

The Chalk Circle

Translated by
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Characters

MRS. CH'ANG

MA CHUN-SHING, *the lord MA*

MRS. MA, *his First Wife*

HAI-T'ANG, *daughter of MRS. CH'ANG, and Second Wife of MA CHUN-SHING*

SHIU-LANG, *the young child of HAI-T'ANG and the lord MA*

CH'ANG-LIN, *son of MRS. CH'ANG*

CH'AO, *clerk of the Court, lover of MRS. MA*

SU-SHUN, *governor and judge of Ch'ing-chiu,*

Many Officers, Sergeants and Guards in the suite of SU-SHUN

Two Neighbors of MRS. MA

MRS. LIU SSU-SHIN *midwife*

MRS. WEI-WU *midwife*

A WINE-SELLER

T'ANG-SHAO *police officer or guard*

HSIEH-PA *police officer or guard*

PAO-CH'ING, *governor and supreme judge at Kai Fang-Fu*

Many Officers of the suite of PAO-CH'ING

A Sergeant, under-officer of justice, occupying the office of Lictor

Prologue

[*The scene is the house of MRS. CH'ANG.*]

MRS. CH'ANG. I am a native of Ch'ing-ch'ao. My family name is Liu; that of my husband was Ch'ang. He died very young, a long time ago, and left me two children, a boy and a girl. My son's name is Ch'ang-lin. I taught him to read and write. My daughter's name is Ch'ang Hai-t'ang. I have no need to say much of one so distinguished for her beauty and fineness and greatness of soul. She knows the arts of writing and drawing, can play the flute most delicately and dance like the spirit of a white butterfly flitting amongst the ethereal flowers of heaven. She can sing like a nightingale and accompany herself most ravishingly upon the guitar. In a word, there is not a talent she does not possess to perfection. For seven generations my ancestors held high positions and achieved literary success. But alas! the wheel of fortune turned and in the wink of an eye I had lost all that I had. And now, pressed by necessity, I have had to force my daughter to make traffic of her beauty in order that she may continue to live and be charming. In this neighborhood dwells a rich man named Ma Chun-shing, a frequent caller at our house. He has seen my daughter and has made persistent proposals, offering her the rank of Second Wife. My daughter asks nothing better than to have him for a husband, but I could not give up the fine raiment and manner of living procured for me by her trade. I shall wait until she comes and then talk over with her the subject which now engrosses me.

[*Enter CH'ANG-LIN.*]

CH'ANG-LIN. I am called Ch'ang-lin.... Well, my Honorable Mother, you know that my father and my ancestors held high places in the

literary world and positions of eminence. If you are pleased to allow that miserable little wretch to continue to practice an infamous trade which dishonors her family, what kind of a figure do you think I can make in the world?

MRS. CH'ANG. What is the meaning of this idle talk? If you fear that the conduct of your sister dishonors your family, would it not be better for you to seek some means of gaining silver yourself for the support of your aged mother?

[*Enter HAI-T'ANG.*]

HAI-T'ANG. My brother, if you would be a gallant youth, take upon yourself the maintenance of our venerable mother.

CH'ANG-LIN. Most degraded of sisters, how is it that you can practice this ignoble profession? If you do not fear the contempt of society, I do. And for that reason, vile creature, I would that you were broken into bits. [*He strikes her.*]

MRS. CH'ANG [*arresting his hand*]. Do not strike her. [*And as he withdraws.*] It is more fitting that I should be the one to strike her.

CH'ANG-LIN. My Honorable Mother, I am weary of these domestic wrangles and beg that you will cease them immediately. Let her receive her punishment through the maledictions and railleries of good people. I am leaving for P'ien-ching, the city where my uncle lives. I shall endeavor to find there some means of gaining a livelihood. It is commonly said that first of all a young man must look out for himself. Big and strong as I am, do you believe that I shall perish of hunger after I have quit this house? [*To HAI-T'ANG.*] And thou, vile creature, after I have departed, see that you take good care of your mother. Should any misfortune befall her, I warn you that you may hope for no pardon.

Inflamed with rage,
 This house I quit in haste
 To find elsewhere some means
 Of sustenance.
 So vigorous am I,
 I cannot think

The heavens have decreed
I spend my days
In penury.

[*Bows to MRS. CH'ANG.*]

I go.

[*He goes, running as from the seven devils.*]

HAI-T'ANG. How often, Respected Mother, am I to suffer such aspersions upon my character? How much better should you graciously permit me to wed the Honorable Ma Chun-shing.

MRS. CH'ANG. You are right, O Daughter of Wisdom. But wait until the Honorable Ma Chun-shing arrives and you shall see that I am augustly disposed to consent to your marriage.

[*MA CHUN-SHING enters and stands apart from the others.*]

MA CHUN-SHING. My family name is Ma and my surname Chun-shing. My ancestors settled in Ch'ing-ch'iu. In my youth I followed the career of letters and acquired a profound knowledge of the classics and of history. As I enjoy a considerable fortune, every one gives me the title of Yuan-wei. I constantly seek pleasure and am passionately drawn toward what is known as the primrose path. Near by lives a most alluring little beauty who exercises the sweetest of all arts and has for some time past maintained with me the most agreeable of relations. Her name is Ch'ang Hai-t'ang. I have no need to describe the perfect accord of her sentiments with mine, for I have the intention of taking her to wife. She has conveyed to me her desire to become united with me, but her old mother has twenty obstacles to offer to our happiness. I suspect her object is to obtain from me rich presents. I have heard that during the last few days Ch'ang Hai-t'ang has had some lively altercations with her brother, Ch'ang-lin, and that he precipitately left the maternal mansion to find his uncle in P'ien-ching. I imagine that he will not return for some time, or at least not before the happy day. It is best that I prepare the wedding gifts and

renew my demands for the marriage. How fortunate that the heavens favor me and that I am about to realize so delightful a project. But what do I perceive? The Honorable Ch'ang Hai-t'ang stands within the entrance of her house, and as usual is most brilliantly arrayed. Her beauty lights the morn with Celestial radiance and her smile is lovelier than the rarest jade. But softly—let us speak with her a while.

[He regards HAI-T'ANG and bows to her.]

HAI-T'ANG. My lord, since you are here, let us profit by the absence of my brother. It should be the easier to bring my mother around to our project and make her augustly consent. She is in the best of humors and has graciously suffered me to converse with her upon the subject. Let us both go to her.

MA CHUN-SHING. Since she is so well disposed, I see that the moment of my happiness has arrived.

[He perceives MRS. CH'ANG.]

MRS. CH'ANG. My lord, to-day my son, Ch'ang-lin, has failed in obedience and filial piety. Without respect for my old age, he has conducted himself with violence toward me. I pray you, I pray you to bring the smelling salts.

MA CHUN-SHING. And what was the altercation you had with your son? I came this morning to offer you one hundred pieces of silver, ten rolls of silk and two porcelain cuspidors of refined shape, of the Sung dynasty. Also when Hai-t'ang shall have become my wife, should you be in need of wood or rice, I shall hasten to procure them for you. Be assured, O Venerable Mother, that you will want for nothing. Give yourself over to a day of happiness. Accept my unworthy and insignificant offerings, and augustly give your consent to our marriage.

MRS. CH'ANG. I cannot think very highly of a daughter who daily involves me in quarrels. But after she is married I can live free from disquietude. But, my lord, you have already a wife of first rank. Therefore I must make sure that my daughter will not be subjected to insults and maltreatment, before I allow her to set foot in the bridal

chamber. Otherwise, I should prefer to have her remain with me. But once my doubts are set at rest, I shall, my lord, be happy to give my consent to your marriage.

MA CHUN-SHING. Have no fears. My First Wife is as incapable as myself of ill-bred conduct. Your honorable daughter will no sooner take up her residence with me than Mrs. Ma will regard her as a beloved sister. As for myself, notwithstanding her secondary rank, she shall have the same privileges as the other. But if Hai-t'ang shall augustly give to the world a man-child, from that moment she shall be in charge of all the affairs of my house. Thus, Respected Mother, you need give yourself no further uneasiness concerning your exalted and sublimely beautiful daughter.

MRS. CH'ANG. My lord, the matter is concluded. Since I have your magnificent gifts, my inferior and ill-favored offspring is yours. You may this instant take her.... And thou, my child, my Golden Lotus, know that it was not I who removed you from the shelter of my arms. You are now elevated to the rank of wife. I hope that from now on you will not again take up your former profession.

HAI-T'ANG. My lord, since your First Wife directs all the affairs of your household, I trust you will not fail ever to stand as my protector and support.

My aged mother hopes
That all my days
I shall remain
Quite faithful to my husband.
She also hopes
To rest on me her head
Her venerable head
White with the years.

My master, I love you better than all the world.

MA CHUN-SHING. That is too much, my betrothed.

HAI-T'ANG. The sweetness of your character

Is what I most adore;
Your noble sentiments,
Sincerity and loftiness.

