

元 Vernacular Stories: 明 Feng Meng-long and Lang-xian

Although the Song Dynasty is the age in which the origins of printed vernacular fiction and the setting for many stories emerged, the earliest actual printed vernacular stories date from the Yuan and early Ming in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Early vernacular stories drew on the plots of stories in the classical language and covered the same range of themes, from tales of the supernatural to romance. To this, however, were added new topics in an urban setting, such as stories of crime and court cases.

Beyond the core of plot, vernacular fiction's resemblance to classical fiction ceases. Early vernacular stories also evoke the ethos of storytelling—addressing the reader, digressing, offering frequent judgments, citing verses, and giving descriptive passages in rhythmic prose. Characterization is more developed and the settings are described in more detail. Vernacular dialogue opened possibilities of nuance in expression that were impossible in the classical language.

Vernacular stories continued to be published throughout the Ming, but the form saw a major resurgence toward the end of the dynasty, in the early seventeenth century. In that remarkable era of fascination with all that was unconventional, serious intellectuals for the first time turned their attention to collecting popular literature and writing in the vernacular. Feng Meng-long (1574–1646) is now recognized as the central figure in this interest in vernacular literature. Feng collected folksongs and jokes, wrote plays and lyrics for popular songs, and elaborated old novels. In addition, he published three large collections of stories, some from his own hand.

“Du Tenth Sinks the Jewel Box in Anger,” from Feng’s collection *Common Words to Warn the World* (*Jing-shi tong-yan*), is based on a classical tale and serves as a good example of the conventions of vernacular stories. There is a long, chatty introduction setting the historical background, and, like a storyteller, the narrator breaks into the action with poems, wise sayings, and judgments.

Sixteenth-century China enjoyed a commercial boom comparable to that of contemporary Europe. The Song Dynasty may have seen the beginning of an urban mercantile culture, but the Ming of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed its maturity. In Tang tales of romance, economic questions were sometimes present, but they were usually kept just beneath the surface: “Du Tenth Sinks the Jewel Box in Anger” belongs to a long tradition of courtesan romances, but here the exact costs, debts, and the balancing of accounts become central to the story. This is a world of commerce, in which objects are commodities with prices—prices that are sometimes set on things that should not belong in a world of commercial exchange.

Feng Meng-long (1574–1646), “Du Tenth Sinks the Jewel Box in Anger” (from *Common Words to Warn the World*)
Translated by Robert Ashmore

The last barbarians swept away, the imperial seat is established;
soaring dragons and dancing phoenixes—a majestic scene!
To the left, encircled in a sash of east-sea sky;
to the right, hugged by Tai-hang’s ten-thousand-mountain walls.¹
Halberd and spear: the nine frontiers held in sway to the utmost passes;
gown and cap: the myriad fiefdoms look up in reverence to the
serene robes of state.

In a peaceful age, the people rejoice in the realm of Hua-xu;²
for ever and ever, a golden jar gleaming in the sun.³

This poem is devoted to the praise of our dynasty’s founding of the capital at Yan.⁴ As for the situation of the Yan capital, it is guarded to the north by towering passes, and commands the region of central China to the south. It is truly a golden citadel, a heavenly mansion, a foundation not to be topped in ten thousand years! In the beginning, Granddad Hong-wu swept away the barbarian dust and established his reign at Jin-ling.⁵ This is the capital known as Nanjing. When Granddad Yong-le led his troops out of Beijing to pacify the turmoil,⁶ the capital was removed to Yan. This is the capital known as Beijing. And all as a result of this removal, what had been a region of bleak chill was transformed into a realm of flowered brocade. From Granddad Yong-le the throne passed down through nine generations to Granddad Wan-li,⁷ the eleventh Son of Heaven of our dynasty. He was wise and strong, perfect in both virtue and good fortune. He succeeded to the kingdom at the age of ten and ruled for forty-eight years, during which time he put down three armed uprisings. Which three were they?

The Prime Minister Toyotomi Hideyoshi of Japan, Bei Cheng-en of the Xi-xia, and Yang Ying-long of Bo-zhou.⁸

¹The Bohai Gulf and the Tai-hang Mountain Range formed parts, respectively, of the eastern and south-western borders of the Northern capital zone in the Ming. The directions “left” and “right” here, as in old Chinese maps, assume a viewer facing south.

²Hua-xu: a legendary state characterized by natural and social tranquility.

³“Golden jar”: a poetic figure for the solidity and permanence of a nation’s borders.

⁴Yan is the ancient name for the region of Beijing.

⁵The Hong-wu emperor Zhu Yuan-zhang (1328–1398) founded the Ming Dynasty in 1368 after defeating the Mongol Yuan Dynasty.

⁶The Yong-le emperor Zhu Di (1360–1424), believed to have been Zhu Yuan-zhang’s son by a lesser consort, successfully usurped the throne from his nephew, the Jian-wen emperor Zhu Yun-wen (1377–1402?), in a civil war lasting from 1399 to 1402. Zhu Di subsequently went to great lengths to justify his right of succession, and to depict his own victory in the civil war as the “pacification of turmoil.”

⁷Zhu Yi-jun (1563–1620), emperor from 1573 to 1620.

⁸Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598) gained the title *kampaku*, or “prime minister,” in 1587. At this point, he was effectively military ruler of Japan. He orchestrated invasions of the Korean peninsula in 1592 and 1597.

Toyotomi Hideyoshi invaded Korea, and Bei Cheng-en and Yang Ying-long were native officials⁹ who plotted revolt; they were put down one after the other. There were none among the distant tribes who were not frightened into submission, and they strove with one another to pay homage and tribute. Truly,

One man's blessed fortune brings content to all;
No trouble within the four seas mars the nation's peace.

Our story picks up during the twentieth year of the Wan-li period,¹ when the Japanese Prime Minister created discord by invading Korea. The King of Korea submitted a missive requesting assistance, and our celestial court dispatched troops to traverse the sea and go to the rescue. Around this time, a proposal by a Bureau of Households official was granted approval, to this effect:

In view of the present armed strife, our logistical supplies are insufficient. Let us provisionally adopt the precedent of accepting payment in exchange for positions in the imperial academy. . . .

Now it turns out that there were several types of advantage for those who bought academy scholar status in this way: it made it easier to study, easier to participate in the civil service exams, and easier to pass. All in all, it added up to a nice little prospect for career advancement. For this reason, the young masters of official families and the scions of wealthy houses became unwilling to take the ordinary licentiates' exam, preferring to take advantage of the quota and become academy scholars. Following the implementation of this practice, the number of scholars at the academies at each of the two capitals rose to over a thousand.

