried out: "Aiya, dear mother!" And Mrs. Li also was awash in tears before she had ever hit him, and the two of them wept together.

Mengjiao cried and wept and knelt down in the dust:
 "Dear mother, why do you have to become so angry?
 It's not that your son believes all those idle words,
 But it seems as if there is some reason in this case.
 If your child is indeed a son who was born to you,
 I should have the same surname, not another one.
 If my true father and I have a different surname,
 There must be a special reason for that situation.
 My father is surnamed Li, and I am surnamed Xu,
 So please, dear mother, explain how that happened.
 Your child is happily willing to take responsibility,
 Even if you beat me to death, I will not complain."

Mrs. Li said: "There's a good reason for that. Because you were beset by troubles in infancy, we were afraid you would not be able to survive, and that's why we had you adopted by the Xu family."¹² Mengjiao then replied: "If you had me adopted, how come I have never seen these adoptive parents?" When Mrs. Li had no ready answer to her son's question, she said: "Let's not discuss this any further!"

Mrs. Li had no idea how to answer this question:
 He scrutinized her words and observed her actions.
 She wished to speak but didn't, at a loss what to do,
 While Mengjiao knelt down in the dust of the floor.
 "As your child I am grateful for all your good care,
 Never throughout my life will I forget your favors.
 And if by chance I can achieve glory and nobility,
 I'll repay your love with a phoenix cap and jacket.

Now who is the person who has given birth to me?
 What is in birth and death my name and surname?
 Please be so kind as to have consideration for me,
 I hope and pray that you will show me compassion.
 Whether by birth or by raising, we are one body,
 I always will serve you with undivided devotion."

When Mrs. Li opened her mouth she reviled him,
 She reviled him as a little rascal bereft of reason:
 "How can you suspect your parents of being strangers?
 How can you suspect your parents of being strangers?
 Your father has never ever married a concubine,
 Your mother has been his wedded wife till today,
 And you refuse to believe the words of your mother,
 But rather consider the words of others to be true!"
 When Mengjiao heard this, his tears gushed forth:
 "Dear mother, you still refuse to confess the truth!
 If all my passionate pleading is of no use at all,
 I'll have to leave home and travel to find them.
 So, my dear mother, today I have to say good-bye,
 To go looking for my parents in the world outside.
 If Blue Heaven perhaps will manifest compassion,
 I'll find my family and then come back home.
 As long as I have not yet seen my parents' face,
 Your child will rather die than come home again.
 If I cannot repay the great grace of care and love,
 I'll be reborn as a dog or horse to repay your love."

When Mrs. Li heard him say this, she got so scared that her souls left her body, and she hurried to say: "Mengjiao my son, you are still so little, who do you want to find in that wide world?" Mengjiao replied: "I will ask everyone I meet. If I can find my father and mother, we will come back together so I can serve both sides for the love of giving birth to me and raising me. But if I cannot find them, I also will not come back to serve you." Mrs. Li thought: "If I don't tell him, he will run away from home

¹² Such fabled adoptions to fool evil ghosts were quite common in some areas of traditional China.

to go off on his quest, and if something unforeseen would happen, that would cut off the ancestral sacrifices of both these families." So she could only say: "My son, there is no need to be so sad! Let your mother tell you the whole story.

Come with me, my son, to the upstairs room,
And I'll tell you everything, from the beginning."

With a complicated key Mrs. Li unlocked a chest,

And from that chest she took a painted portrait.

As she pointed to the painting she told her son:

"These people in the painting are your parents!"

Mengjiao looked at the painting very attentively;

As his eyes were brimming with tears he thought:

"This man and woman painted in black and white
Plain to see are a couple, and still young in years."

Mrs. Li then addressed him in the following way:

"My dear son, now please listen to what I will say.

But I'm afraid that you'll be saddened by my tale.

Even a man of stone or iron would burst into tears.

Your father's lineage originally is from Ningbo,

And the family was settled there in Cixi County.

He was my younger brother, we shared one womb,

But our parents died early while here in Hangzhou.

He was studying to be a manager of a pharmacy,

And for some years he assisted in mixing the herbs.

That year he had reached the age of twenty-three;

His surname was Xu, Xu Xian; his style Hanwen.

As it happened to be the Clear and Bright Festival,

Your father went to West Lake to sweep the graves.

And on the road he met the mother that bore you—

Bai Suzhen was the name and surname she used.

But by the origin of her body she was no mortal:

She was a white snake spirit of a thousand years!

The two of them fell deeply in love with each other;

Based on this common desire they wanted to marry.

Because your father was poor and lacked the money,

Your mother gave him silver for the engagement gifts.

But when your father wanted to exchange the silver,

He was arrested by police officers and taken away.

The silver had been stolen from the vault, these ingots,

So he was accused of the crime and duly sentenced.

Mengjiao asked: "Mother, why did that happen?" Mrs. Li said: "This silver was silver from the Qiantang County strongroom, and it had been snatched away by your mother. Fortunately the magistrate was honest and pure. He noticed that your father was not a criminal type, and so he did not subject him to torture. He questioned him in great detail, and your father gave a truthful account. The magistrate immediately ordered the officers to arrest your mother. But as soon as she and her maid saw the officers come in, they miraculously disappeared, and that's why she is called a demon. Later the magistrate banished your father to Suzhou, and it turned out that your mother and her maid Little Blue were already in Suzhou, waiting for him.

Your father then was banished to the city of Suzhou,

And your mother had gone there and waited for him.

In Suzhou they met with a certain Millionaire Wu,

Who loved justice, and was free with his money.

He urged your two parents to get together again,

And so they celebrated their wedding a second time.

They opened a drugstore, and called it Baohetang;

The business was booming, so they had a good life.

After they had run that shop for a number of years,

They had amassed ten-thousands of ounces of silver.

A monk from Golden Mountain asked for donations,

And your father wrote down his name on that list:

He alone gave three hundred loads of sandalwood

To carve statues of the arhats and of Guanyin.

The work was done, and the eyes were to be opened;

He was invited to Golden Mountain—disaster struck."