And so I give to you to-day
My heart;
But giving it, take to myself the joys
Of which I long have dreamed.

I go to announce to my friends that Ch'ang Hai-t'ang is to wed the illustrious Yuan-wei, Ma Chun-shing. And hence forth I hope that no one will again cast aspersions upon me.

From all aspersions now
I shall be free;
No more can it be said
I smirch the honor of the family.

[She goes out with MA CHUN-SHING.]

MRS. CH'ANG. I go to-day to marry my daughter to the noble Ma Chun-shing, who presented me with one hundred pieces of silver and other valuable gifts. This means that I shall pass the rest of my days in joy and abundance. As this affair occupies me much, I shall first go in search of my aunt and my sisters, whom I have not seen for some time. We will then have tea together and regale ourselves in a neighboring tavern.

End of the Prologue

Act I

[*The scene is in the house of MA CHUN-SHING.*]

MRS. MA. The men do not cease
To eulogize my charms,
And because I desire their pleasure
There is vermillion upon my lips
And bright colors glorify my cheeks.
Yet in the twinkling of an eye
The rouge and white paint may disappear;
It takes only a basin
Of pure water.

I occupy the important position of First Wife to Ma Chun-shing. He has a Second Wife by the name of Hai-t'ang, a daughter of some person named Ch'ang. She has given our husband a son who is already five years of age.... For me, I have succeeded in imposing upon the confidence of my lord Ma. Near here dwells a clerk named Ch'ao, who is as handsome as a spring morning and who passionately adores the gentler sex. I maintain with him certain relations and appreciate his rare qualities. Also, my particular wish, my most ardent desire is to undo this Ma Chun-shing, in order to live always with Ch'ao as a wife with her husband. To-day, seeing that the excellent lord Ma is from home, I have sent some one to Ch'ao with a request that he pass by here. I hope that at any moment he may arrive.

CH'AO. My station in life
is that of a clerk.

But privately
 There are two things I love
 Surpassingly:
 Good wine
 And the women
 Of other men.

What is the present object of my affections? A lady whose cheeks rival the most beautiful flowers.... My name is Ch'ao. I hold the position of clerk at the court of Ch'ing-ch'iu. Near here lives the First Wife of the Yuan-wei, Ma Chun-shing. One day when he invited me to dine with him, I saw by chance this Wife who is endowed with a most seductive face, the equal of which it may be doubted if heaven or earth has ever produced. The sight of this charming beauty struck deep into my heart. Night and day she is present in my thoughts, before the eyes of my mind. I imagine that she also had fixed her regard upon me because, imposing upon the confidence of her husband, she would hold with me certain relations not entirely in accord with morality. She has begged me to come to see her to-day. Let us go and find her. We do not yet know what is the motive of the message.... I now have arrived at the house where she lives. I shall enter without being announced.... Madam, you have commanded my presence. May I learn what you desire of me?

MRS. MA. It is a most simple matter. I am troubled over the mystery with which we have need to cover our furtive amours. We have not yet come to the point of fixing the date for our union. What happiness will be ours when we live together as husband and wife!

For man achieves
 Not by himself alone,
 Nor woman, either;
 But like the fabled
 One-winged birds, they two
 Must rise together.

And to this end I desire but one thing now, to discover with you the most felicitous method of poisoning my lord Ma.

CH'AO. Need we mention this matter? Is it possible that she whom I regard already as my wife should form such a project without its having also presented itself to my own thoughts? Is this not poison? For some time I have been ready to execute this plan.

[He hands the poison to MRS. MA.]

Here, I shall confide it to you. I am obliged to return to the court to fulfill my duties there. *[He goes out.]*

MRS. MA. Ch'ao is gone. Let us take this poison and put it in some safe hiding place. I shall not rest until I have discovered a favorable moment to strike the blow I meditate. But I am thoughtless. I had forgotten that to-day is the anniversary of the birth of the young child. I go to pray with my lord Ma in all the temples, to burn perfume and gild the figure of Fu.¹

HAI-T'ANG. I am named Hai-t'ang. It is five years since I was married to my lord Ma. My Venerable Mother has long ago departed to the Land of the Gods. I do not know the whereabouts of my brother, as since his departure I have received no news of him. The child which I had from my marriage is called Shin-lang. Since he was three years of age he has stayed by the side of Mrs. Ma, who took him to bring up. As to-day is the anniversary of his birth, my lord and Mrs. Ma have taken him to all the temples in the city to burn sweet perfumes and to gild the image of Fu. I go now to prepare rice and tea to receive them as soon as they shall have returned.... Hai-t'ang, since you have espoused the lord Ma, nothing has interfered with your happiness.

Through the silken curtains
At my window
I contemplate the moon
And its cold shadows.
It shines alike without reproach or passion
Upon my richly embroidered curtains
And upon that street which is the abode of vice.
Could I ever have hoped one day
To abandon that degrading profession,

¹ Buddha

The companionship of rakes and their mistresses,
With their orgies and licentious songs?
Yet I have forever said farewell
To that theatre of pleasure.
Let them follow me if they will
With railleries and aspersions.
Never again will I make advances for gain
Nor stretch forth a seducing hand to noblemen.
No more will I make traffic with my beauty
Nor return to the follies of the gay life.
They shall see me no more
In the abode of the Flowers of the Weeping Willow Tree,
Seeking new paramours
And inviting the return of old ones.
No longer do I fear that officers of the law
Will remove me violently from the Palace of Pleasure.
Nor shall I ever again be the slave
Of the go-between.
I shall suffer no more the amorous callers
Who succeeded one another without cessation.
Nor will my door be broken down
And my house invaded by insolent neighbors.
No longer must I vex myself
About the slenderness of my resources
And the boredom of my profession.
Untroubled by the wickedness of the world outside,
I live the long hours through in tranquil peace.
Even as the wild duck seeks its mate in the grass,
I have found a husband
Whose heart accords happily with mine,
And who each day begs me
To recompense his tenderness.
And so that I may taste with him
The sweetness of slumber,
Ere the moon silvers the edges
Of my window curtains,
I send back to her own apartment

That woman so jealous of my serenity.

I await the return of my lord and Mrs. Ma.... But they do not come....
Let us go out for a moment and look for them in the distance.

[She steps outside and with a hand shading her eyes, peers off.]

[Enter CH'ANG-LIN.]

CH'ANG-LIN. From the bounty of my fellow mortals
I have acquired sad experience.
I see now that it is much better
To place one's trust in the High Gods.

I am Ch'ang-lin. After having had, in the past, a lively altercation with my sister, I quitted the maternal house to go in search of my uncle. Who would have dreamed that I would find him departed for Ch'ong Hse-tao accompanied by some individual named Yen P'ing-fu? Having discovered no one who would tender me hospitality, I have returned benumbed by cold and weighed down by fatigue. I fell down ill in the middle of the road. I have no need to tell how soon my money and my provisions for the journey were used up. In order to exist, I was forced first to pawn, then to sell the clothing off my back. I returned to my family, but my Venerable Mother has long since been enjoying herself in the Celestial Rice Fields. In our ancestral dwelling there is now no place where I can lay my head. I have learned that my sister is married to the great Ma Chun-shing. He is a man of wealth. Without doubt he will deign to regard with compassion his unfortunate brother-in-law and accord him the means of reclaiming his position. Who could blame me for seeking him out? I shall implore his assistance and ask of him relief for my most pressing needs. In a moment I shall arrive at the house of Ma Chun-shing— Why, if I'm not mistaken, there stands my sister just within the doorway!

HAI-T'ANG. I say to myself, who is it that arrives below? Well, if it isn't my brother! ... Fat and plump as you are, you have nothing to ask here. Get you gone.

CH'ANG-LIN, Most Honored Sister, grant me, I pray you, but two words with you.

HAI-T'ANG. I think, my worthy brother, it must be that you have come to erect a tombstone over the hallowed spot where reposes the body of our Honored Mother, and duly to console me in my grief.

CH'ANG-LIN. Respected Sister, I beg of you do not look at my face but rather at the way I am clothed. I am in penury and tormented by the pangs of hunger. How then can you possibly believe that I have come for the purpose of erecting a tombstone over the grave of our lamented mother ?

HAI-T'ANG. When death took my mother, I furnished the shroud and winding sheet and also the camphor wood for the double coffin. I saw to it that with her were buried replicas of all the articles necessary for her comfort while upon this earth, and the spirit money with which to pay her way to the First Heaven. I supported all these expenses without having recourse to my lord Ma Chun-shing.

CH'ANG-LIN. As it was your husband who defrayed the cost of the obsequies, I know that you are under immense obligation to him.

HAI-T'ANG. Having lost my August Father,

Without resources

I was left the care of my mother.

How could you suffer your own sister

To exercise a profession which tarnished

The honor of the house?