Among this number there was a young man surnamed Li, named Jia, with the cognomen Gan-xian, a native of Shao-xing Prefecture in Zhejiang. He was the eldest of the three sons of his father, Provincial Commissioner Li. From childhood he had been studying in the local school, but had not yet passed the district licentiates' examination. At this time he entered the academy at the Northern capital under the new provision. When he had been enrolled as an academy scholar, he would pass the time in the compound of the Ministry of Music² along with his townsman the academy scholar Liu

⁹Bo Cheng-en (d. 1592), along with his father, Bo Bai, led a military uprising on the northwestern frontier of the Ming in 1591; they were both killed when the uprising was put down by Ming troops. Yang Ying-long (d. 1600) was a hereditary leader under the Ming of the Miao ethnic minority in the Southwest. He led sporadic raids in the border region between Sichuan and Gu-zhou, sometimes escalating into full-scale revolt, from 1587 until his defeat and suicide in 1600. Ethnic enclaves in remote regions were administered on behalf of the Ming by dominant members of the local ethnic group; once granted, the posts became hereditary.

¹1592 in the Western calendar.

²Originally a kind of imperial conservatory for the training and maintenance of musicians and dancers for the court, by the Ming, the term "Ministry of Music" could also be loosely applied to privately run brothels.

Yu-chun. There he encountered a famous courtesan. She was surnamed Du, named Mei, and was tenth-born of her generation, so in the quarters everyone called her Du Tenth.

She was

High-toned allure from head to toe;
every inch coy scent.
Two arcs of eyebrow traced with green of distant hills;
a pair of eyes bright with welling autumn floods.

Face like a lotus bud—just like Wen-jun of the Zhuo clan;³
lips like cherries—not a jot inferior to Fan-su of the Bai household.⁴

Pity this slip of flawless jade
that fell by mistake amid whoredom's flowers and willows!

Du Tenth had lost her maidenhead at the age of thirteen, and was at this time nineteen. During those seven years there is no telling how many lordlings and ducal heirs she had gone through, leaving each of them wanton and besotted with passion—they wrecked households and squandered fortunes without the least regret. A jingle circulated around the quarters that went:

When Tenth attends a drinking bout
abstainers quaff till the wine runs out.
When dandies meet Mei on their rounds,
They swear the rest all look like hounds.

Now our young master Li was a dashing fellow who had never before encountered real womanly charms. When he ran into Du Tenth, his happiness exceeded all expectation. He took the whole burden of his youthful passion and loaded it on her alone. Our young master had a handsome face and a tender disposition, besides being a big spender and quick to say the right thing. So he and Du Tenth became an inseparable couple who got along in everything. Tenth, knowing how greedy and unjust her madam was, had long been meaning to go straight. Furthermore, when she noticed how sincere and earnest young master Li was toward her, she was very much inclined to throw in her lot with him. The thing was that master Li was deathly afraid of his old man, and did not dare take her up on her proposal. Nonetheless, the two grew ever more devoted to one another, and happily spent both day and night in each other's company, just like a married couple. They swore by seas and vowed by mountains that they would never have thoughts of another. Truly,

³Zhuo Wen-jun was the wife of the Han Dynasty writer Si-ma Xiang-ru.

⁴Fan-su was a singing-girl in the household of the Tang poet Bai Ju-yi.

Affection as deep as an unfathomed sea;
Loyalty as heavy as mountains, but higher.

Now as for Tenth's madam, what she saw was her girl being monopolized by Master Li—none of those other worthy heirs and lordlings who were drawn by Tenth's reputation could get so much as a peek. In the beginning, when Master Li was spending in grand style, the madam would hunch up her shoulders and laugh ingratiatingly, playing up to him for all she was worth. But days and months went by, and before they knew it, it had been over a year. Master Li's coffers gradually grew empty, and he was unable to spend according to his heart's desires. Then the madam began to snub him. And when old Commissioner Li back home heard that his son was passing his time whoring in the pleasure district, he repeatedly sent letters calling him back home. But Master Li was befuddled with Tenth's charms, and was forever putting off his departure. Later on he heard that his old man was in a towering rage at home, and he became more unwilling than ever to go back. The ancients said, "friendship based on profit grows cold when profit runs dry." But that Du Tenth had a real affection for Master Li, and the more she saw the hard financial straits he was in, the warmer she grew toward him. Her madam told her repeatedly to send Li Jia away from the premises, and when the madam saw that her girl was paying her no mind, she began herself making verbal attacks on Master Li, in hopes of angering him and thus provoking him to take his leave. But the young master was mannerly and subdued by nature, and only became ever more accommodating in his tone.

The madam had nothing for it, and could only browbeat Tenth day in and day out, saying, "In our profession we rely on our guests for both food and clothing. We see off the old at the back gate and welcome the new at the front. Our forecourt stays as lively as a house on fire, and money piles up in a heap. That Li Jia has been hanging around here for over a year now. Forget about new guests, even our old patrons have been cut out of the picture. It's clear as clear can be that it's a ghost-catcher you've brought in here—not even a little ghost would dare set foot in this door! It's to the point where your old lady's household is running on nothing but wind. What way is this to do business?"

Du Tenth could not remain silent in the face of this dressing-down, and answered, "Master Li didn't show up here empty-handed. He's spent big money." The madam said, "That was then; this is now. You just tell him to go and spend some little money to keep your old lady and you in rice and firewood, and that'll do. Those girls in the other houses are all money trees—it's just like magic. Why does it have to be my place that's got all the bad luck? I've raised a money-losing white tiger. Every one of the seven necessities has to be seen to by my poor old self.⁵ And it's to the point where

I have to see to the upkeep of this bum of yours, you lousy slut! Where are my clothes and food supposed to come from? You go and tell that bum: if he's worth anything let him give me a few ounces of silver and buy you out so you can go off with him. Then I can find another girl to support me. How about that?"

Tenth said, "Mama, do you mean that or are you just kidding?" The madam knew that Li Jia had not a penny to his name, and had even pawned all his clothes. She figured he'd never be able to bring it off. So she replied, "When has your old lady ever told a lie? Of course I mean it." Tenth said, "Ma, how much money do you want from him?" The madam said, "If it were anyone else, I'd ask for a thousand or so. But I know that bum can't afford it, so I'll just ask for three hundred. Then I can go find another tart to take your place. But there's just one thing: he's got to give me the money within three days. I'll hand you over to him as soon as he hands me the cash. But if he hasn't got it within three days, then I'm not going to trouble my old self about any 'Master' this or 'Master' that—I'll cudgel his footsoles, and drive that vagrant right out the door. And when that day comes, don't you go finding fault with poor old me!"

Tenth said, "Though the young master may be a little strapped for cash here this far from home, I'm sure he can raise three hundred. But three days is such a short time. Give him ten, and you've got a deal." The madam thought to herself, "This bum has got nothing but a pair of empty hands. Even if I gave him a hundred days, where would he ever get the money? And if he can't raise the money, then no matter how shameless he may be, I'll bet he won't have the nerve to show his face at this door again. Then I can put this house back in style, and Mei won't have a thing to say about it." She answered, "For your sake, then, I'll give him ten days. But if the tenth day comes and he hasn't got the money, don't go trying to blame it on me."