Mengjiao said: "It is a huge merit to donate all by yourself three hundred loads of sandalwood, so why did this give rise to disaster?" Mrs. Li said: "My son, in this Golden Mountain Monastery you had a Chan master Fahai, who said that your mother was a demon, and therefore he kept your father in the monastery, not allowing him to go back. When your mother came to know this, she and Little Blue followed him to the monastery to ask your father to come home. But that monk refused to let him go, and that enraged your mother to such an extent that she engaged the monk in a battle of magic.

A single drop of water cannot raise a hundred waves;

One spark of fire can burn down thousands of houses.

Suddenly the two of them engaged in a magic battle,

And she harmed the people in a most distressing way.

The population of the prefecture suffered a disaster,

And the sinful karma of this event was not minute!
 Later the couple came back to their old hometown,
 And she was closer to me than my closest relatives.
 And then a few months later you my son were born,
 We were overwhelmed by joy over this rare jewel.
 But just when we were to celebrate the Full Month,
 And when friends and relatives came to celebrate,
 That monk Fahai appeared at the gate in person,
 And said that your mother's sins were too many!
 In the Golden Mountain flooding people had died;
 As she disobeyed Heaven, the sentence was heavy.
 The Buddha had given him a bowl of purple gold
 Under which to capture and subdue your mother."

Mengjiao asked: "So what happened eventually to my mother?" Mrs. Li said:
 "My son, that is chilling to tell. The golden bowl of that monk flew into her
 upstairs room, and when it covered the top of her head, your mother quickly
 changed into a snake, which was captured by the monk. So that's why we are not
 your father and mother. I am actually your aunt. When your mother was captured,
 I could not believe it, as I thought that that monk was deluding people with black
 magic, so I was not willing to let him get off that easily, but later I went with him
 to Thunder Peak Pagoda. There he allowed your mother to come out in human
 shape as before, and your mother explained everything to me in great detail. That's
 how I came to understand, and only then could I forgive the Chan master.

So you should call me your aunt from now on,
 And I in my turn should call you my nephew.
 At the suggestion of your mother you're engaged
 Since before your birth to marry my dear daughter.
 But your father,
 Overcome by suffering, departed for other regions;
 He shaved his head and then left to become a monk.
 I now have raised you to the age of seven years,
 And I love you more than I would a son of my own.
 The ancestral sacrifices of the two families depend
 On you, who will be the heir to continue the lineage."
 When Mengjiao had heard this, he spoke as follows,
 Repeatedly addressing her as "my aunt" without end:
 "Your nephew has been cared for and raised by you,
 On top of kinship you have added still more kinship!
 Your love is as deep as the sea, and as high as heaven;

If ever I achieve glory, you will receive a noble title.
 But because my mother is buried under a pagoda,
 And I don't know
 Where my father may have gone for self-cultivation,
 The karma of my sins is as heavy as a mountain—
 So how can I not be deeply pained in my heart?
 That detestable Fahai was totally bereft of reason,
 How could I be willing to forgive that evil monk?
 A hempen cord of a thousand *zhang* still has a knot!¹³
 None measures the hatred for my parents' murderer!
 As long as I haven't taken revenge, I'm not a man—
 If I encounter him in a narrow lane, he is done for!
 As long as I cannot revenge my father and mother,
 I have no desire at all to read books and writings.
 What is so special about the highest rank at court?
 A golden belt, a purple gown—just wasted effort!"

Mrs. Li said: "That Chan master Fahai roams like a cloud throughout the wide
 world, so where should you, still as young as you are, be able to find him? Don't
 be so sad, and diligently study your books. If one day your name is listed on
 the golden placard,¹⁴ it's not too late to take revenge!" Mengjiao replied: "Your
 nephew is ridiculed by his classmates, so what face do I have to go back to that
 school?" Mrs. Li said: "If that's the case, your uncle will hire a teacher for you,
 so you can study at home."

Mengjiao could only think of his father and mother;
 Tears coursed down his cheeks, such was his grief.
 His aunt urged him again and again to come down,
 And only then did Mengjiao walk down the stairs.
 In his belly he secretly had come up with a plan;
 No one suspected that he had conceived this idea:
 While nobody noticed, he sneaked out of the house,
 As his burning desire was to meet with his mother.
 He asked all he met for the road to West Lake,
 And where Thunder Peak Pagoda was located.
 By asking again and again he received directions;
 For an offering he now needed incense and candles.

¹³ Ten feet equal one *zhang*.

¹⁴ The golden placard refers to the poster on which the names are listed of those who have passed the
 oriental metropolitan examinations.

He said: "I have five copper coins with me. I will use three to buy incense and candles, and two to get some sugar cakes." Straightaway he arrived at the foot of Thunder Peak Pagoda.

When he saw the pagoda, Mengjiao was afflicted; Sadly wailing and weeping, he cried out: "Mother!" Using earth to serve as incense, he deeply bowed; Sugar cakes and red candles he placed on the dust.

"I was not aware of your sufferings, dear mother; Because till this very day I was fooled by my aunt. But now the truth was disclosed by my classmates; When I questioned my aunt, she told me the facts.

My father shaved his head and became a monk, My mother suffers disaster here inside the earth, And I wrongly called other people my parents: Only today, alas, this all was made clear to me!

In vain your son has grown till the age of seven, The crime of unfiliality weighs a thousand pounds, Kneeling down at the pagoda, I repeatedly call out, But you, mother, below the pagoda, will not know.

It is not because your son was slow or sluggish; It's because since my birth I didn't know a thing! When will I be able to revenge your cruel death? Only then will I have dissolved this great hatred!"

While outside Mengjiao was telling his tearful tale, His mother inside the pagoda heard him clearly, Raising her voice, she called out to her dear son: "Mengjiao, please listen to what I will say to you.

Even though I've been buried under this pagoda, I have spent these seven years in ease, at peace. Thanks to Fahai who came and enlightened me, I've taken refuge with the Buddha, his Dharma.

My son, no need to be sad and grieved at heart; Please allow your mother to explain the situation. You think that your mother suffers in darkness, But in pure stillness I practice self-cultivation.