I see now that in the depths of your heart

You do not belong to the family of Ch'ang. [*She strikes him.*]

CH'ANG-LIN. Why do you strike me, Most Marvelous of Sisters? I realize that I am greatly indebted to you. Be assured that I have only the highest admiration for your extreme filial piety.

HAI-T'ANG. Sweet morsels fall from your lips

Like cherries dipped in honey.

I see that you have learned that flattery

Is the password to a warm welcome.

CH'ANG-LIN. I came to-day, my sister, to ask your assistance. How is it you receive me with such coldness?

HAI-T'ANG. It is not for you to reproach me with the coldness you observe upon my countenance. Do you recall, my brother, the day

when, burning with anger, you addressed frightful threats to me, after which you fled as if you wanted to run to the end of the world?

CH'ANG-LIN. My sister, that is ancient history. What pleasure can it give you to bring up the past?

HAI-T'ANG. Since you set forth

 Upon the shining road

 To cover yourself with glory,

 I ask you how

 Do you now return

 Clad in rags and tatters?

CH'ANG-LIN. You know, my Excellent Sister, that we are the children of one father and of one mother. Therefore if your brother has done you wrong you should forget it and cool your wrath in the beneficent waters of forgiveness.

HAI-T'ANG. My brother, how could you have the face to seek me out to-day? You will hear to the very end what I have in my heart.

CH'ANG-LIN. Honorable Sister, it was necessity that forced me to appeal to you. Pressed by extremity as I am, I shall not question the amount of the help you accord me and shall leave immediately after receiving it.

HAI-T'ANG. My brother, of silver I have none. It is foolish to demand it of me. You must understand that even the robes and head-ornaments I am wearing are the property of Ma Chun-shing and Mrs. Ma. How could I dispose of them for your benefit? I myself possess nothing to offer as a sacrifice to your needs. Go. It is useless for you to remain.

CH'ANG-LIN. My sister, you are hard and unrelenting. It pierces my marrow that not only have you denied me succor, but you have overwhelmed me with abuse and ill-treatment. However, I shall not take myself off. I shall rest here upon the doorstep until the arrival of the Honorable Ma Chun-shing. Perhaps he will deign to augustly extend to me some bounty.

[*Enter* MRS. MA.]

MRS. MA. I am the First Wife of Ma Chun-shing. I have raised the young child and I have prayed and burned incense for him upon the

altars of all the temples. [*Approaching.*] But what do I perceive? A mendicant upon the portal? Ho there, what evil purpose brings you hither?

CH'ANG-LIN [*rising*]. Madam, I do not merit such language. I am the brother of Ch'ang Hai-t'ang. I have come to call upon my sister.

MRS. MA. Ah! Ah! You are the brother of Hai-t'ang. That makes you my brother-in-law. You know me?

CH'ANG-LIN. Your unworthy servant is unacquainted with the illustrious lady with whom he speaks.

MRS. MA. I am the First Wife of Ma Chun-shing.

CH'ANG-LIN. Gracious Madam, I dare hope that you have not taken offense because I failed to know you.

[*He bows to her.*]

MRS. MA. My brother-in-law, what was your purpose in looking up your sister?

CH'ANG-LIN. Though the truth is painful I shall not dissimulate. Pressed by necessity and having nothing upon which to subsist, I came to ask my sister for something with which to assuage my urgent need.

MRS. MA. How much did she give you?

CH'ANG-LIN. She replied that all the articles in this house belonged to you and that she therefore had no right to dispose of anything, and that she herself had nothing.

MRS. MA. My brother-in-law, you are no doubt ignorant of the fact that since her marriage with Ma Chun-shing your sister has given him a son who is already five years of age. He is your nephew. Ever since his birth your sister has held the keys of the rice-bin and the entire compound is under her direction. That is because I have no son. [*She beats her breast.*] I have not even the shadow of a son! ... Since you are the brother of Hai-t'ang, I regard you as my brother. I shall go to her and demand assistance for you. Should you obtain it, do not be too joyful. On your discretion will depend your good or your bad fortune.

CH'ANG-LIN. Your inferior servant realizes that you are a lady of fine spirit and much wisdom.

HAI-T'ANG [*perceiving* MRS. MA]. Madam, you are the first to return. You have had a tedious pilgrimage. I am sorry to have caused you so much fatigue.

MRS. MA. Hai-t'ang, who is the man seated upon the doorstep ?

HAI-T'ANG. It is my brother, Ch'ang Lin.

MRS. MA. Ah! It is your brother? Why has he come here?

HAI-T'ANG. He came to ask of his sister something to supply his needs.

MRS. MA. And is it possible that you have given him nothing?

HAI-T'ANG. It was Ma Chun-shing and his First Wife who presented me with these robes and head-ornaments. Tell me if it would be augustly right of me to give them away.

MRS. MA. Since the articles were given to you, what is to prevent your giving them, in turn, to your brother?

HAI-T'ANG. Madam, I believe that to be far from my duty. What should I say if Ma Chun-shing were to inquire what I had done with them?

MRS. MA. If Ma Chun-shing questions you, I shall be there to justify you, and he will present you with new ones. Run along and make haste to take them off and give them to your brother.

HAI-T'ANG [*obediently*]. Since you permit me, I shall at once remove these robes and ornaments and give them to my brother. [*She strips them off.*]

MRS. MA. Since he believes they are not your own, give me the things and I will offer them to him myself. [*She takes them and approaches CH'ANG-LIN.*] My brother-in-law, to obtain help for you, I have aroused the anger of Ch'ang Hai-t'ang. I would never have thought that your own sister could be so unkind to you. Who would have imagined that she, who possesses so rich a wardrobe, would not have deigned to present you with so small a part of it? Or that she would refuse so slight a sacrifice with as much fury as if I were wanting to take away some pieces of her flesh. These robes and ornaments were given to me a long time ago as marriage gifts by my Esteemed Mother and Father. I give them to my brother-in-law in order that they may be sold at once to relieve for the moment his most pressing needs. I trust he will not despise them because of their smallness.

CH'ANG-LIN. [*taking the things which she offers*]. Receive, O Most Noble and Generous Lady, my sincerest thanks. Like the little bird whose life was saved by Yang-pao and who returned later in the form of a young man, bearing gifts of four white jade bracelets to his benefactor, I shall place all my efforts into testifying to you worthily of my grateful memory of this august day. [*He bows low to thank her.*] MRS. MA [*returning his bow*]. My brother-in-law, as Ma Chun-shing is from home, I dare not invite you to dine. I trust you will not be offended.

[*He bows and goes.*]

CH'ANG-LIN. I believed at first that the robes and the head ornaments were the property of my sister. Who would have supposed they belonged to the honorable Mrs. Ma.... Oh well, you are my sister. We had the same father and the same mother. Yet not only have you failed to give me a mite to relieve my distress, but also you have repulsed me in a manner most hard and brutal. On the other hand, this estimable lady to whom I am an entire stranger, most graciously gives me of her clothing and head ornaments. Inasmuch as the written symbol for the word trouble is two women under one roof-tree, I imagine the First Wife and the Second Wife, in the seclusion of the within apartments, have many differences. It is not unlikely that they frequently need the intervention of the police.... For the moment, I shall sell only the head ornaments to buy myself some clothing. Afterwards, I shall endeavor to obtain employment as an official in the law-court of Kai Fang-fu. My sister, look well to your conduct, that we may not meet face to face, should any accusation bring you before the tribunal; because I wish to take the skin from off your shoulders with the blows of a stick. [*He goes.*]

[*Enter MRS. MA.*]

MRS. MA [*perceiving HAI-T'ANG*]. Hai-t'ang, I have just come from presenting the robes and head ornaments which you handed over to me.

HAI-T'ANG. Madam, you give me my life. But I fear one thing, and that is when my lord Ma Chun-shing demands of me what I have done with the things. When this occurs, I hope you will defend me.

MRS. MA. Without any doubt. Put all your trust in me.

[HAI-T'ANG *goes out.*]

MRS. MA [*alone*]. Hai-t'ang, thy brother has parted with the robes and head ornaments. I think you will not have any occasion to enjoy yourself about it, because if Ma Chun-shing asks what you have done, I am sorry for you!

[*Enter MA CHUN-SHING and his son, SHIU-LANG.*]

MA CHUN-SHING [*holding his son by the hand*]. I am Ma, surnamed Chun-shing. As soon as I had married Ch'ang Hai-t'ang, I had by her this young child, whose name is Shiu-lang. He is five years of age. As to-day is the anniversary of his birth, I have gone with him to all the temples to burn perfumes in honor of Fu. Observing that the temple of the goddess who presides over the birth of boys is crumbling in many places, I have given silver with which to make the repairs. That is the reason for my prolonged absence. But in one instant I shall arrive at my house.

HAI-T'ANG. There comes my lord Ma. He is weary and fatigued. I must go quickly for tea. [*She goes.*]

MA CHUN-SHING. Madam, how is it that I do not see the customary robes and ornaments upon Ch'ang Hai-t'ang?