Tenth said, "If he hasn't raised the money inside of ten days, then I'll bet he won't have the gall to come back here. I'm just afraid that if he gets the three hundred taels of silver, Mama may have second thoughts." The madam said, "My poor old self is now fifty-one years old, and I carefully keep the ten fast-days.⁶ How should I dare to tell a lie? If you don't believe me, we can slap hands and swear on it. If I go back on my word, let me be reborn as a pig or a dog."

The ocean's water can't be guessed in cups;
that farical old bawd has no goodwill.
She's sure the struggling scholar's purse is dry,
and speaks of marriage gifts to trick the girl.

That night, Tenth and the young master discussed their future as they lay in bed. The young master said, "It's not that I don't want this to work out. But getting a girl's name off the courtesans' register is extremely ex-

⁵The "seven necessities" were firewood, rice, cooking oil, salt, soybean paste, vinegar, and tea, referring generally to day-to-day household expenses.

⁶The ten days in each month on which Buddhist lay believers were forbidden to eat meat or slaughter animals.

pensive. Nothing less than a thousand taels will do the trick. My purse is empty, down to the last speck. What can I do about it?" Tenth said, "I've already got Ma to agree to only three hundred, but it's got to be raised within ten days. I know you've used up all your traveling funds, but don't you have any friends or relatives in the capital who might lend you some? If you can raise the set amount, then I shall be yours alone, and we can be spared the overbearing behavior of that evil woman." The young master said, "My relations and friends have had nothing to do with me since I began spending all my time in the pleasure quarters. Tomorrow I'll pack up my things and set out, going to each house as if to take my leave. Then I'll bring up the topic of borrowing some money for traveling expenses. If I pool it all together, perhaps I could reach that figure."

He got up and dressed, said goodbye to Tenth, and set out. Tenth said, "Be sure to be quick about it. I will be waiting here for good news." The young master said, "I need no reminding about that." He set out from the gate of the quarters and went in turn to the places of his various relatives and friends, pretending that he was setting off for home and had come to take his leave. When they heard he was headed home, they were in fact glad to hear it. But then he came to the part about lacking traveling money and hoping to borrow some. The adage has it that "the mention of money dissolves predestined ties." His friends and relatives did not respond to his pitch, and, to tell the truth, they had good reason. They thought to themselves, "Here is this Master Li, a big-spending wastrel, enchanted with high living. He's been dallying here a year or so, and his father at home is sick with fury. And today he suddenly wants to set off on his return? There is no telling if this is real or an act. And what if it should turn out that the money he collects as 'traveling expenses' ends up being paid out on whoring debts? If his father should get wind of it, he'd take our good intentions as bad ones. . . . One way or another we're sure to end up on somebody's bad side, so when all is said and done, it's cleaner just to turn him down." And so they answered, "It just happens we're a little short at the moment, and unfortunately can't help you out. It's really most embarrassing. . . ." And it was the same with each and every one of them; there was not a single man of noble sentiment to agree to spot him ten or twenty.

Master Li rushed about for three days in a row without a thing to show for it. He did not dare go back to tell Tenth it was no good, so he just made equivocal replies to buy time. When the fourth day came and he still hadn't come up with a plan, he felt too embarrassed to return to the quarters. And since he'd been staying at Du Mei's place lately, he did not even have lodgings of his own. So at this point he found himself with no place to spend the night. All he could do was go to the lodgings of his townsman, the academy scholar Liu, to stay over. When Liu Yu-chun saw the worry clouding the young master's face, he asked him what he had been up to. The young master told him all about how Du Tenth wanted to marry him. Yu-chun shook his head, saying, "I wouldn't be so sure about that. That Du Mei is the number-one courtesan in the pleasure district. If she wanted to go straight, wouldn't there

have to be a marriage gift of ten measures of pearls and a good thousand in silver? How could that madam just ask for three hundred? I bet the madam is just down on you for having no money to spend, and taking up her girl's time for nothing. She's made up a plan to get you out of her house. As for the girl herself, she's been with you for a long time, and feels too much compunction to say it outright. She knows good and well you're empty-handed. But by setting this price of three hundred taels, and giving you ten days, she makes it seem like she's doing you a favor. And if you don't have the money in ten days, you won't very well be able to show your face at their door. Even if you did, she'd make fun of you and put you down. You'd end up with a good dose of humiliation, and would naturally find it impossible to settle down there again. This is an old brothel trick for getting rid of unwanted guests. My good friend, I hope you'll consider carefully—don't be taken in! If you want my advice, I'd say your best plan is to make a clean break right away."

On hearing this, the young master sat a long while in silence, not knowing what to think. Yu-chun continued, "My friend, make no mistake. If you really return home, the travel expenses won't come to that much, and there will still be people to help you out. But if it's three hundred you want, well then, forget ten days, in even ten months you could scarcely raise that amount. In this day and age, who do you expect will show understanding for your situation? That mist-and-flowers woman knows you've got nowhere to go to raise that kind of money, and is only telling you all this to put you in an impossible position."

The young master said, "Worthy brother, what you say is quite true." But though he said this, he was unable to fully resign himself to it in his heart. He continued as before to run about here and there looking for help—but at night he did not return to the quarters. The young master lodged for three days running in the rooms of academy scholar Liu, which made six all together. When Du Tenth saw that the master had gone several days without returning, she grew quite anxious, and sent her little servant boy Number Four to go out on the streets looking for him. When Number Four went out, it just happened that he ran into Master Li. Number Four called out to him, "Brother-in-law Li, the mistress is looking for you at home." The young master felt too ashamed to go, and answered, "I haven't got time today. I'll go tomorrow." But Number Four had received strict orders from Tenth, and grabbed hold of the young master and would not let go for anything. He said, "The mistress told me to find you. You've got to come along."

Now the young master was secretly missing that whore, so there was nothing for it but to give in and follow Number Four to the quarters. When he saw Tenth, he just stood there dumbly. Tenth asked him, "How is our plan progressing?" The young master began to shed tears. Tenth said, "Can it be that people have grown so unfeeling that you cannot raise the three hundred?" The young master, with tears in his eyes, said,

"Catching tigers cannot be considered easy,
but begging favors is what's truly hard."

I've been rushing about for six days in a row, and haven't a penny to show for it. With this pair of empty hands I've been ashamed to see you, so these few days I have not dared come here. Today I received your command, and come bearing up under shame. It is not that I haven't tried. But human feelings have in fact come to this pass." Tenth said, "Don't let that wicked crone hear any of this. Stay here tonight, my love—I have another idea." Tenth prepared food and drink, and shared a happy banquet with the young master.

When they'd slept half the night, Tenth said, "My love, can you really not come up with even a single coin? What is to become of the plan for my future?" The young master just wept, unable to answer a single word. Around the fifth watch, it gradually grew light. Tenth said, "The padded quilt I sleep on contains a hundred fifty taels in odd change. This is my private savings. My love, you may take it. I will take care of half of the three hundred, and you can take care of the other half. That should make things easier. But there are only four days left before our time is up. Be sure not to be late."