So, my son, don't cry on behalf of your mother, But quickly go home, and read books and texts. If one day you are listed on the golden placard, Your mother too will not have suffered in vain.

You and Bilian will then be united in wedlock,¹⁵ The ancestral sacrifices of two families—it's you. Great is the love shown to you by uncle and aunt, Ten times as heavy as that of your own mother."

While lady Bai spoke for this one long stretch, Mengjiao heard her as clearly as clear could be. "I only could think that you had lost your life, I had no idea that you practiced self-cultivation.

Fortunately, dear mother, you have not yet died, Only now can I, your son, put my mind at rest. But alas, I cannot get closer and hug your body, I only hear your voice, but I do not see your shape.

If mother and son are going to see each other, I must topple Thunder Peak and save my mother. The deities in the air will come to my assistance, Clearly my filial piety will move heaven's court!"

Again and again Mengjiao loudly cried and wept, Hoping for a collapsed pagoda, to see his mother. Mrs. Li waited for her son, but he didn't return; When she asked at his school, he hadn't been seen.

When Mrs. Li heard this, she grew quite concerned, And she also informed her husband of the situation. Li Junfu wasted no moment and went out asking, Asking the neighbors for news, then other people.

Some people who had met Mengjiao told him That the boy had left through the Qiantang Gate. When Junfu heard this, he grew quite concerned, Walking as fast as he could, three steps now two.

Hurriedly he walked out of the Qiantang Gate, And arrived at the bank of West Lake to look. When he had passed all six bridges in his search, He arrived at the pagoda and looked all around.

As soon as Junfu saw Mengjiao crying and weeping in front of the pagoda, he exclaimed: "My son, why did you come here all by yourself? Your mother at home is worried sick, and you had me worried too, so I hurried to come and look for you here. Just look, it's already getting late—aren't you scared? Come back home today with your daddy, and then we will return some other day to visit your mother."

¹⁵ Bilian is the name of the daughter of Li Junfu and his wife.

Carrying the boy in his arms, Junfu returned home, Where he blamed his wife for spilling the truth.

"When later he goes outside, we must take care And have him followed by a servant at all times."

Mrs. Li could only agree to what he told her, And she urged the boy to set his mind at rest.

"When you have eaten dinner, go to your room, And your mother will spend the night with you."

But let's not talk about Mengjiao and his aunt, But turn to the subject of Little Blue's revenge!

"Fleeting disaster I lived in hiding for seven long years, / On Mr. Emei practicing self-cultivation in secret. / For the evil monk who killed my mistress my hatred runs deep: / I have created throwing knives to take revenge. I am Little Blue. Today I have arrived at Golden Mountain Monastery. When I see Fahai, I will revile that bald scoundrel. I'm set to revenge my mistress!" Fahai exclaimed: "You evil animal, last time you escaped me, but today you yourself are seeking your death!" As soon as Little Blue heard these words, she battled Fahai with her throwing knives. The Chan master bear all her knives down in the middle of the River. When Little Blue saw that her throwing knives had all been undone, she tried to escape, but the Chan master suddenly got out his demon-binding cord, which he threw into the air. When he had tightly bound Little Blue, she manifested her original shape.

Seeking revenge for her mistress is Little Blue,

But the work of seven years is undone in a day.

"It was for my mistress that I have been bound,

But do you know that, there under the pagoda?"

Today her throwing knives had all been undone—

Could it be that someone would be her savior?

The very moment Little Blue suffered distress,

This alarmed Guanyin, who descended to earth.

The Chan master kowtowed and said: "Bodhisatva, may I ask you why you deign to descend to this place?" The bodhisatva said: "The White Demon has already been pinned down below Thunder Peak Pagoda. Now I have learned that you at the behest of the Buddha have subdued the Blue Monster. Please hand her over to me, so I can report to the Buddha." Fahai hastily handed her over, folded his hands and retired. Dragon Daughter took out the pure vase,¹⁶ and magically made the snake smaller until she wormed her way into

the vase. The bodhisatva exclaimed: "Blue Monster, you will have to practice self-cultivation with a proper mind, so you will be able to annihilate your earlier sins, and then you may be able to emerge again at some later date."

Now the bodhisatva had saved the Blue Demon, she went off to save Mengjiao from his disease.

Longing for his mother Mengjiao became ill;

For five years he suffered from a serious illness.

Prayers to the gods and divinations didn't help;

The medicines of famous doctors didn't work.

Mrs. Li again and again was awash in tears,

When suddenly she heard a knock on the gate.

She saw that a woman old in years had arrived,

Who entered her house—her hair was all white!

Mrs. Li asked: "May I ask you, old woman, for what reason you have come here?" The bodhisatva said: "I have heard that you love to do good deeds, and that's why I have come here to ask for a vegetarian meal." Mrs. Li replied: "If you would like to have a meal, please come inside and sit there for a while." The bodhisatva then asked: "Who is this young master?" Mrs. Li replied: "This is my nephew. Because he lost his parents at a young age, he attracted this wasting disease. Prayers to the gods went unanswered, and the medicines he took had no result. He has been ill like this since he turned eight." The bodhisatva said: "I have here a cinnamon pill. He should swallow it with a cup of tea, and then he will be better." Mrs. Li took it in her hands, and said: "Many thanks!" But that old woman had disappeared—changed into a gust of wind, she rode off on a cloud!

The bodhisatva Guanyin gave her a cinnamon pill,

And that old woman had immediately disappeared!

She unexpectedly had turned into a colored cloud,

And straightway went to the Purple Bamboo Grove.¹⁷

Mrs. Li immediately knelt down on her knees,

She kowtowed with eight bows to thank the gods.

Mrs. Li then wasted no time to call for her son;

Once he swallowed the pill, he was rid of woes!

Mengjiao's belly seemed suffused with fragrance;

His whole body was purified, filled with energy!

He smelled in his mouth a pure and fragrant taste,

He was as before, fully recovered from his illness.

¹⁶ Dragon Daughter is one of the acolytes of Guanyin.