MRS. MA. My lord, had you not questioned me, I should have kept my lips sealed. Because she has given you a son, you have heaped good things upon her and you have toward her a tolerance past bearing. Who would have thought that in your absence she would have taken a lover? To-day, while we were away burning perfume in all the temples, she gave her robes and head ornaments to her paramour. At the moment when she was going in search of other garments and ornaments, I surprised her and uncovered her intrigue. It was I who prevented her from concealing the situation and repairing the disorder of her appearance. I have been awaiting your arrival in order that you

may reward the traitress according to her merits. It is not that I am jealous of her; even she does not impute that to me.

MA CHUN-SHING [*Snorting*]. So then, Hai-t'ang has given her robes and her ornaments to a lover. I see clearly that she is a person naturally depraved. Such conduct makes me die of grief and indignation. [*He calls HAI-T'ANG and strikes her.*] I will annihilate you, vile creature, for violating the most sacred of all bonds.

MRS. MA [*egging on her husband*]. Beat her, beat her! That is fine! What will you do with a strumpet who has dishonored your house? Augustly kill her with blows.

HAI-T'ANG. The robes, the head ornaments, I would not at first give to my brother, but she forced me to by her insistence. Who would have thought that in the presence of My Lord she would say that I had given them to a lover? In all this there is nothing for which Hai-t'ang should be reproached.

I used to ponder secretly
 But not to vex myself;
 Mistrusting none of her designs,
 Nor yet suspecting this abyss
 She's dug to plunge me in
 With malice that is past belief.
 I tremble now no less from fear
 Than from the blows.

MA CHUN-SHING [*transported with rage*]. Wrah! To think that you, who have given me a son, should so strip yourself also of honor and decency. You'll make me die of anger.

MRS. MA. Why do you thus excite yourself? You should rather be thankful that you have at least one woman of unquestioned virtue in your household, and annihilate the other with blows.

HAI-T'ANG. All the time, he has had in his house

A First Wife.
 All the time, sole dominion she's had,
 She alone.
 Who would think she could steal from the fox
 His cunning,

Or from the wolf
His ferocity?

It is you who have taken to yourself a lover. How dare you hang upon me this outrageous calumny?

Because in my youth
I was a sing-song girl,
I have no wish to emulate her;
All that is past.

It will not be astonishing if she involves me in a crime.

Dare you cast upon me
The shame of your own debauches?

MRS. MA. Vile creature, I see well that your natural depravity is reawakened. You have given your robes and head ornaments to a lover, while deceiving your husband.

HAI-T'ANG. Surely the young wife named Sang was less cruel than you. You who glory in belonging to an ancient family, dare you say to me, whose heart is true and constant, that I have deceived the head of the house?

MRS. MA. With whom have you carried on this liaison?

HAI-T'ANG. She says that, disrobed,
I received a lover.
I might as well assist her
To cover me with mud
As to suffer without a word
This aspersion she casts upon me.

MA CHUN-SHING [*appearing indisposed*]. This wretch of a woman will make me die of indignation. Madam, I am faint. Fetch quickly some broth to restore me.

MRS. MA. It is Hai-t'ang the good-for-nothing who has caused the wrath that suffocates the august one. Hai-t'ang, go at once and heat some broth for the Honorable Lord Ma.

HAI-T'ANG. I obey.

Within the hour
There has rained upon my shoulders
A shower of blows.
And now behold!
I am sent to the kitchen
To heat some broth.
Without ceasing
This First Wife irritates lord Ma,
And angers him;
While making me
The victim of his anger
And suspicion. [*She brings in the broth.*]

Here, madam, is the broth.

MRS. MA. Bring it to me that I may taste of it. [*She tastes the broth.*] It needs a little more salt. Run and get it.

[*Exit HAI-T'ANG.*]

MRS. MA. Let us procure quickly the poison prepared some days ago for the August Lord Ma, and put it in the broth. [*She pours in the poison.*] Hai-t'ang, make haste!

[*HAI-T'ANG enters.*]

HAI-T'ANG. What troubles now my lady Ma,
What makes her shake, and tremble?
How could a little lack of salt
Produce such agitation?
Madam, here is the salt.

[*MRS. MA sprinkles salt in the broth and stirs it, then holds out the cup to her.*]

MRS. MA. Here, Hai-t'ang, run and take it to him.

HAI-T'ANG. Madam, present it to him yourself. I fear to approach the Excellent One, as he augustly permits himself to be in a new fit of rage.

MRS. MA. If you yourself do not take it to him, he will infer that you are displeased with him,

HAI-T'ANG [*bowing*]. I obey. [*She goes to MA CHUN-SHING with the broth.*]

HAI-T'ANG. My lord, take a sip of this.

[MA CHUN-SHING *takes the cup and drinks.*]

HAI-T'ANG. Alas! What's this I see!

He sinks beneath the weight of pain,
His mouth convulsed with bitterness
And yet the broth was sweet.

[MA CHUN-SHING *expires.*]

HAI-T'ANG [*terrified*]. My lord, my lord, deign to open your eyes!

Behold now this sudden pallor
Replacing the warm yellow hue.
What can, in one little instant,
Have taken the light from his eyes?
Frozen with terror, my courage is gone;
My own eyes but rivers of tears.
This spectacle chills while it palsies,
Can nothing prevent this untimely end?

He leaves his two wives and his five year-old son without protection.... Poor mother! I alone remain with my young son and must finish my days in desolate widowhood. And thou, my child, what protector will now sustain thy frail existence? [*She goes to MRS. MA*] Madam, my lord Ma is no more.

MRS. MA. This same lord Ma Chun-shing had the ungraciousness to neglect me and take to himself a Second Wife.... Hai-t'ang, wretch that thou art, but a moment ago the excellent lord Ma was in the best of health. Is it possible that the cup of broth you gave him could bring

all of a sudden the coldness of death? It is because you put poison in it. Is it not?

HAI-T'ANG. Madam, you tasted the broth yourself. Therefore, if it had been poisoned, it would have killed you first. But in any case, he is dead. And bitter will be my bowls of rice from this time on. [*She weeps and rends her garments.*] Oh heaven! I shall die of grief and despair.

MRS. MA [*calls off*]. My good servants, where are you?

[SERVANTS *enter.*]

Go and choose, upon a bit of high ground, a fitting place to dig a grave. Fell the wood for a coffin and inter for me the honorable lord Ma.

[*The SERVANTS make haste to bear away on their shoulders the body of the honorable lord MA CHUN-SHING.*]

MRS. MA. Hai-t'ang, you little wretch, wait a bit until we have disposed of the honorable body of Ma Chun-shing, and I shall make suitable arrangements for you, as surely you will not dare venture to continue your residence here.

HAI-T'ANG [*weeping*]. Madam, since the illustrious Ma Chun-shing is no more, I have no right to remain. Permit me only to take my son with me and I shall immediately take my leave.

MRS. MA. The young child whom he gave to us both?

HAI-T'ANG. It was me to whom he gave the child.

MRS. MA. If it was to you he gave the little Shiu-lang, why did you not nurse and care for him yourself? Ever since his birth he has been close to my side, close in my arms. It was I who fed him and chafed his cold limbs. It was to me that he brought each day his little troubles to be cared for with the tenderness of a mother. Soothing a thousand vexations, to what pains have I been to bring him up properly? And now you have the effrontery to demand that I hand over to you the child I so patiently raised. You have had a secret lover and you have murdered your husband. Therefore the best thing you can do is to

renounce your claim upon the child. Will you do so voluntarily, or be compelled under the authority of the law?

HAI-T'ANG. What do you mean by that?

MRS. MA. If you give him up voluntarily, leaving the young child with me, the entire fortune of Ma Chun-shing—his houses, his lands, everything that he possessed, shall be yours. I shall leave, taking Shiu-lang with me. But if you do not withdraw except under legal pressure, I shall bring to mind the fact that you poisoned your husband. As you must know, that is no trifle, and I shall take you before the magistrate.

HAI-T'ANG. As it was not I who poisoned Ma Chun-shing, what fear have I of the magistrate? I am perfectly willing that we should go to him together.

MRS. MA. The magistrate is discriminating and will soon discover the truth. He will not fail to punish the guilty one. Very well then, since you fear nothing in appearing before the judge, I shall conduct you to the court.

HAI-T'ANG. I indeed fear nothing. By all means let us go to the court.

I shall see that the truth is known
And no credence given her mendacity.
I shall call in as witnesses
The two women
Who assisted him into the world.
They shall say which is the mother
And which the stepmother.

MRS. MA [*embarrassed*]. I am the true... true mother of the child... That boy is my... my... real... real child. [*Passionately.*]
He is my heart, my blood, my life, the child of my womb. How could I let go of him?

HAI-T'ANG, How impose upon all the inhabitants
Of this quarter;
They who know of his birth
And have watched him grow
From infancy
Into a little lad?