Tenth got up and gave the quilt to the young master, who was pleased beyond his wildest expectations. He called the servant boy to take the quilt away and took his leave. He went straight to Liu Yu-chun's place, and told him all that had happened the night before. When they opened up the quilt and looked inside, there were odd coins wrapped inside the stuffing. When they took them to exchange, the amount really did come out to one hundred and fifty taels. Yu-chun said, astounded, "This is truly a woman with sincere intentions. Since she has real feelings, she should not be let down. I will see to this on your behalf." The young master said, "If our dream is fulfilled, I promise not to forget you."

Then Liu Yu-chun, leaving Master Li at his place, set out himself to borrow money. Within two days, he had put together the one hundred and fifty taels, and handed them over the master, saying, "It was not for your sake that I borrowed this money, but rather because I am moved by the sincere feeling of Du Tenth."

When Li Jia had the three hundred in hand, it was like a gift dropped from Heaven, and he went off, beaming with joy, to see Tenth. It was only the ninth day, so he had not even used all ten of the allotted days. Tenth asked him, "A few days ago you had a hard time borrowing even the least bit. How is it that now you have suddenly got a hundred fifty taels?" The young master related to her the business with academy scholar Liu. Tenth raised her hands to her forehead, saying, "It is all thanks to the efforts of Mr. Liu that our desires have been fulfilled." The two of them were overcome with happiness, and spent another evening in the quarters.

The next day, Tenth rose early and said to Li Jia, "Once I've handed over this silver, I will be able to follow you. We should prepare the necessary carriages and boats. I have recently borrowed twenty taels of white silver, which you may take to cover our traveling expenses." The young master had

just then been worrying that he had no source of traveling money, but had not dared speak of it. When he received this money, he was extremely happy. Before they'd done speaking, the madam came knocking at the door, saying, "Mei, today is the tenth day." When the master heard her call, he opened the door and asked her in, saying, "We have benefited from your kindness, and were just going to invite you here." With this he put the three hundred taels on the table.

The madam had not expected the young master to have money, and stood silently, her expression suddenly changing. She seemed to have it in mind to go back on her promise. Tenth said, "I have been in Mama's house for eight years, and the gold and treasures I have brought in are nothing short of a thousand talents. The happy occasion of my reformation today was granted from Mama's own lips. There is not one jot lacking of the three hundred taels, nor have we passed the time limit. If Mama should go back on her word and prevent us, my husband will take the silver away, and I will make an end of myself this very instant. I fear that then you will have lost both person and profit, and it will be too late for regrets." The madam had no reply to make to this, and pondered it over for a while to herself. In the end, all she could do was bring out a scale to weigh out the silver. She said, "Since it has come to this, I guess I won't be able to stop you. But if you mean to go then go at once. Don't imagine you'll take one bit of your clothes and jewelry along with you."

When she'd done saying this, she pushed the young master and Tenth out the chamber door, found a lock, and locked it right up. It was around November at this time, and Tenth, who had just got out of bed, had not even had time to dress. Wearing the old robe she happened to have on at the time, she bowed twice to her "Mama." Master Li also made a bow. With this they departed, husband and wife, from the door of that old crone.

The carp slips off the iron hook
and glides off without looking back.

The young master asked Tenth to wait up a moment. "I will go and call a sedan chair to carry you. For the time being we can go to Liu Rong-ying's lodgings, and make further plans from there." Tenth said, "All my sisters in the quarters have stood by me through thick and thin. By rights I should go and take my leave of them. What's more it was from them that I got the loan of that traveling money. It would not do to go without thanking them." Thereupon she went with the young master to the homes of all her sisters to thank them and to take leave of them. Of the sisters it was Xie Yue-lang and Xu Su-su who lived closest by, and they were also on especially good terms with Tenth. Tenth went first to Xie Yue-lang's house. When Yue-lang saw Tenth going about in a bare hairknot and old worn robe, she asked in bewilderment what had happened. Tenth told her the whole story, and led Li Jia in to see her. Tenth pointed to Yue-lang, saying, "The travel money I received the other day was the loan of this elder sister. My lord ought to

thank her." Li Jia bowed again and again. Then Yue-lang asked Tenth to dress, going in the meanwhile to invite over Xu Su-su.

When Tenth had done making herself up, the two beauties Xie and Xu brought out their whole store—emerald brooches and gold bracelets, jade hairpins and precious earrings, patterned skirts and brocade-sleeved blouses, phoenix sashes and embroidered slippers, and they did up Tenth all over again, so that she looked like a completely different person. They also prepared wine for a celebratory banquet. Yue-lang gave up her own chamber to Li Jia and Du Mei to spend the night.

The next day, they had another big banquet and invited all the sisters from the quarters. None of those who were good friends with Tenth failed to appear, and they all drank to the health and happiness of bride and groom. With pipes and strings, song and dance, each made the most of her talents, intent on making it a joyful gathering. They kept at it right up until midnight. Then Tenth thanked each of the sisters in turn. The assembled sisters said, "Tenth is commander in the legion of glamour. She is now setting out with her man, and we will have no more chance of seeing her. On the day you choose to leave for good, we sisters should once more come to see you off." Yue-lang said to them, "When the time is fixed, I will come and notify you. Our sister will be journeying hundreds of miles over hill and dale along with her husband. Yet her savings are scanty, and she is not in the least prepared. This is a matter that should concern all of us. We should work together to ensure that our sister does not have to worry about being left without resources." All the sisters voiced their assent to this and went their separate ways.

That evening, the master and Tenth lodged once more at the Xie house. At the fifth watch, Tenth said to the young master, "After this departure of ours, where will we settle? Have you come up with some solid plan?" The master said, "My aged father is in the height of rage. If he learns that I've returned home along with a prostitute as my wife, he is sure to make trouble, and I may end up more trouble than help to you. I've thought over this again and again, and I still have no perfect plan." Tenth said, "How could the Heaven-ordained relation of father and son be permanently cut off? But since it is not a good idea to provoke him by a sudden confrontation, it would be better to take up temporary residence in the scenic region of Su-zhou and Hang-zhou. You can return first, and ask friends and relatives to intercede on your behalf before your reverend father and convince him to relent. Then you can come and take me home with you. In this way all will be well on both sides." The young master said, "This is well said."

The next day the two set out, taking leave of Xie Yue-lang, and went for a time to the lodgings of academy scholar Liu to get their luggage ready. When Du Tenth saw Liu Yu-chun, she prostrated herself before him and thanked him for the kind service which had allowed things to work out. "On some future day I swear that we will worthily repay your kindness." Yu-chun hurriedly returned her bow, saying, "You were stirred to true love for

your favorite, and did not change your feelings on account of poverty. This makes you a hero among women. All your servant has done amounts to 'blowing a flame along with the wind'—really, what need is there to mention my insignificant efforts!"