¹⁷ The Purple Bamboo Grove is located on Mt. Putuo, a little island off the Ningbo coast, believed to be the Chinese Potalaka, where Guanyin lives.

be the monk Fahai. He left three years ago to travel to other places, roaming like a cloud." Mengjiao then said: "Then there is still another monk, but I forgot his religious name." The monk said: "He will be difficult to find if you have forgotten his religious name. In our monastery we have over five hundred monks, and each has his own cell, so how could we check them one by one?" But Mengjiao suddenly came up with a solution: "Am I telling you to check individually on each of these more than five hundred people? This monk hails from Hangzhou and was surnamed Xu. That should be enough to identify him?"

Now our story goes that Xu Xian, who was now called Daozong, had lived for three years at the Zhaoqing Monastery after he had entered the Gate of Emptiness, and that he now had been living for thirteen years at Golden Mountain Monastery. Suddenly he thought to himself: "Alas! How painful it is that lady Bai is captured and pinned down under Thunder Peak Pagoda! I remember that the Chan master three years ago told me that I would be reunited with my son in this year, in this month! When I left home, the boy was just one month, and now he must have turned sixteen. If this time father and son would meet each other face to face but be unable to recognize each other, it would all be in vain. So let me go to the Great Hero Hall to pay my respects to the Buddha." He also bowed before the bodhisattva Guanyin. When he lifted his head, he suddenly saw a young man whose features were extraordinary, and whose appearance was impressive.

He stepped forward, bowed deeply, and then asked:

"May I ask where you live and how you are called?"

And what kind of business brings you to these parts?"

Please tell me all the details, sir, so I may hear them."

Mengjiao returned his greeting, and said: "Reverend, I will tell you truthfully, I hail from Qiantang County in Hangzhou. Because I am on my way to the capital to seek fame, I passed by your monastery. I had heard that the Buddha images at this ashran are magnificent, so I came here first of all to admire the statues, and secondly to pay my respects to the monks." Daozong said: "That is too kind of you. Please let's have some tea in the guest room so we can have a better conversation."

In earlier years father and son has been separated;

Today flesh and blood were to be reunited again!

While Daozong walked in front, leading the way,

Mengjiao followed behind him, walking together.

The two of them entered into the meditation hall,

And sat down, taking their seats as host and guest.

Following an exchange of courtesies, a cup of tea,

Mengjiao opened his mouth, asking this question.

Mengjiao asked: "May I ask you, reverend, where you do hail from? And what were your surname and name? Did you leave the household as a child, or did you shave your head as an adult?" Daozong replied: "Dear sir, it's a long story if I have to tell you how I left the household." Mengjiao said: "Reverend, please take your time."

"When I was a layperson I hailed from Ningbo;

Our family originally is from Cixi County there.

But my parents moved to the city of Hangzhou,

Unfortunately they passed away when still young.

They left behind the two of us, my sister and me:

I am surnamed Xu, Xu Xian, my style is Hanwen.

My elder sister became the wife of some Li Junfu,

Who works at the Qiantang County as an officer.

Because our financial situation was very bleak,

I worked as an assistant at a pharmacy for a living.

And on the day of the Clear and Bright Festival,

I went to West Lake to sweep my parents' grave.

On the road I met lady Bai, such a smart woman!

Becoming a couple we were united in marriage.

But my wife was not a woman of the mortal realm,

But a thousand-year-old miraculous snake-spirit!

Hardships and reunions—we shared three years,

And she gave birth to a boy to repay an old favor.

But many died when she flooded Golden Mountain;

As she broke Heaven's rules, her sins were great.

Thus she is buried below Thunder Peak Pagoda—

When I come to this point, I'm killed by sadness.

Because my wife was captured under the pagoda,

I abandoned that one-month-old baby and I left."

Mengjiao said: "Reverend, to whom did you entrust that one-month-old baby when you left the household?" Daozong replied: "I have an elder sister who is married to Li Junfu. Because I secretly left the house, I never entrusted the baby to anyone, but I am sure she will have raised the kid." Mengjiao then asked: "What was the name of your son? And how old would he be by now?" Daozong said: "Sir, please let me tell you.

Before she gave birth my wife had a strange dream,

In which she saw a *jiào*-dragon encircling her body.

Because of this lucky sign, she settled on his name.

And the name she chose for my son was Mengjiao.

If I count the years, he must be sixteen by now,

But I do not know whether he grew up to be a man."

Upon hearing these words, Mengjiao, awash in tears,

Immediately knelt down in the dust on both knees,

Exclaiming: "My father, I am your son Mengjiao!

I came here in the hope of finding my dear father!"

When Daozong realized that this was his own son,

He embraced him and wept in a heartrending way:

"My son, how much you suffered without parents!

You haven't seen your own father for sixteen years!

Aiya, my soul! Thanks to your uncle and aunt you have been raised! You never

are allowed to forget that—they surpass a mother!" Mengjiao said: "I am on my

way to seek fame. If my name will be listed on the golden placard, I will return

to Golden Mountain, and take you with me back home, so I can serve you as a

son at dawn and at dusk, and exhaust the way of a son." But Daozong said: "My

son, as I have left the household, I cannot return to the lady."

"Today father and son have been reunited again,

This is more unexpected than a bolt from the blue.

But one sires a son as an insurance against old age,

Escorting you in old age to the hills is a son's duty.

If you, my father, refuse to return to the family,

Then your son will be guilty of unfilial behavior.

If you, my father, stubbornly refuse to return,

I, your son, will stay with you in this monastery.

You will be a monk and I'll serve as an acolyte;

Father and son, we will practice self-cultivation.

Why should I painfully chase glory and fame?

Without a care or a worry we'll lead our lives!"

Daozong addressed him in the following way:

"My son, what you say makes no sense at all!

All in vain you would have studied the books!

All in vain you would have gained your degree!

Only because the Xu lineage still lacked an heir,

Did your mother descend to this mortal world.

Alas, after experiencing hundreds of sufferings,

She was buried under a pagoda—for your sake!

My son, there is no need for you to be grieved,

Glory and fame are important—don't stay here!"

At this moment Mengjiao truly was at a loss,

But he didn't dare disobey his father's order.

They talked heart to heart throughout the day—

Till the sun went down and the moon appeared.