MRS. MA. You have poisoned my lord Ma. It is within my power to hush up that fact.

HAI-T'ANG. For a long time you had the poison in readiness and you secretly put it into his broth.

MRS. MA. There is plain evidence that you poisoned the broth. All that I fear is that you may not suffer sufficient retribution.

HAI-T'ANG. Who is it that poisoned her husband?

You wish beyond doubt
That in expiation of your crime
I should sacrifice my life,
There is nothing to incriminate others,
Therefore you calumniate innocence.
No, surely among all the wives
Of first rank,
There is not another on earth
So corrupt and so barbarous as you.

MRS. MA [*alone*]. How is it that she has divined my strategy? ... If only I can keep the child, the entire fortune of the honorable lord Ma will become my property. Clearly, this is a matter requiring due consideration. Everything must be carefully thought out if I am to spare myself the bitter food of painful regrets in the future. Let us reflect a little.... It is certainly a fact that the child is not my own. If Hai-t'ang invokes the testimony of her midwives and of the neighbors who knew of his birth, all these witnesses will testify before the magistrate in her favor. The whole project will be ruined. But when their black eyes perceive this shining metal [*She displays silver.*] they will undoubtedly burn to possess it. Therefore let us gain in advance their honorable interest, and in payment present each of them with a piece of silver. Then, at least a number of them will speak in my favor. But that is not all. I must also graciously win over the magistrate. What luck that Ch'ao is connected with the Courthouse and that I can send for him to talk the matter over. I must at once consult him as to the course of action I am to follow.

[Enter CH'AO.]

CH'AO. Someone has just been here asking for Ch'ao. Well, here I am. It is some days since I have called upon the honorable Mrs. Ma. I have had in the depths of my heart a most lively desire to see her. Without her, my spirit becomes downcast.... But I am now arriving at the door of her house. If her husband is absent, nothing will prevent my seeing her. [*Perceiving* MRS. MA] Honorable Madam, I have been burning with thoughts of you. My longing has been augustly unutterable.

MRS. MA. Ch'ao, you are not aware that I have administered the poison you brought to the honorable lord Ma. Presently I go to take Hai-t'ang before the magistrate to lodge a complaint against her. I would take unto myself not only the inheritance of the lord Ma, but his son as well. Manage to win over the magistrate. Use all your wits, all your influence to arrange the case according to my wishes. Then we can entwine our lives together in lasting connubial bliss.

CH'AO. Nothing will be easier. I foresee but one difficulty; that the child is not your own. What good will it do you to remain guardian to him? It were the part of great wisdom to let go of him and be free of encumbrance.

MRS. MA. Is it possible to hold the post of clerk of the court and yet be so stupid? If I give up the child to Hai-t'ang, as he is the heir of the Excellent Lord Ma, he will come and despoil me of his fortune. He will not permit me to keep so much as a stick of incense. As to Hai-t'ang, she plans to call as witnesses the midwives who attended her at the birth and many of the people who live near by. But I intend to make things easy for myself by means of this. [*Indicating silver.*] And if you can attend to the details at your end, recourse to the law will avail her nothing. I ask of you but one thing, to go and promptly make the necessary preparations.

CH'AO, Very well, Madam, but make haste to present your accusations. I go to the tribunal to prepare for everything. [*He goes out.*]

MRS. MA. Ch'ao has gone. I go to bind the arms of Hai-t'ang. The proverb says:

“Man dreams not of injuring the tiger;

It is the tiger who dreams
Of devouring man.”
But I say:
What man dare attack a tiger
Without getting his flesh torn
To shreds?

End of Act I

ACT II

[The scene is the Court of CH'ING-CH'IU and there are present SU-SHUN and his suite.]

SU-SHUN. I am the governor of the Court of Ch'ing-ch'iu. My name is Su-shun.

Although I perform the functions of judge,
I am unacquainted
With a single article of the code.
I love but one thing
With his death it has flown
The clink of silver;
Graced with this beauteous
White metal,
The pleader is sure to win his case.

I detest this county of Ch'ing-ch'iu, which ridicules my extreme indulgence toward the guilty. They have given me the nickname of Su Mo-lun. These words have a double meaning. The character of Mo signifies "to take with the hand," and lun means a square piece of wood. The idea is that whether one receives it with the right hand or the left, it is all the same. It is by that absurd name that I am familiarly known.... In my opinion there are many magistrates whose rigid inflexibility has caused the downfall of an infinitude of people. But as for Su Mo-lun, one may try in vain to count the number of persons he

has covertly saved.... This morning I am opening court unusually early. Ho! officers, bring me the tablets of cases scheduled for to-day.
OFFICER [*bowing*]. I obey.

[*Enter MRS. MA, dragging after her HAI-T'ANG and her young son, SHIU-LANG.*]

MRS. MA. I am taking you before the magistrate, to ask for vengeance.
HAI-T'ANG [*struggling*]. Let go of me! Let go of me!

She envelops me
Like a devouring flame.
She bound me with hemp
And dragged me hither.

MRS. MA. You have poisoned your husband, and the penalty is death.
HAI-T'ANG. You claim I have committed a crime,
The penalty for which
Is death.
If that were so,
How could I escape?
Alas, Hai-t'ang!
In espousing the noble lord Ma,
I attained the pinnacle of happiness.
Of that happiness there remains not a trace.
Like red leaves
Before the Autumn wind.
Oppressed by calumny,
I cannot open my mouth to prove my innocence;
But the heavens know the falseness
Of her accusations.

MRS. MA. It is perfectly evident that you poisoned our husband. The heavens themselves were witness to your crime.

HAI-T'ANG. I attest my innocence
Before all space.
Though truth be hid from mortal sight,

The gods look down on all
The whole day through
And nothing can escape their eyes.

MRS. MA. Vile creature! ... Here is the entrance to the Courthouse of Kai Fang-fu. Should you dare to falsify before the judge, you will be forced to undergo, one after another, all of the many tortures. It were far better to acknowledge your misdeed. And now consider well: will you renounce your claim, or undergo the hideous suffering?

HAI-T'ANG. Though they beat me to a pulp, I shall never do as you demand. All I ask is that you unbind me and right willingly will I go with you before the judge.

You say that I shall suffer
In the hands of the Honorable Judge;
That one by one I shall be subjected
To all the tortures.
But to convict me,
He must find a motive for the deed.
So kind, so good, so deeply loved,
How could I have murdered my husband?
Having persevered most diligently in wisdom,
Having spent my years
In contemplating the shadows
Of the Six Virtues,
Why should I fear this ordeal
Or the threatened tortures? Alas!
Despite my innocence,
I have fallen into the most odious of traps.

MRS. MA [*taking firmer grip on HAI-T'ANG; crying loudly*]. Justice!
Justice!

SU-SHUN. I would see the person who cries outside the door. Officers, go quickly and bring her before me.

OFFICER. She is here.

[Enter MRS. MA, followed by HAI-T'ANG and her son. Perceiving the judge, they sink to their knees.]

SU-SHUN. Who is the plaintiff?

MRS. MA. It is your unworthy servant.

SU-SHUN. In that case, let the plaintiff kneel on that side and the defendant kneel on the opposite side.

[*They kneel in places indicated.*]

SU-SHUN. I now order that the plaintiff lay before me the reasons for her accusation. Speak: you can count on me for justice.

MRS. MA. Your unworthy servant was the First Wife and now the widow of the illustrious Ma Chun-shing, with title of Yuan-wei.

SU-SHUN [*rising from his chair*]. In that case, Madam, you may stand up.

OFFICER. Your Excellency, this woman is a suppliant. How can she supplicate standing up?

SU-SHUN. She came here to inform us that she was the wife and now the widow of Ma Chun-shing, with the title of Yuan-wei.

OFFICER. The title of Yuan-wei, being honorary, means nothing. It is given to all men who possess fortunes, but carries no rank or public office.

SU-SHUN [*reseating himself*]. In that case, kneel down again.... Now let us have your accusation.

MRS. MA. Her name is Ch'ang Hai-t'ang. She is the Second Wife of Ma Chun-shing. I accuse her of having a secret paramour and of having, together with him, poisoned her husband. Also of having appropriated my son and of having stolen my property. Deign, honored sir, to render me prompt justice.

SU-SHUN. With what fluency, with what facility this woman speaks. But I confess I have failed to comprehend a word of her complaint.... Let some one call quickly the Clerk of the Court.

[CH'AO enters.]

CH'AO. I am Ch'ao, the Clerk of the Court. I was in my office copying judicial documents when His Excellency had me summoned. Undoubtedly that means he is occupied in conducting a trial and, confronted with some difficulty, has need of me to throw light upon it. [*Perceiving* SU-SHUN.] Sir, what is perplexing you and retarding your decision?

SU-SHUN. Honorable Clerk, here is a person presenting an accusation.

CH'AO. Let me interrogate her. Ho, woman! against whom are you making your complaint?