The three of them spent another day drinking. The next morning, they selected an auspicious day for their departure and hired the necessary sedan chairs and horses. Tenth once more dispatched her servant boy to take a message to say goodbye to Xie Yue-lang. When it came time to leave, bearers and palanquins began arriving in great numbers. It was Xie Yue-lang and Xu Su-su, who had brought along all the sisters to say goodbye. Yue-lang said, "Tenth sister is following her husband into distant parts, yet their traveling purse is barren. We are by no means able to put aside our sisterly concern, and have raised a meager sum among ourselves. Tenth sister, you may take it under your care. It may be that in your long journey you fall short, and even this may be of some small use." When she had done speaking, she commanded the others to bring forward a gold-inlaid stationery box, which was locked up most securely so that there was no guessing what it might contain. Tenth neither refused it nor opened it to look inside. All she did was to thank them earnestly. In a short while carriage and horses were in readiness, and the attendant urged them to set out at once. Academy scholar Liu poured out three cups of parting wine, and saw them off as far as the outside of Chong-wen Gate, along with the troop of beauties. One by one they tearfully took their leave. Truly,

None can predict a future meeting date
This moment of parting is most hard to bear.

Now when Master Li and Du Tenth had traveled as far as the Lu Canal,⁷ they left the land and took to boats. By good luck they were able to take advantage of the envoy boat from Gua-zhou,⁸ which was about to set out on its return journey. They agreed on a price and reserved a cabin. When it came time to board, Master Li's purse had not the least bit of cash left in it. Now you may be asking, if Du Tenth gave the young master twenty taels of silver, how came it that he suddenly had nothing left? Well, the young master had been whoring in the quarters till his clothes were all bedraggled. When he got his hands on some money, he couldn't help but go to the pawnbroker's to redeem some clothes, and have a set of quilts and bedding made. What was left over was just enough to cover the carriage and horses.

Just as the young master was growing worried, Tenth said, "My husband, don't be troubled. The collection made by all my sisters will surely

⁷Lu Canal: a name for the northern section of the Grand Canal which linked the northern and mid-southern regions of China. The major embarkation point for traffic in and out of Beijing was at Tong-zhou, approximately twenty kilometers east of the city.

⁸Gua-zhou was a transport post at the mouth of the Grand Canal, on the northern bank of the Yangzi River.

help us out.” With this, she took out the key and opened up the case. The young master, who was standing to one side, felt ashamed, and did not venture to peek at what was inside the box. Tenth pulled out a red silk pouch and tossed it onto the table, saying, “Why don’t you open that up and take a look?” The young master lifted it up in his hand and felt that it was quite heavy. When he opened it up and took a look, he saw it was all white silver, together all of fifty taels. Tenth locked up the box once more without saying what else might be inside. She merely told the young master, “Thanks to the noble feelings of all my sisters, we will not only lack nothing on our journey, but there should be a little something to help with our household expenses while we pass the time in the South.” The young master, startled and pleased all at once, said, “If I had not encountered you, my dear benefactress, I, Li Jia, would have been left without even a place to be buried. I will never dare forget this debt of gratitude as long as I live.” From this time on, whenever their talk turned to events of the past, the young master would always be moved to tears, and Tenth would try gently to console him. And so they traveled on.

Before they knew it, they had reached Gua-zhou, and the big boat moored at the bank. The young master hired another boat, loaded their luggage onto it, and arranged that they should set out across the river at dawn. It was now around the beginning of January, and the moon was as bright as water as the young master and Tenth sat at the bow of the boat. The young master said, “Ever since we left the capital gate we’ve been penned up in one little cabin with people all around us, and have been unable to speak freely. Now we’ve got this whole boat to ourselves, and have no further cause for restraint. Furthermore, we’ve left the North behind us and are just now drawing near Jiang-nan. It is fitting that we should set ourselves at ease and drink as much as we please, so as to relieve our cooped-up feelings. Dear benefactress, what do you say to that?” Tenth said, “I have grown long unused to conversation and laughter, and I share this feeling of yours. That you should speak of it now is proof of our fellow nature.”

Then the young master brought out drinking vessels and arrayed them on the deck, and spread out a felt mat for the two of them to sit on. The cups passed back and forth between them. When they were half-giddy with the wine, the young master, clutching his cup, said to Tenth, “Dear benefactress, your wondrous voice was counted finest among the quarters at the time when my unworthy self first made your acquaintance. Each time I heard one of your incomparable songs, I was unable to restrain the flight of my soul. Much has gone awry since then, and both of us have long been anxious and ill at ease. The simurgh’s cry and the phoenix’s song have long been silent. Now on this clear river under the bright moon, in the still of the night with no one else to hear, will you deign to sing me a song?”

Tenth as well felt a sudden stirring, and she unleashed her voice and varied her tone, tapping out the time with a fan. Crooning and murmuring, she sang from the scene “The Exam Champion Holds the Cup to Chan-juan”

from the opera *Bowing to Moon Pavilion* by the Yuan writer Shi Jun-mei, to the tune of “Little Red Peach.” Truly,

The tone flies up to the Milky Way—clouds stop in their tracks;
the echo sinks into the deep pool—fish come up to play.

Now on a neighboring boat there was a young man surnamed Sun, named Fu, with the cognomen Shan-lai, who was a native of Xin-an County in Hui-zhou. His family had been in the salt trade at Yang-zhou for generations and had amassed an immense fortune. Sun Fu was just twenty years old at this time, and was also a fellow of the Nanjing Imperial Academy. He was glamorous by nature, accustomed to buying smiles in the “blue houses,” seeking happiness in rouge and powder just as if on a jaunt to enjoy breeze and moonlight. He was a commander in the legion of loverboys. Well, coincidences will happen, and it came about that on that evening he was also moored at the ferry dock at Gua-zhou, drinking alone in boredom. Suddenly he heard the bright sound of a singing voice—chanting phoenix and piping simurgh could not compare to it in beauty. He rose and stood at the prow, listening raptly for a while.

Soon he divined that the sound was coming from the neighboring boat. Just as he was making ready to inquire, the resounding tones grew suddenly still. Thereupon he dispatched a servant to ask the boatmen what it was. All they knew was that the boat had been hired by his excellency Li, but they did not know the background of the singer. Sun Fu thought to himself, “This singer is certainly not of respectable background. Now, how can I get a look at her?” He mused over this, staying awake all night. When he’d stuck it out to the fifth watch, he suddenly heard the wind on the river kicking up fiercely. By dawn the sky was packed with dusky clouds, and snow swirled wildly about. How can we know about this scene? There is a poem bearing witness:

A thousand hills wiped clean of clouds and trees;
the tracks on countless human paths swept clear.
In poncho and rainhat, an old man on a skiff
fishes alone in the snow of the cold river.⁹

With this snowstorm enveloping the ford, the boats were unable to set out. Sun Fu commanded his helmsman to move the boat, mooring it by the side of Li Jia’s boat. Sun Fu, in ermine cap and foxfur coat, opened the window and looked out, pretending to be enjoying the snowy scene. Du Tenth had just then finished washing. With her slender jade white hands, she lifted up the short curtain at the side of the boat and emptied the washbasin into the river. Her powdered face shone out for a moment, and Sun Fu got a peek. Sure enough, she was a heavenly beauty, and his soul was shaken and his

⁹This is the poem “River Snow,” by the Tang poet Liu Zong-yan (773–819), with minor alterations.

heart went wild. He stared intently at the spot, waiting for another chance to see her, but he had no such luck. He sat long in a funk, and then loudly chanted these two lines of Scholar Gao's "Poem of Plum Blossoms":¹

Snow fills the mountain slopes, the recluse lies at ease;
moonlight shines beneath the forest's eaves—the lovely one
approaches.