I cannot tell you all they said during that night:

At the crowing of the golden cock, dawn broke.

Daozong said: "My son, the date of the examinations is not far away. The

winds are mild, the sun is warm, so the weather is invigorating. So quickly

off by boat to go to the capital and sit for the examination." Mengjiao said:

"My father, I will follow your advice, and say good-bye right now." Daozong

exclaimed: "My son, let me recite a gatha!²⁰

On this journey you will be able to travel like a cloud;

Passing as top-of-the-list, you'll enjoy imperial favor.

Both your parents will one day be reunited once again;

Together at the ancestral sacrifice, showing old fame."

Mengjiao took his leave of his father with a bow,

Daozong accompanied him till outside the temple.

Outside the monastery's gate they said good-bye;

As father and son separated, tears soaked gowns.

On the wide and open road he met no obstacles;

No waves rose on the sea, the skies stayed clear.

Fortunately a favorable wind accompanied him,

And after a smooth journey he came to the capital.

By imperial edict all students were summoned:

In crowds they entered the examination grounds:

On the second of the Second for the first session;

On the Birthday of Flowers for a second session.²¹

The chief examiner was imperially appointed

To select the best men for the sake of the state.

On the fifteenth the three sessions were finished;

On a dragon-phoenix day the placard was posted.

The first name, the top-of-the-list: Xu Mengjiao,

An inhabitant of Qiantang County in Hangzhou!

His Majesty granted him three cups of fine wine;

²⁰ A *gatha* is a Buddhist poem.

²¹ The Birthday of Flowers is celebrated on the twelfth day of the Second Month.

At Crying Deer Banquet high rank was bestowed.²²
 Mengjiao thanked his teacher and chief examiner,
 Then he paraded through the streets for three days.

After Mengjiao had passed the examinations as top-of-the-list, he expressed his gratitude the next day at the third quarter of the fifth watch,²³ and kneeling down, he reported: "Your Majesty, by your grace I have been allowed to pass the examination. My mother is [a snake spirit] that practiced self-cultivation for over a thousand years, and she was united in wedlock to my father who had shown her a favor in a former life. Alas, he relied on relatives who operated a pharmacy in Jiangsu and spent his days in very modest circumstances. Who could have known that my father would become the victim of rumors, and that he would be enticed to his monastery by the monk Fahai of Golden Mountain, who pressured my father to leave the household and become a monk. When my mother came to the monastery to fetch my father, he was hidden by the monk Fahai who addressed her in a most abusive way, whereupon the two of them engaged in a battle of magic, which resulted in a flooding of Golden Mountain and a great loss of human life, all because of this Fahai. When my parents had returned to their hometown, and I had been born and reached the age of one month, Fahai unexpectedly again showed up to pester them. In his hand he held a magic bowl and he loudly declared to act as the behest of the Buddha. Claiming that the crimes of my mother filled heaven, he captured my mother and pinned her down under Thunder Peak Pagoda. When my father saw this, he was so distressed that he became a monk at Golden Mountain. I have been raised by my aunt Mrs. Li. Now I have passed the examinations with highest distinction, I request that she may be ennobled with an official patent as a repayment for her love and care in feeding and raising me. As my mother is still buried under the pagoda, I humbly request that Your Majesty will give the order to destroy Thunder Peak so as to free my mother from the pagoda. I also hope that Your Majesty may give an order to command my father to return to his family, so I may serve my parents and give full expression to my filial devotion. I humbly beg you to graciously agree to this request.

Your Majesty, weeping blood I expound my feelings,
 As I hope to save my mother from her bitter suffering,
 Please order Thunder Peak Pagoda's destruction,
 To free my mother from disaster, so she may be saved!

²² At the Crying Deer Banquet the emperor feasted the students who had passed the metropolitan exam (and the subsequent palace exam). The name derives from an ode in the Book of Songs, in which the host celebrates the fine quality of his guests.

²³ In imperial China, court audiences started at break of dawn. As the night was divided in five watches, the third quarter of the fifth watch refers to the opening of the audience session.

I also hope that you will order to award a noble title
 To my aunt, as a reward for feeding and raising me."
 The emperor personally drafted the imperial edict,
 Which was read out at the palace gate for all to hear.

The emperor's edict read: "The new top-of-the-list Xu Mengjiao has reported that his mother, upon practicing self-cultivation for a thousand years, entered the world of the red dust, and inappropriately wounded and harmed living beings, so how could Blue Heaven not be roused to anger? He has requested the destruction of Thunder Peak, but as this is an ancient monument dating from an earlier dynasty, it cannot be torn down, so he will have to wait till her merit is fully accomplished, when she will be able to free herself and soar off. Now the son she gave birth to has achieved fame. We issue an edict that a memorial arch may be erected in front of the aforesaid pagoda, and we also ordain that she be granted a full spread of imperial offerings in sacrifice, so she will not have borne a famous son in vain. As his father Xu Xian has already left the household, he should be allowed to follow his own preference. We order that he be awarded one monastic cap adorned with the seven jewels, one red woolen cassock, one dragon-head meditation staff, and one pair of cloud-climbing shoes. We command the local officials to set aside one thousand *mu* of good fields to provide for all his needs.²⁴ Mrs. Li, the aunt of our beloved servant, has great merit in feeding and raising him, and we raise her to the noble rank of Lady, and officials will issue her a patent. We order that she be provided with a phoenix cap and dawn jacket. The wife of our beloved servant will be raised to noble rank and receive such patents depending on his functions. We allow our beloved servant to return home so he may offer sacrifice to his ancestors, expecting him to return to the capital within a year in order to be appointed to a suitable office." Mengjiao thanked the emperor for his grace by shouting: "May Your Majesty live a myriad of years, and a myriad of years, and a myriad times myriads of years!"

Once the edict had been read, the orders were executed.
 Mengjiao accepted the decisions, his eyes wash in tears.
 While wearing the black gauze cap,²⁵ he wasn't yet happy—
 By passing at the first try, famous throughout the world!
 He took his leave of the civil and military officials at court.
 He said good-bye to his fellow students, and left the capital.
 Mengjiao traveled throughout the night, as fast as he could;
 He passed prefectures and counties without ever stopping.