MRS. MA. I accuse Hai-t'ang there of having poisoned her husband, of having appropriated my son, and of having stolen my property. Have pity on me and deign to render me justice.

CH'AO. So! they have brought before me Hai-t'ang.... Why have you poisoned your husband? Come, out with the truth. If you do not confess, you must take the consequences. Officers, were it my choice it would be the biggest stick for her.

HAI-T'ANG. Prostrate upon her knees,

Your servant entreats you
To uncover the origin
Of her misfortunes.

CH'AO. Speak plainly! Defend yourself.

HAI-T'ANG. The guards surround me
Like so many wolves;
The six officials are ranged against me
Like a troop of malignant spirits.

CH'AO. You have poisoned your husband. That is one of the six crimes which are punishable by death.

HAI-T'ANG. If the burden of guilt

Rests upon me
By so much as the weight
Of a grain of rice,
I hope to expire
Amid the cruelest of tortures.

CH'AO. What was your origin? What kind of people were your parents? By what means were you enabled to marry the honorable lord Ma? Go on, speak I am listening.

HAI-T'ANG. I am of an ancient and distinguished family.

But having lost, little by little,
Our fortune,
My August Mother and I
Were finally without resources.
Would you have dreamed that your servant
Had then lived by her beauty?
Happily I had the good fortune
To please my lord Ma,
Who made rich wedding presents
To my Honorable Mother,
And married me—as Second Wife.

CH'AO. Ah! ah! you began as a Sing-song girl, a Flower of the Weeping Willow. That profession does not speak much in your favor. Well, when the lord Ma took you into his establishment, what did you give him—a boy or a girl?

HAI-T'ANG. I gave him both
A boy and a girl,²
And shall spare no pains
In bringing them up.

CH'AO. There was a man who called upon you at your house?

HAI-T'ANG. My brother, pressed by hunger, clad in rags,
Came to ask me for aid.
I spoke with him upon the step,
Then returned into the house
Having given him nothing.
We were both observed by Mrs. Ma.

CH'AO. If it was your brother, there was no harm in her seeing you together.

² This is the only reference in the play to the girl child.

HAI-T'ANG. Mrs. Ma said to me: "Hai-t'ang, since your brother is in need of assistance and you have no silver, why not give him the robes and the head ornaments you have on? He can then sell them and procure what he needs."

CH'AO. What you tell of her proves her benevolence.

HAI-T'ANG. Obeying her counsel, I took off my robes and head ornaments, and she gave them to my brother. But when the lord Ma returned, he wanted to know why I was no longer wearing them and declared I must have given them to a lover.

Who would have thought that this woman,
Professing charity,
Would be double-faced,
Double-tongued
And would turn my husband
Against me?

MRS. MA. Such falsehood! In the town of Ch'ing-ch'iu I pass for a model of wisdom and virtue. How dare you say I have two tongues and two faces?

CH'AO. That is a trifle and is not a part of the evidence.... I am asking you why you poisoned your husband, why you appropriated the son of this woman and why you stole her property? Come, answer these accusations and confess to all the crimes of which you are guilty.

HAI-T'ANG. In a fit of anger
My husband fell to the ground;
Lacking power to move,
He remained there.
But when he had recovered his senses,
Mrs. Ma helped me to lift him up.

Then she said to me: "Hai-t'ang, the lord Ma desires some broth. Go quickly and heat a cupful for him."

When I brought the cup
Of hot broth,
She tasted it and said

There was not enough salt.

She profited by the moment I was gone in search of the salt.

Who would have thought
That she would furtively
Pour poison
Into the cup ?

My lord Ma then took the broth, but the moment he tasted of it he expired. Honored Sir, examine well the facts and weigh them carefully.

The servants then burned
The body
And disposed of the ashes
In a desert-place beyond the town.

CH'AO. I see clearly that you administered the poison. But why did you appropriate this woman's son and steal her property? What answers have you to these indictments?

HAI-T'ANG. It is I who am the true mother of the child. Honored Sir, if you will but call before you Mrs. Liu Ssu-shin and Mrs. Wei-wu, who assisted at his birth, and the people of the quarter where I lived, their testimony will verify my claim.

CH'AO. Your demand is a reasonable one. Officers, fetch the two women and some of the people of the quarter.

[SU-SHUN *makes a gesture. An OFFICER goes out.*]

OFFICER [*calling outside*]. Ho ye! men and respectable ladies of the quarter, you are called before the tribunal.

[*Enter MRS. LIU SSU-SHIN, MRS. WEI-WU and NEIGHBORS.*]

A MAN. The proverb is right: When one has received silver from another, one is disposed to help him out of his troubles.... To-day the First Wife of the August Lord Ma has brought an accusation before

the Court. We are desired to depose in her favor. The fact is that the First Wife is not the mother of the child. But, graced with the silver with which she gratified us, we shall affirm that it was she who gave him birth. Have no misgivings, you others; do not be troubled in mind. TWO NEIGHBORS. We know what we have to testify. [*They follow the OFFICER and fall upon their knees.*] We are here.

CH'AO. It is true that you are inhabitants of the quarter wherein these two wives of Ma Chun-shing reside? ... Well then, who is the mother of the child?

A NEIGHBOR. The lord Ma was a rich personage and our obscurity prevented close association with him. But when five years ago his wife gave him a son, he distributed to each of the inhabitants of the quarter a piece of silver, in order that we might share in his joy. After one moon, the lord Ma invited us to come and drink and regale ourselves with him. We saw the beautiful child in whose honor the feast was given. In the years following, on each birthday of his son, the Yuan-wei and his Lady took him themselves to all the pagodas and burned perfumes in honor of Fu. All of the other people of the quarter saw them, the same as we did, and could testify to it.

CH'AO. After these depositions it is quite evident that Mrs. Ma is the mother of the child.

HAI-T'ANG. Excellency, these neighbors have been bribed by Mrs. Ma. Their testimony is worth nothing.

THE NEIGHBORS. No, we have not been given so much as a grain of silver. What we are advancing is the purest truth. There is not a false syllable in our depositions. [*To HAI-T'ANG.*] I hope you get a fever-blister on your lip as big as a tea-cup!

HAI-T'ANG. Now I invoke the testimony
Of Mrs. Liu Ssu-shin and Mrs. Ch'ang,
Who aided in bringing my son
Into the world.
During the first moon of his life
They came more than ten times
To visit me.
Now I am in great trouble,
Calumny having pursued me
To the very feet of Justice.

It hurts me to see my neighbors
 Thus perjure themselves
 And outrage truth and honor.
 It is silver
 That has caused them to persist
 In their mendacity.

Respected Sir, kindly interrogate these estimable women. No one can be better informed than they.

CH'AO. Who is the mother of the child?

MRS. LIU SSU-SHIN. We midwives attend at least seven or eight cases every day. How then can we recall those which occurred years ago.

CH'AO. The child is not over five years old. Consequently it is not such a very long time since he was born. Make haste now and tell me which of these two women is his mother.

MRS. LIU SSU-SHIN. Wait a bit while I try to draw together the scattered threads of memory. On that day the room in which the mother lay was carefully closed for the most part. The semi darkness did not permit me to see her features clearly.

CH'AO. It is your turn, Mrs. Wei-wu. Make your depositions.

MRS. WEI-WU. On that day when I came to deliver the woman, it was the First Wife who was great with child. Thus there is no doubt but that Mrs. Ma is the true mother.

HAI-T'ANG. Is it possible that you both testify so unfairly?

Mrs. Liu, when you came
 To receive the newly-born,
 I spoke to you gently.
 You carried me in your arms
 From the couch where I lay
 To my bed.
 And you, Mrs. Wei-wu,
 After you had placed the child
 On my breast,
 Who lighted for me
 The fragrant candles
 Before the shrine of Kuang-yün?

You are neither of you
So greatly advanced in age
As to cause impairment
Of your memory.
I ask you how it is
That you could say what you did
With such unbelievable assurance!
Is it possible,
With all this false testimony,
That the judge will be able to distinguish
Right from wrong,
Virtue from crime?
The truth is as tangled as water-weeds
In the dark sea of falsehood.

CH'AO. You see how it is. These respectable women both swear that Mrs. Ma is the true mother. Also it is known that you made no objection to her raising the child.

HAI-T'ANG. Respected Sir, the neighbors and these women were bribed with silver by Mrs. Ma. Allow my son to be called as witness. Although he is but five years old, he is endowed with marked intelligence. Will you question him?

MRS. MA [*holding the child in her arms*]. Say that I am your true mother and that it was I who nursed you.

THE CHILD. There is my own mother. [*To HAI-T'ANG.*] It was you who nursed me.

HAI-T'ANG. Behold another proof of his rare intelligence!

Dear child, dream in the depths
Of thy little heart;
Dream, alas! of the many times
That cruel woman
Bruised thy tender skin
With blows.
Thou dost remember well
That it was she
Whom you call mother,

Who nourished you with her milk
 And cradled you
 On her breast.
 But how could she always
 Preserve thee from the fury
 Of that vixen?