When Li Jia heard someone chanting poetry in the neighboring boat, he stretched his head out of the cabin to see who it was. And with this he fell right into Sun Fu's trap. Sun Fu was chanting that poem precisely in order to entice Master Li to poke his head out, so there would be a chance to start up a conversation. Right away Sun raised his hand in greeting and asked, "Respected friend, what is your surname and given name?" Master Li told him his name and native place, and of course it would not do not to ask Sun Fu in turn. Sun Fu introduced himself as well. Then they exchanged some idle talk of the academy, gradually growing more cordial as they chatted. Then Sun Fu said, "This snowstorm which has delayed our boats was Heaven's way of granting me the chance to meet you—this is truly a stroke of good fortune for me! Lodging on board a boat is tiresome and monotonous. It is my sincere wish to go ashore with you for a drink in the wineshop, so as to receive some small portion of your wise instruction. I earnestly beg that you not refuse me!" The young master said, "We have met like drifting duckweed on the water. What right have I to put you to such trouble?" Sun Fu said, "What can you possibly mean? Within the four seas all are brothers."²

He barked out an order to the boatmen to leap over and to the servant boy to hold open an umbrella and receive the young master on board his boat. Sun Fu came right up to the bow of his boat to greet him. Then, making room for the young master to lead the way, Sun followed up as they went ashore. Before they'd walked more than a few steps, they came upon a wineshop. The two walked upstairs and sought out a clean spot beside the window. The steward laid out wine and snacks before them. Sun Fu raised his cup and urged Master Li not to stand on ceremony, and the two of them sat drinking and enjoying the snowy scene. First they exchanged a few polite commonplaces, but soon the conversation turned toward affairs of the heart. The two of them were both men of the world, and found in each other sympathetic listeners.

As their talk became relaxed and unrestrained, they grew ever more confidential. Sun Fu sent away all the attendants and asked in a low voice, "Who was the clear-voiced singer on your boat last night?" Li Jia was just then anxious to play the man of the world, and he blurted out, "That was Du Tenth, the famous courtesan from Beijing." Sun Fu said, "If she is a sister from the quarters, how is it she has become part of your household?" Then

the young master told all about how he first met Du Tenth, how they became lovers, and how later she wanted to marry him and how he borrowed money to win her, from beginning to end in full detail.

Sun Fu said, "My dear friend, your return home with this beauty is certainly a happy event. What I wonder is, will your family be able to accept her?" The young master said, "My humble mate is no cause for concern. What worries me is my old father, who is by nature strict and unyielding. This is still causing me some hesitation." Sun Fu, adapting his strategy to the circumstances, asked, "If you fear your revered father may not accept her, where do you plan to settle this lovely whom you are escorting? Have you spoken to her of this and made plans together?" The young master winked up his brows and answered, "I have in fact discussed this matter with my unworthy consort." Sun Fu asked with a smile, "Surely your esteemed pet has a splendid strategem." The young master said, "It is her intention to take up temporary residence in Su-zhou or Hang-zhou, to linger for a while among the hills and lakes. She would have me return first and ask relations and friends to put things delicately before the head of my family. At such time as he shall change his ire to pleasure, we will consider how we may best return. But what do you make of this?"

Sun Fu sat murmuring to himself for a while, and put on an anxious expression. He said, "I made your acquaintance only a short time ago. If I presume on such a brief friendship to speak frankly to you, I truly fear that you will be offended." The young master said, "I find myself just now in need of your wise instruction. Why need you stand on ceremony like this?" Sun Fu said, "Your esteemed parent holds the keys of the provincial government, and is sure to be strict about maintaining propriety in the affairs of his household. From the beginning, he has been displeased that you frequented houses of ill fame. How then can he be expected to accept your marriage to an unchaste woman? Furthermore, which of your noble friends and relations will not be solicitous of the wishes of your esteemed parent? If you vainly ask them for favors, they are sure to refuse. And even supposing that some tactless one among them puts in a word on your behalf, once he sees that your esteemed parent does not mean to give in, he will surely change his tune. You will find yourself unable either to restore harmony to your family or to answer to your esteemed pet. Even whiling away the time amid the scenery of hills and lakes is no long-term solution. If some day your savings should run out, will you not be left with nowhere to turn?"

The young master knew that all he had left was the fifty taels of silver, and by now even that had largely been spent. When he heard this part about being left with no place to turn, he unconsciously began nodding his assent. Sun Fu continued, "I have one thing further to say. Will you indulge me by listening?" The young master said, "You are too kind. I beg you say everything that is on your mind." Sun Fu said, "'Distant relations should not come between close ones.' On second thought, I think it is better not to say it." The young master said, "Just say it, what harm can there be in that?" Sun Fu said, "Of old it has been said, 'woman's nature is water, devoid of

¹Scholar Gao is the Ming Dynasty poet Gao Qi (1336–1374).

²A familiar quotation from the *Analecfs*, XII.5.

constancy? How much more so of the league of mist and flowers, who lack truth and abound in artifice? Given that she is a famed courtesan of the pleasure districts, she must have acquaintances everywhere under the sun. It may just be that she has a previous engagement in the South, and is making use of you to bring her there, to run off with someone else." The young master said, "As for that, I really don't think that that is the case." Sun Fu said, "Even if it isn't, the young men of Jiang-nan are champion womanizers. If you keep such a lovely alone there, it is hard to be sure there won't be some 'fence-climbing and wall-tunneling.' And if you take her along home with you, it is certain you will further inflame your esteemed parent's anger against you. There really seems to be no good way out of your present situation. Moreover, the relation of father and son is sanctioned by Heaven, and is by no means to be abrogated. If you offend your father on account of a concubine, if you abandon your family due to a prostitute, everyone in the world will surely agree that you are a reckless and outlandish person. In the future your wife will not treat you as a husband, your brother will not treat you as brother, and your colleagues will not treat you as a colleague. How will you find a place to stand between Heaven and Earth? My friend, you really cannot but consider this carefully."