²⁴ Sixteen *mu* make up one acre.

²⁵ The black gauze cap was the typical headgear of an official.

But when the top-of-the-list arrived at Golden Mountain, He had his boat tied up at the quay to visit the monastery. All the monks of the monastery came out to welcome him. To the sounds of bells and drums they received the edict. As he welcomed the edict, Daozong deeply knelt down: An incense table was quickly arranged—what a bustle! "What an exceptional event that you achieved this rank, Let's express our gratitude for the ample imperial grace!"

Mengjiao said: "My father, please be seated, and allow your son to express by a bow his gratitude for your grace in string me." Daozong said: "My son, today, now your name has been listed on the golden placard and you also have received such ample favors from His Majesty, your mother's sufferings have not been in vain, and even though she may be buried under the pagoda, she can close her eyes in peace."

At the monastery father and son were filled with joy
When suddenly a monk entered to announce to them
That the officials of the whole prefecture had arrived
To pay their respects, and now had entered the gate.
Mengjiao went out in cap and girdle to receive them:
"Allow me to thank you for showing such kindness!"
And the assembled officials replied as with one voice:
"Sir, we have come here to offer our congratulations!"

Mengjiao replied: "Thank you very much for taking such trouble. I have come here at the behest of the emperor, whose sagely order and edict commands you gentlemen to set aside one thousand *mu* of good fields for this monastery as an investment to provide for its needs." The assembled officials answered as if with one voice: "As this is an imperial order it truly has to be respected. Upon our return to our offices, we will convene the local gentry and make arrangements for this donation." Then the assembled officials took their leave and departed.

As soon as Mengjiao had seen them off, he hurried to write a letter to his family to erect a memorial arch in front of Thunder Peak Pagoda. He also sent his servants to Zhenjiang to buy red silk and have more than five hundred cassocks made for the monks. In this way Mengjiao stayed for a month at Golden Mountain Monastery. One day Daozong said to him: "My son, you are staying here, but your uncle and aunt at home must be eagerly awaiting your return, so you should go back home, offer sacrifices to the ancestors, and celebrate your wedding with your cousin. Don't waste your time."

Hearing these words the top-of-the-list replied thusly:
"Lacking in filial piety, your son deserves punishment.
I, your son, receive this salary from the imperial house,
So I should fully practice both loyalty and filial piety.
But when serving one's lord, it is difficult to be filial,
So I have to abandon my father, leaving you all alone.
How can I be told to depart from my father's presence?
It is impossible for me to tear me away, be separated!"
But Daozong immediately called his son, and argued:
"We, father and son, each have our own road to travel!
I advise you, my son, to go back home with all speed;
Please convey on my behalf my greetings to your aunt.
Celebrate the wedding-night with your cousin Bilian,
The engagement while yet unborn should be honored.
I hope you will live in harmony throughout your life;
May your marriage be blessed with the birth of sons.
As an official you must always be loyal and righteous,
Serving the dynasty with true valor and a loyal heart.
Love the people like children, be strict in inquiries;
Don't covet the people's wealth, be pure and honest!
There is no need to worry about your father at all—
Now quickly go home, don't dawdle here any more."
Mengjiao promptly addressed his father by saying:
"Following your fatherly advice I'll take my leave."

Mengjiao thereupon took leave of his father, and Daozong said: "My son, when you return home please inform your uncle and aunt that I am quite happy here in the monastery, and tell them not to worry about me. Make sure to inform them of that, and tell them to take good care of themselves."

The top-of-the-list said good-bye to his dad and left,
Seen off at the gate by all monks of the monastery.
With a favorable wind all the way, he traveled fast,
And within a few days he had arrived at Hangzhou.
Overcome by joy Junfu and wife hung up lanterns
And decorated the house—what a crowded scene!
They promptly set out an incense table in the hall:
By imperial edict they were awarded title and gifts.
The top-of-the-list then sacrificed to the ancestors,

Offering sacrifice to both the Li and the Xu lineages.
He then asked his uncle and aunt to take their seat,
And thanked the couple for all their love and care.

"My son, now you have passed the exams so young,
Your aunt's worries haven't been wasted in vain!

You've discarded the blue gown, now wear purple,²⁶
And the flowers on your cap sparkle as they shake.

Today the whole family enjoys this brilliant glory,
And my daughter is blessed that she now is a Lady!

My son and son-in-law: on both counts I'm happy;
Thanks to the emperor the whole family's ennobled!

If one son becomes an official, all enjoy his salary;
Three generations of ancestors are raised to heaven!"

The top-of-the-list told his aunt: "Your nephew has reported to the emperor and received these patents of nobility for you. Uncle and aunt, please receive this official girdle and the phoenix cap and dawn jacket, and then allow me to express my gratitude for your love and your raising." Mrs. Li said: "Your filial piety is truly exceptional! All my care has not been in vain!" Mengjiao also said: "Then there is still something else I have to tell you.

My father has become a monk at Golden Mountain,
And I wanted to urge him to return and come home.

But he said that he has left the household for good,
On no account will he return to the life of a layman."

When Mrs. Li heard this, she was filled with joy:
"It is truly rare to find a son with such filial piety!

Your father is fully devoted to cultivating the Way;
The emperor in his grace has given him treasures."

The top-of-the-list addressed her again, and said:
"My father also sternly enjoined me to listen well,

To transmit his message which I had to remember,
And to convey his best wishes to the two of you.

Don't be worried, he says, and have no concerns:
I live thanks to your blessing at ease and in peace.

May you all upon hearing this message be happy,
And each and all live in harmony, filled with joy!"

Now let's tell that at West Lake the construction of the memorial arch had been completed. They then selected a date and prepared the three kinds of vegetarian offerings, and the whole family went to West Lake to offer sacrifice. That was quite a crowded scene!

Three offerings at Thunder Peak: filled with filialty;

Lady Bai's disaster is finished: she leaves the dust!

The top-of-the-list, together with his uncle and aunt,
Arrived then at West Lake to sacrifice to his mother.