CH'AO. The words of the child count for nothing. It is upon the weight of the testimony of the many that the judge makes his decisions. For the rest, since it is known that you appropriated to yourself the child of the other woman, it is not important to prove that you stole goods from her. Come, admit at once that you poisoned your husband.

HAI-T'ANG. I had nothing whatsoever to do with the poisoning.

CH'AO. Perhaps a good beating will hasten your confession. Ho! Officers, take this hardened wretch and give her a good chastening.

[They beat her until she sinks weakly to the floor.]

MRS. MA. Beat her! Beat her! That's right, that's good. Kill her with blows, it's all the same to me.

[HAI-T'ANG faints.]

CH'AO. She is shamming death. Officers, lift her up.

[They do so.]

HAI-T'ANG *[regaining her senses]*.

When the blows hailed their fire upon my shoulders,
 Hissing like the wind,
 A mortal agony shook my spirit;
 My trembling soul was nigh unto escape.
 The pitiless ones!
 They will tear out my hair....

AN OFFICER. Come on now, confess. It is better than to undergo torture.

HAI-T'ANG. Confusion is ringing in my ears.
Alas! this perverse clerk
Accords grace to the culprit
And betrays innocence
Into the hands of his ferocious minions.

CH'AO. Confess who was your paramour.

SU-SHUN. If she continues her obstinacy, I will talk to her myself and then she will admit everything

HAI-T'ANG. With violence the magistrate would force me
To confess to an imaginary lover
Who does not exist.
Thrice have I tried to escape
By the door in the wall,
But in vain.
What reward will you have
For the blood which streams
From my body?
Alas! did I but possess some silver,
It would be easy to obtain
My deliverance;
But lacking silver as I do,
How can I bring myself to endure
These frightful tortures?

CH'AO. Officers, give her another taste of the rod.

HAI-T'ANG. I come of a good family. How can I submit to these indignities?

SU-SHUN. Let us waste no more of our valuable time.

[He makes a sign and two SERGEANTS put on ghastly, fiendish masks and approach her with knives.]

HAI-T'ANG [*groans*]. They beat me until I fell unconscious. They cut me with knives and I groan in my anguish. The fiends tear at my flesh, and my body is writhing with exquisite pain. Vanquished by suffering, I see myself forced to admit crimes of which I am innocent. [*She*

comes forward and sinks on her knees before SU-SHUN.] Honored Sir, your servant recollects that she poisoned her husband, that she abducted the child and stole property. Oh heaven! this injustice is killing me.

CH'AO [*apart*]. Though it be a thousand times an injustice, what is that to me? And happily the injustice works well for her who would be awarded the boy.... Officers, since the woman has admitted her crimes, have her sign her declaration. Then place a large cangue about her neck, after which conduct her to Kai Fang-fu where she will receive her final sentence.

SU-SHUN. Officers, use that brand-new heavy cangue. It weighs nine and a half pounds.

OFFICER. You are obeyed.... Vile woman, put your neck in this cangue.

[OFFICERS *fasten the wooden yoke about her neck.*]

HAI-T'ANG. Oh heaven!

The cruel magistrate ceases not his tyranny.
Without regard for justice,
He records on paper imaginary crimes.
No longer am I to remain here
To invoke, with groaning voice,
The brassy heavens.
The ears of the gods are turned to stone
And the world swarms with infamous accusers.
Ah, where can I find a judge of integrity
Who will recognize my innocence?

CH'AO. Brazen-face! the August Head of this Court is a magistrate of the utmost fairness and incorruptible integrity. His decisions are ever based upon the law. Nowhere in the world will you find a judge so equitable, so superbly impartial as His Excellency.

HAI-T'ANG [*sobbing*]. Feeble and dying as I am,
How can I endure the rigors
Of the dungeon
Where I am to await

The crowning agony?

[She goes out with the guards.]

CH'AO. Behold! the matter is at an end. The witnesses may return tranquilly to their homes. As to the Honorable Plaintiff, I promise to acquaint her with the decision of the Supreme Court as soon as it is reported to me.... For me, consider that I have been occupied an entire day in judging. Hunger presses me. It is necessary that I return home for dinner.

*[The Neighbors and Witnesses prostrate themselves and then retire.
Exit CH'AO.]*

SU-SHUN *[alone]*. The case is at last settled. Though I am a magistrate, I need never exert myself to pass sentence. When it is a question of whether to flog someone or to set him at liberty, I leave it to the pleasure of the clerk Chao, even at the risk of having it said that I am a downright rogue.

Now that he has rendered his decision,
I need trouble my head no further.
Whether the accusation be true or false,
Whether the sentence be a cudgelling
Deportation or exile,
He is at perfect liberty to choose.
I demand but one thing, Silver.
Always I divide the silver
Into two portions;
One for me
And one for my clever clerk.

[He goes out.]

End of Act II

Act III

[The scene is a wine-shop and vicinity.]

WINE-SELLER. I am a seller of wines. My business is situated ten *lis*³ from the town of Ch'ing-ch'iu. The merchants and the travelers on their way north and south never fail to stop at my place for refreshment. I go now to open the door of my shop and to heat this kettle of wine over my brazier. Soon some customers will appear and I must be ready for them.

[He goes out.]

*[Enter HAI-T'ANG, led in by two guards, T'ANG-SHAO, and HSIEH-PA.
She falls down, rises again and seats herself.]*

T'ANG-SHAO. I am a guard employed by the Court of Ch'ing-ch'iu. My name is T'ang-shao. This is my companion, Hsieh-pa. We are conducting the woman named Ch'ang Hai-t'ang to the Supreme Court of Kai Fang-fu, where she will receive her final sentence.... Ho, woman, hurry a bit! Don't you hear the roar of the wind? Can't you see the whirling eddies of snow? I suppose you are hungry. Well, take this food. We go to purchase a cup of wine. As soon as you have eaten you will have to go on. *[She falls weakly.]* Hey! None of that! *[Strikes her.]*

³ About 2.7 miles.

Hai-t'ang [*rising*]. I pray you, my friend, not to strike me. I am unjustly condemned and have not long to live. I ask but one thing: that you pity my condition.

T'ANG-SHAO. Woman, why did you poison your husband? Why did you abduct the son of the First Wife? Why did you steal from her? Come, tell me quietly and I will listen.

HAI-T'ANG. How shall I clear myself of the crimes they impute to me? To whom can I recount the injustice that has been done me? How shall I denounce that woman who, after robbing me of my child, accused me of having poisoned my husband? Where shall I find a disinterested judge, one of integrity?

HSIEH-PA. If you give something to me and my comrade no one will bother you further. You'll have no need to concern yourself with the iniquity of judges.

HAI-T'ANG. Every friend of justice should pity me. Covered with blood from the wounds of the torture, a prey to unheard-of miseries, how can I suppress the sighs that issue from me and the cries that rend the air? How can I eat anything? Alas, my clothing is in tatters, the iron padlock of my chains, this heavy cangue, I bow beneath their weight. Hard and cruel as you are, what do you care that I am the victim of a foul plot?

T'ANG-SHAO. Whoever is responsible for your situation, it is not right for you to accuse us. We are not responsible for your train of misfortunes. What would you have us do? But hasten your steps. The snow is coming down with new force. Come along!

HAI-T'ANG. The goddess of the snow is without pity.

The snow is blinding my tear-swollen eyes.
The wind pushes me back with its powerful arms,
Howling like a wild thing
In the trees of the forest.
Alas! I am desolate
And am suffering cruel anguish.
Though strength has abandoned me,
Yet must I go on.
My clothing is in tatters
And my knees are bared to the elements.
The wounds from the torture are bleeding anew.

HSIEH-PA. We are having a hard enough time ourselves, and she will not go on. [*Strikes her.*]

HAI-T'ANG. Why are you vexed at the sight of my condition?

I am walking as fast as I can.
If you continue to hit me,
I shall die under the blows.

T'ANG-SHAO. I should be inclined to liberate you, if you had not confessed to the murder. What impelled you to do so?

HAI-T'ANG. My friend, do not weary me with importunate questions. I wish only that you would listen.

When the merciless judge employed against me
All the severity of the law,
I went through the torments of the Seven Hells.
Vanquished by suffering,
My endurance at an end,
I surrendered at last to their wishes
And signed my declaration.
There was no one to intercede for me.
Victim, alas, of a false accusation,
I was yet put through every degree of torture.

T'ANG-SHAO. Rise, woman! [*Meaningly.*] After we have rounded the next hill, I can promise you the pleasure of a very long rest.

HAI-T'ANG. Would I had turned that hill.

Alack! numbed by the cold,
Weakened by suffering,
I cannot so much as stand.

[*Takes a few steps and falls.*]

When I lifted my feet
I felt as if all the Shui-mang devils
Were penetrating my flesh.