When the young master heard all this, he was dazed and at a loss for words. He edged his seat closer and asked, "As you see it, what advice would you give me?" Sun Fu said, "Your servant has one plan which could be most advantageous. I only fear that you, enamored as you are of the joys of pillow and mat, will not necessarily be able to carry it out, in which case it would be a mere waste of words to tell you." The young master said, "If you have a plan that can allow me once more to know the joy of a harmonious family, you are truly my benefactor. What need have you to be fearful of telling me?" Sun Fu said, "You have been roaming away from home for over a year, and your stern parent has become enraged. Chamber and tower are set at odds. Imagining myself in your position, it seems this must be a time when there can be no peace of mind in sleep or at table. However, the cause of your esteemed parent's anger with you is nothing more than your fondness for the land of 'flowers and willows,' for which you spend money like dirt. You must seem sure to turn out a homeless wastrel, and thus not suited to inherit the family fortune. To go home empty-handed at such a time would be just the thing to set him off. But if you are willing to set aside the affections of quilt and mattress, and act decisively when opportunity presents itself, I would be willing to present you with a thousand taels. With these thousand taels to placate your esteemed parent, you can claim that you kept to your chambers at the capital and have not wasted the least bit. Your esteemed parent is sure to believe this. From then on your family will be at peace, and there should be no further grumbling. In no time at all you could change disaster into good fortune. Please think this over carefully. It is not that I am covetous of the charms of the lovely one. The truth is that I am eager to give some small expression of my devotion to your welfare."

Now Li Jia had always been a man with no backbone who, when all was said and done, was terrified of his dad. Sun Fu's little talk went right to the heart of his fears. He rose and bowed, saying, "On hearing this instruction from you, the scales have fallen from my eyes. But my little consort has stood by me through a journey of hundreds of miles; I cannot in justice cut her off all at once. Allow me to return and discuss it with her. When I have received her earnest assent, I will come back and present my reply." Sun Fu said, "When you talk to her, you ought to put it delicately. But if she is really motivated by sincere loyalty to you, she's sure to be unwilling to cause father and son to split. She'll certainly do her part to bring about your successful return home."

The two of them drank a while longer, and when the wind settled and the snow stopped, it was already quite late. Sun Fu told his servant boy to settle the bill, and he led the young master by the hand down toward the boats. Truly,

With strangers, say a third of what you think;
don't throw out all your heart's designs at once.

Now we turn to Du Tenth in the boat. She set out wine and dainties, meaning to share a small banquet with the young master. When he failed to return all day, she trimmed a lamp and sat up waiting for him. When the young master came aboard, Tenth rose to greet him. He had a flustered expression and seemed to have something unhappy on his mind, so she poured out a full cup of warm wine and tried to console him. But the young master shook his head and refused to drink. Without uttering a single word, he went right to bed alone and lay down. Tenth was worried by this, and, after gathering up the cups and trays, she came and helped Master Li undress and make ready to sleep. She asked him, "What has happened that has put you in such a gloomy mood?" The young master just sighed, still not opening his mouth to speak. She asked him the same thing three or four times, but in the end she noticed he had already nodded off. Tenth could not resolve it in her mind, and sat at the side of the bed, unable to sleep.

In the middle of the night, the young master woke up and sighed once more. Tenth said, "My lord, what difficult matter do you have in your mind, that you sigh so?" The young master sat up, clutching the blankets about him, and made as if to speak, but stopped short several times. And then streams of tears began running down his cheeks. Tenth clasped the young master in her bosom and spoke softly to comfort him, saying, "You and I have been lovers for two years now, and we have held out to this day through innumerable trials and reversals, and every manner of difficulty. But through all the hundreds of miles of our journey together I have never seen you grieve like this. Now we are preparing to cross the river, on the verge of a new lifetime of happiness. How is it that you instead grow sad and troubled? There must surely be some reason. Husband and wife share all equally between them, in life and death. If any problem arises it can surely be talked over. Do not be afraid to say whatever is on your mind."

The young master, thus repeatedly egged on, could not hold out, and at last said tearfully, "I was left destitute and without recourse at the ends of the earth. I undeservingly received your forbearing indulgence, and you consented to follow me to this place. It is truly an incomparable favor that you have done me. But I have pondered it over and over; my father, in his position of local prominence, is subject to strict standards of propriety. Furthermore, he himself is stern and inflexible by nature. I fear that if I add to his ire, he is sure to run me out of the house. If you and I are forced to wander rootlessly, where shall we come to rest? The joys of husband and wife will be hard to preserve intact, while the relation of father and son will be broken. During the day, I received an invitation to drink from my new friend Mr. Sun of Xin-an. He considered this problem on my behalf . . . yet my poor heart feels as if it is being cut!"

Tenth said in great alarm, "What is it you mean to do?" The young master said, "Being as I was personally involved in the situation, I was unable to grasp it clearly. Now my friend Sun has devised a plan for me which seems quite good. My only fear is that you, my love, will not give your assent to it." Tenth said, "Who is this friend Sun? If the plan is a good one, what can there be against following it?" The young master said, "My friend Sun is named Fu, a salt merchant from Xin-an. He is a stylish young fellow. During the night he heard the clear tones of your voice, and thus inquired about you. I told him your background, as well as the reasons making my return home difficult. He has it in mind to take you in for one thousand taels. With that thousand taels I will have a pretext on which to call on my parents, and you, my dear benefactress, will also have someone to rely on. But I cannot bear to give up the affection I feel for you. It is for this reason that I am grieved and weep." When he had said this his tears fell like rain.

Tenth removed her hands from him and laughed coldly, saying, "The man who devised this plan for you is truly a great hero. The fortune of the thousand taels will enable you to restore your position in your family, and I will go to another man so as not to be a burden to you. 'Originating in feeling and stopping in accordance with propriety'³—truly this can be called a strategy with advantage on all sides. Where are the thousand taels?" The young master dried his tears and said, "Since I had not received your approval, the money has not yet been exchanged. It is still over at his boat." Tenth said, "Go first thing in the morning to settle it with him. You mustn't let this opportunity slip by. But a thousand taels of silver is a serious matter. You must be sure to have it counted out in full and securely in your hands before I go over to his boat—do not fall victim to an unscrupulous trader." By this time it was nearly the fourth watch, and Tenth got up and lit a lamp and made herself up, saying, "Today's dressing is for the purpose of 'welcoming the new and seeing off the old.' It's no ordinary occasion."

Having said this, she attentively made herself up with powder and perfume. In her ornate bracelets and embroidered jacket, she looked splendid. A fragrant breeze seemed to play about her, and she radiated a brilliance that dazzled all who saw her. By the time she was done dressing, it was just beginning to grow light outside. Sun Fu's servant boy came to the bow of their boat to await news. Tenth looked in at the young master, smiling as though pleased with how things were going, and urged him to go and give his reply, and to quickly count out the silver in full. The young master went in person to Sun Fu's boat, and replied that he agreed to everything. Sun Fu said, "Counting out the silver is not a problem. But I would like to have the lovely's make-up stand as security." The young master went back once more to pass this reply on to Tenth. She pointed to the gold-inlaid stationery box, saying, "Go on and take it."