With twenty-four bows he kowtowed most deeply;

The top-of-the-list wept tears in a heartrending way.

Imperial offerings, sacrificed at the emperor's order;

In official cap and official girdle: something special!

Mengjiao said: "Your son has passed the examinations with the highest honors, and I had hoped to destroy Thunder Peak Pagoda and save you, my mother, so I could take care of you for all the years of your life and give full expression to the feelings of a son. But alas, the emperor did not grant my request, so there is nothing I can do."

As the top-of-the-list was presenting the sacrificial offerings while sadly crying, one suddenly saw the Chan master Fahai descend from the sky, and exclaim: "Sir top-of-the-list, here I am!" When Mengjiao heard that Fahai had arrived he was only too eager to crush his body into a pulp, but then again he thought to himself: "Let's see what he will say or do, and then decide on a course of action." So he asked: "Dear reverend, what's the holy teaching you are bringing us? You must be filled with kind compassion and feelings of sympathy and save my mother from this pagoda. Please take my intense obsession into account, first of all because of her virtue in giving birth to me, secondly because of her effort and care on my behalf, and thirdly because of the love for our parents. As a Confucian son, I must make loyalty and filiality my first duties." The monk replied: "Sir top-of-the-list, your words exemplify loyalty and forgiveness and filial piety. Because your filial piety has moved the heavens, I have come here at the behest of the Buddha to allow your mother to leave the pagoda, so mother and son, oh top-of-the-list, may meet!" The Chan master stamped his staff on the ground, and shouted: "Underworld, open your gates!" Suddenly you saw the earth split in two.

The Buddha's Law is limitless, the Law's sea is deep!²⁷

By stamping his staff he opened the gates of the hells.

All of a sudden a girl in skirt and hairpins appeared:

None else that Bai Suzhen in the years of her youth.

²⁶ Students who have not yet passed the highest examinations wore a blue gown, while the highest officials were allowed to wear purple.

²⁷ The name Fahai may be translated as "Ocean of the Dharma" or "Sea of the Law."

Her features were indeed not those of mortal women. She now was even far more beautiful than formerly. Fahai then addressed him in the following manner: "Sir top-of-the-list, here please meet your mother!" The top-of-the-list promptly fell down on his knees, Loudly he wept at the top of his voice, saying: "Ma, It is sixteen years since you gave birth to your son, But only today am I allowed to see my dear mother!" As soon as lady Bai saw him, her tears gushed forth; Embracing him, she loudly wept in a heartrending way. She threw both her arms around her son's shoulders, And her tears coursed down, soaking her garments. "Fortunately you now have passed the examinations, And your filiality has moved heaven, saving my life. My son, you can untie your knotted sorrows and cares; Please forget your hundred and thousands of worries!"

Mengjiao told his mother: "My mother, while you were living below this pagoda, I cried sad tears from morning till night, as I was thinking of all the endless sufferings you must be experiencing! Father had already shaved his head and is at Golden Mountain Monastery. I have repeatedly tried to change his mind, but he stubbornly refuses to come back home." Lady Bai said: "My son, I have only myself to blame from my disaster, so don't blame him. While living below the pagoda these last sixteen years, my heart was at peace and I practiced the Way, with greater results than if I would have practiced self-cultivation throughout my life in the hidden chambers and high lofts of this mortal world. Why should your father be willing to return to the lairy now he has entered the Gate of Empresses? Still your filial piety is exceptional, and your parents are happier than if they were in heaven!"

Lady Bai also addressed his uncle and aunt: "Please allow me to thank you for raising my son! It must have cost you so much care and effort! If my son has grown up to manhood, it is all thanks to your love and care. Even though I may be living here below this pagoda, this gratitude is engraved on my heart!" Mrs. Li said: "My dear sister-in-law, once you had entrusted him to us, we gave it all our care and effort. On top of that you also mentioned that the continuation of these two families completely depended on this one drop of blood and of these two families completely depended on this one drop of blood and bones. So first of all we had to consider the ancestors, and secondly there was your love. Now your son has grown up and achieved fame, you and my labor in giving birth to him and raising him has not been in vain. He has brought glory to the ancestors, and the ancestral sacrifices now have a root and source to rely on. Remembering, sister-in-law, all your problems in those earlier years, I cried sad tears by night and by day, and in waking and dreaming my thoughts were

with you, right till this very day! Who could have known that today we would meet each other again—how that gladdens my heart!"

Mrs. Li addressed lady Bai in the following manner: "How well do I still remember the events back then! When I had only met you for a few days, we already were the best of friends, feeling likewise at all times. Each of us was pregnant, we were heavy with child, And we engaged the unborn children to be married. Then one day we gave birth to both a boy and a girl, But who could know that disaster would strike you? Once back home after seeing you off to this pagoda, Frost fell atop of snow—such were my sufferings! I had no desire at all to eat any rice or drink any tea, And throughout the night I cried and wept till dawn. At all times of the day I carried the baby in my arms, Nursing and spoon-feeding him for a full three years." When she had heard this, lady Bai spoke as follows, "Dear sister-in-law," she exclaimed, and she said: "I left behind this little boy of only one month old, So I caused you, dear sister-in-law, no end of trouble. I suffered the pangs of the ten months of pregnancy, But the three years of nursing drew from your blood. If it hadn't been for your kind care in raising him, How could he have made it to the golden placard?"

My son,
You must serve your uncle and aunt with respect,
Because they surpassed your mother's care by far!"

The top-of-the-list promptly answered as follows,
Repeatedly exclaiming "Dear mother" a few times:
"Dear mother, I'll remember your instructions well,
These words like gold and jade I'll store in my heart.
I pray you, dear mother, to come back home with us,
So we may together enjoy a life of glory and riches."

Lady Bai said: "My son, I have already taken refuge in Buddhism, so I am not my own master." The top-of-the-list exclaimed: "Reverend, allow my mother to come home so I may wait on her throughout her life in order to give full expression to the Way of a son." Fahai replied: "Sir top-of-the-list, when your mother earlier tumbled down into the world of red dust, she caused herself these tribulations. Fortunately, the roots of her self-cultivation went deep, because otherwise she

would have been annihilated. For these sixteen years under Thunder Peak Pagoda she has peacefully practiced self-cultivation, dissolving her sins and crimes. Moreover, your filial piety, top-of-the-list, has moved heaven, so now I, this old monk, have received the command of the Buddha to come here and liberate her from the pagoda so mother and son may meet, and then to take your mother, who has a place in the ranks of the immortals, with me to heaven to enjoy eternal bliss. Such joy! But how can she ever be reborn in heaven if you keep her here in your mansion to enjoy glory and splendor? When the top-of-the-list heard this, he loudly wept and sadly wailed: "Aiya, my mother! From the moment I entered this world, I have never seen the image of my parents, so how can I bear to be separated now I barely have seen your face? If I hear the words of the reverend, we will not be able to meet again in this life and in this existence!"

The top-of-the-list knelt down in the dust in tears;
Loudly weeping and lamenting, he cried: "Mother,
The heart of your son feels as if carved by knives,
Is it perhaps only in a dream that I see my mother?"
Lady Bai immediately exclaimed: "My dear son,
Please do not cry, as there is no need to shed tears.
Pursuing glory and fame, you're the top-of-the list;
Practicing self-cultivation I ascend to high heaven.
That joy and pleasure are truly without compare,
Surpassing those of the mortal world many times!
My dear son, now quickly go back to your home,
And celebrate the marriage with your dear cousin.
As an official you must act with honest loyalty,
Don't covet riches and power, harming the people.
Practice self-cultivation also while serving in office,
Instruct the people well, and inquire into the facts.
May the two of you, rich and noble, live in harmony,
And may you and your heirs practice self-cultivation."

Lady Bai then asked the Chan master: "Did Little Blue achieve liberation?"
Fahai replied: "Little Blue's merit was shallow, and her sins were heavy, so her sufferings have not yet come to an end. But after ten years she will join you in the ranks of the immortals!" Fahai then pointed to the sky, and after a while two colored clouds descended from above. Lady Bai said: "Dear sister-in-law, I will have to leave!" Mrs. Li replied: "Dear sister-in-law, may you enjoy eternal bliss now you go to the palaces of heaven!" Lady Bai then said: "Many thanks for your golden words!" And she also said: "Mengjiao, your mother must go!"
And Fahai said: "Sir top-of-the-list and all you other gentlemen, good-bye!" As

soon as the auspicious clouds touched down, Fahai and lady Bai each stepped on a cloud to disappear into the distant sky.

She had suffered many tribulations for twenty years
Because of entanglements from an earlier existence.
Stilling her heart she cultivated the fruit of bodhi,
And in clear daylight she soared into the clear sky!
Now lady Bai had fully suffered her many sorrows,
Her ascension to heaven this time was fully perfect.
Riding a cloud she returned to Ultimate Pleasure;²⁸
Unencumbered and free, she became an immortal!

The top-of-the-list lamented and wailed and loudly wept, and then he returned home with the others.

Junfu selected a lucky day, and the top-of-the-list and Bilian were married. Husband and wife lived in harmony, like fish and water.

All too soon one year of light and shade had passed,
By imperial edict he was appointed to a higher rank.
The emperor appointed him as governor of Henan,
So he invited his aunt and uncle to his official palace.
With his wife, a cousin but not of the same surname,
He went and took up his post, governing the people.
Pure and honest, husband and wife lived in harmony,
And four sons were born to continue two families.
Each had a pair of heirs, practicing self-cultivation:
Honesty practicing cultivation, protecting their soul.
The essays of all four sons were of stellar quality,
So they all passed the examinations with high rank.
They displayed loyalty, filiality, and righteousness;
Talented and capable, each of them loved goodness.
From generation to generation they were high officials,
And for all eternity the family will produce great men.

Now let us tell that Xu Xian had retired to Golden Mountain Monastery where he practiced self-cultivation. He had the background of having been a monk for seven generations, but because he had not yet cut off himself from love and desire, he suffered these entanglements in the mortal world. Because he now received the instruction of Fahai, an elder fellow-monk from an earlier life, he could achieve perfect enlightenment and return to the Pure Land.

²⁸ Ultimate Pleasure is one of the many names of the blissful Pure Land of the Buddha Amrtaḥa.

When Daozong had reached the age of sixty-three,
 He one day closed his eyes and went off to the West,
 To be reborn in the Western Paradise in a golden body—
 The husband now was a Buddha, the wife an immortal.
 If people of this world are willing to do good deeds,
 It turns out that above their head there is blue heaven!
 Just look at the loyalty and filiality of the Xu family:
 They enjoyed riches and status, glory and splendor!
 So I urge all good men and also all devout women
 To widely practice good deeds—blessings will follow!
 Families accumulating goodness will be amply blessed,
 But people who commit evil will suffer punishments.
 To be filial and obedient to your parents comes first;
 Accept your lot, guard yourself, and enjoy your lifespan!
 Do not commit any evil but practice many good deeds,
 Be of benefit to other people in whatever you may do.
 To try to accept indignities is the true way of the sage;
 To shut your mouth and keep silent surpasses mediation.
 Filially obeying your parents-in-law is Buddha-worship;
 If you stick to the Five Norms, you will go to heaven!²⁹
 Eat vegetarian food, refrain from killing living beings;
 In studying the Way you must try to outperform others.
 A gentleman guards his nature, preserves his position—
 Pure and clean like sages and saints, nourishing his soul.
The Pyreous Scroll of Thunder Peak has been performed,
 May you all imitate its perfect loyalty and its filial piety.
 May you, good men and devout women, remember it well:
 If you'll not become a bodhisattva, you'll be an immortal!
 Cultivate virtue both in your heart and also in your body;
 And both as a mortal or a sage, you can achieve perfection.
 Cultivate your mind and your body, cultivate your mouth—
 If so, never did man or woman not achieve transcendence.
 If upon cultivation mind and body are freed of hindrances,
 You will without a worry ascend to the Western Paradise!

FOUR ANONYMOUS YOUTH BOOKS

²⁹ The Five Norms refer to the proper relation between lord and official, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and friend and friend.