Sun Fu was greatly pleased. He then took one thousand taels of white silver, and sent it off to the young master's boat. Tenth counted it out herself and found to that it was sufficient in both purity and amount, without the least error. Thereupon she grasped the gunwale and waved to Sun Fu, and as soon as Sun Fu saw her, his soul flew out of him. Tenth opened her crimson lips, exposing gleaming teeth, saying, "Please send back that box I sent over just now. In it are some travel documents of Master Li's which should be picked out and returned to him." Sun Fu already regarded Tenth as a turtle in his trap, and without hesitation ordered his servant to carry that gold-inlaid stationery box right over and place it at the prow of Li Jia's boat. Tenth took out the key and opened the lock. Inside the box were many small drawers. Tenth asked the young master to pull out the first drawer to look, and there was all kingfisher feathers and bright pendants, jade hairpins and jeweled earrings filling it up inside, probably worth several hundred taels.

Tenth threw it all right into the river. Li Jia and Sun Fu and the rest of the people on the boats were all astonished. She then told the young master to open another drawer. It was filled with jade whistles and golden pipes. He opened another drawer full of antique knickknacks of ancient jade and purple gold, probably worth several thousand. Tenth threw all this into the great river. People began gathering on the bank, until they packed the entire shoreline. They said with one voice, "What a shame!" and were left standing there, wondering what it was all about.

Finally Li Jia opened one more drawer. Inside this drawer there was another box. When he opened the box and looked, there were handfuls of priceless pearls, and all sorts of sapphires, cat's-eyes, and rare treasures such as they had never seen before. There was no guessing at their worth. The crowd of people all cheered lustily, and the noise of their commotion was like thunder. Tenth made as if to throw these things as well into the river. In that instant Li Jia was overcome with remorse. He clasped Tenth and wailed aloud. Then Sun Fu came over as well and tried to reason with her. Tenth pushed the young master to one side and cursed Sun Fu, saying, "Mr. Li and I have endured every kind of hardship. It was no easy thing for us

³"Originating in feeling and stopping in accordance with propriety"—a quote from the "Great Preface" to the *Classic of Poetry*.

to come this far. But you with your lecherous intentions hatched a cunning plot that has dissolved all our destined life together in a single day, and destroyed the love and affection between us. You are my sworn enemy. If I have consciousness after death, I swear I will take my grievance against you to the clear-eyed gods. And you dream of sharing the joy of pillow and mat with me!"

Then she said to Li Jia, "I languished in a fallen life for several years, during which time I amassed some private savings. This was meant as a provision against old age. I did not intend for those mountain vows and ocean oaths that we exchanged to be broken even in our declining years. That day as we were leaving the capital, I used the pretext of my sisters' parting gifts to store these hundred treasures in this box. There is no less than ten thousand taels here. I meant to use this to set you up in such style that you could return to see your parents without shame. Perhaps they might have taken pity on me for my sincerity and allowed me to assist your wife in the duties of the household, so that I could live out my life relying on you, with no regrets to my dying day. How could I have guessed that your trust in me was so shallow that you could be confused by groundless counsel? You have abandoned me at midjourney and betrayed my earnest heart. Today, before these many eyes, I open this box to reveal its contents, so that you may learn that a thousand taels is no great thing. In my jewel case there is true jade; I regret that you lack eyes in your head to see it. Born in an ill-fated hour, I fell into the bonds of a shameful life. And just as I made good my escape, I have been cast aside once more. Today every person who has ears and eyes can witness that it is not I who have betrayed you, but rather you who have betrayed me!"

At this the crowd that had gathered to watch all shed tears, every last one of them, and they all cursed Master Li for a heartless deceiver. The young master was both ashamed and grieved. He wept with remorse, and was just beginning to beg for her forgiveness when, clutching the treasure box, she plunged right into the heart of the river. The crowd cried out in alarm for someone to save her. But all that could be seen were dark clouds over the river, and the restless waves—there was no trace of her. Alas, a famed courtesan, beautiful as flowers or jade, left all at once to be entombed in fishes' bellies!

The three souls settle to the water-kingdom's trackless depths;
the seven spirits set off on the distant road of darkness.

At the time, the people who were watching gnashed their teeth in fury, climbing over one another in their desire to thrash Li Jia and Sun Fu, which started these two so badly they didn't know what to do. They hurriedly called out to the boatmen to set out, and went off in separate directions. Li Jia sat in his boat looking at the thousand taels and thinking back on Tenth, brooding day in and day out on his shame. These oppressive feelings eventually drove him crazy, and he never recovered as long as he lived. As for Sun Fu, after the shock of that day he fell ill and was bedridden for over a

month. All day he would see Du Tenth beside him, cursing him. In time, he died. People said it was revenge exacted from the depths of the river.

And now we speak of that Liu Yu-chun. When his stint in the academy at the capital was up, he packed up his things to return home, and moored at Gua-bu.⁴ He happened to drop a bronze washbasin in the river as he was washing his face over the water, and he sought out a fisherman to fish it up with his net. When the net came out, what was inside was a little case. Yu-chun opened the case to look, and in it were bright pearls and rare treasures, precious things of inestimable price. Yu-chun richly rewarded the fisherman, and kept the things by his bedside to play with them. That night in a dream he saw a woman out in the river, striding toward him over the waves. When he looked closely, it was Du Tenth. She approached him and greeted him, and complained to him of Mr. Li's unfeeling behavior. She also said, "I was the recipient of your gracious assistance, when you helped us out with that hundred and fifty taels. I originally meant to seek out a way to repay you when we came to the end of our journey. Little did I know that there was to be no constancy from beginning to end. Yet I often bear your noble favor in mind, unable to forget it. This morning I presented you a small case by way of the fisherman as a small token of my heartfelt thanks. From this time on, we shall never meet." When she had done speaking, he awoke all at once in alarm. Only then did he realize that Tenth had died, and he sighed with pity for several days.

Those who later assessed the merits of this case felt that Sun Fu, who thought nothing of throwing away a thousand taels in a plot to steal away a lovely woman, was certainly no gentleman, while Li Jia, who failed to recognize Du Tenth's sincere devotion, was a vulgar person not even worth talking about. But most of all they wondered why a rare hero among women like Tenth could not find a mate worthy of her, to ride away together on a Qin Terrace phoenix.⁵ Yet she mistakenly took up with Master Li, casting bright pearls and lovely jade before a blind man. The result was that gratitude was made enmity, and their ten thousand feelings of affection were changed to flowing water. This is most pitiful! A poem lamenting this event says:

Do not talk idly of romance if you don't know the game;
a world is hidden there within love's name.
If one knew all of love that was in love to know,
the epithet "romantic" should be thought no cause for shame.

⁴Gua-bu is on the north bank of the Yangzi, about sixty kilometers upstream of Cua-zhou. It seems possible that the two places are conflated here.

⁵A reference to the story of Xiao Shi and Nong Yu, daughter of Duke Mu of the state of Qin. Xiao Shi was an expert player of the xiao, a whistlelike instrument, and could imitate the call of the phoenix. At last, a phoenix descended to the couple at the terrace built for them by Duke Mu and carried them off to Heaven together.