T'ANG-SHAO [*angrily*]. Get up!

HAI-T'ANG. Aïe! your temper
Is as impetuous as a flame.
See, my friend,
The ground is hard-frozen and glassy.
How can I keep myself
From slipping?

HSIEH-PA. A thousand people, yes, ten thousand have passed this way
without falling. Wait while I precede you. If I keep my balance, I shall
not fail to bruise your legs with my stick.

[He walks on the ice and falls down.]

As a matter of fact, the road is a bit slippery.

[CH'ANG-LIN enters.]

CH'ANG-LIN. I am called Ch'ang-lin. I am the First Clerk of the Court
of Kai Fang-fu. This morning the governor, Pao-ch'ing, sent me on a
military commission to the frontier of Si-yen. On my return I was
surprised by this blinding snowstorm. Oh heaven, if only it would
cease for an instant!

HAI-T'ANG *[perceiving him]*. That man over there resembles my
brother, Ch'ang-lin.

I have observed his features,
Surely it must be my brother.
But my eyes, swollen with over-weeping
And blinded by the sleet,
May be deceiving me.
Let me look again....
Aïe! I am not mistaken;
It is he and none other.
I straighten with an effort my trembling shoulders;
I hold with my hands my fluttering bosom....
Alas! How can I catch up with him,
Impeded by this iron chain and heavy cangue?

CH'ANG-LIN [*to the guards*]. Where are you taking that woman with the iron chain and the heavy cangue?

HAI-T'ANG. My brother!

O my Honorable Brother!

Stop and deliver your sister.

My brother!

Hi-yah! you appear in my sight

As a living image of Kuang-yün the Merciful,

Come down from the Mountain of Lo-chia-shan

To preserve me.

Why do you wait to manifest

The goodness and compassion that you feel ?

O Honorable Brother, deliver me, your sister.

CH'ANG-LIN. Who are you?

HAI-T'ANG. I am your sister Hai-t'ang, and sorrow is eating my heart.

[*She approaches him.*]

CH'ANG-LIN [*repulses and strikes her*]. Vile prostitute! Do you recall how you helped *me* on that day I implored you for assistance? [*Turns away.*]

HAI-T'ANG [*weeping and running toward him*]. I ask why you speak thus to me!

Yet I am aware that it is difficult

To suppress a fire

That has long burned secretly.

The sight of me has revived

An old enmity.

It is seeing me

That has revived his burning wrath.

[*Brokenly.*] My brother!

[CH'ANG-LIN *continues on his way.*]

He does not deign to recognize me.
As I am in fear of my life,
I shall run after him
And catch him by his garments.

[*Dragging her chain, she runs after him and clutches him. T'ANG-SHAO follows.*]

CH'ANG-LIN. Vile prostitute! Let go of me! Let go of me!
T'ANG-SHAO [*seizing her by the hair*]. This woman is molesting
passers-by and wearying them with her importunities.
HAI-T'ANG. Swifter than I,
He has seized me by the hair.

I supplicate you, cruel man, to give me an instant's respite. And thou,
my brother, I pray you to listen to the true story of my misfortunes.
CH'ANG-LIN. Wretch! Could you have foreseen this day you would
not have refused me those robes and head ornaments.
HAI-T'ANG. She! She! She!

Loves to bring death and destruction
To others.
All of her projects were born of craft
And perfidy.
Thou didst take the robes
And the golden spire
Which ornamented my hair;
And me, me, me!
For having given them,
I am plunged into the abyss
In which you find me.

My brother, the frightful misfortunes which have overwhelmed your
sister all sprang from those same robes and head ornaments. At first,
believing it would not meet with her approval, I dared not turn them
over to you to supply your needs. Could I ever have believed that she

would herself have taken them off me and given them to you herself? ... On the return of the lord Ma Chun-shing, she told him that, in his absence, I had been entertaining a lover to whom I had given the robes and ornaments. Transported with rage, the Honorable Lord Ma fainted and fell ill. But that is far from all. She gave him a poisoned beverage which swiftly carried him to the Vale of Longevity. Then she dragged thine honorable sister before the judge and condemned me for having poisoned my husband and appropriated her son. O Heaven! Have pity on me! I succumb under the weight of unjust accusations.

CH'ANG-LIN. To whom belonged these robes and head ornaments?

HAI-T'ANG. To me! To thy sister.

CH'ANG-LIN. What! They were yours? And to think that that wicked woman assured me the things had come from the trousseau given her by her parents. I was wrong to have so misjudged you.... We are before the entrance to an inn. Come inside with me and we will together have some cups of warm reviving wine.

[He leads her to the wine-shop, the two guards following.]

Hey waiter! Fetch us some wine.

WINE-SELLER. Right here! Right here! Come in and find seats.

CH'ANG-LIN [*to the guards*]. Officers of the police, I am the chief clerk of the Court of Kai Fang-fu. My name is Ch'ang-lin. This woman is my sister. I was sent on a mission by the illustrious governor Pao, from which I am now returning. I pledge myself to look after her and to relieve you of responsibility.

T'ANG-SHAO. My friend, you have no need to give us that assurance. All we ask is that as soon as you arrive in the city, you despatch to us the official answer we are to bring back.

CH'ANG-LIN. That is easy.... And now, my sister, I said a while back that that woman was a model of wisdom and prudence. But now that I have learned of the cruelty of her nature, I am wondering how you can escape from the net she has thrown around you.

HAI-T'ANG. That woman, whose visage is bright

With artificial splendor,

Appeared to you to be prudent and wise.

When my husband questioned her, she used against me

All the venom of her long serpent's tongue,
Heaping falsehood upon falsehood.
Later she declared I had poisoned my husband,
Stolen her property and appropriated her child.
On top of that she dragged me
To the Court of Ch'ing-ch'iu
And stood by indifferently
While they put me through the tortures.
Oy-ah! despite my innocence
I am bruised by blows, bleeding from wounds
And doomed to fall under the glittering blade
Of the executioner,
To whom shall I impute the death that menaces me,
If not to that inhuman monster?

My brother, let us rest here a moment in this secluded corner.

[Enter CH'AO, followed by MRS. MA.]

CH'AO. I am Ch'ao the clerk. I come in search of Ch'ang Hai-t'ang. I am quite sure that she has not a near relative who would interest himself in her affairs and demand a reversal of the judgment given at the Court of Ch'ing-ch'iu. However, to be on the safe side, I felt it advisable to have her killed along the way. I chose two guards who do not spare the stick. These are T'ang-shao and Hsieh-pa. According to my instructions, it was not necessary to wait until they had gone any great distance. They were to stop at the first deserted place they came to and there despatch her. But as they had not returned to render an account of their commission, I began to have misgivings. It is necessary that Mrs. Ma and I make this journey in order to clear up our doubts.

MRS. MA. In making my way through this blinding snowstorm I am benumbed by the cold. Let us go into this inn where we may obtain some warm wine before continuing our journey.

CH'AO. Madam, that is an excellent suggestion. *[They enter the inn. HAI-T'ANG perceives them.]*

HAI-T'ANG. What a fortunate encounter. She herself has happened in here with the companion of her debauches.

Let us inform my brother.
 This woman is cruel and brazen.
 Since providentially they are both present,
 Here is my opportunity
 To arrest the course
 Of their iniquity.
 But by what means?

My brother, this debauched woman is here in this very inn, accompanied by her accomplice. Let us seize and hold her.

CH'ANG-LIN [*to the guards*]. My friends, arrest that adulteress and her paramour.

HAI-T'ANG. Make haste to seize them swiftly,
 Lest they become frightened and make their escape.
 Now we shall see which of us is innocent
 And which shall receive the penalty for crime. [*To CH'ANG-LIN.*]
 Let us not wait for the guards,
 But go and capture them ourselves.

[*CH'ANG-LIN and HAI-T'ANG go to lay hold of them, but the two guards make signs to them to flee. HAI-T'ANG grabs at MRS. MA, who disengages her hands and escapes with CH'AO.*]

HAI-T'ANG. I seized her clothing
 And through the fault of these men
 She fled under my hands.
 Above all it distresses me
 That when we so nearly had them,
 The guards gave them warning
 And caused the flight
 Of those illicit lovers.

CH'ANG-LIN [*to T'ANG-SHAO*]. Imbecile that you are! The sign that you and your comrade made, warned them and gave them a chance to

escape. Are you aware that I am the Chief Clerk at the Court of Kai Fang-fu, and that, if I chastise you, I need fear no consequences?

[*Strikes* T'ANG-SHAO.]

T'ANG-SHAO. Since your rank is higher than that of the master I serve, you have the right to strike me. But I, in turn, have the right to strike my prisoner. Therefore, for every blow I receive from your stick, she shall receive one from mine. [*Strikes* HAI-T'ANG.]

HAI-T'ANG. These men conduct me
By order of the magistrate.
Of what use to strike them
When they pass along each blow?

[CH'ANG-LIN *seizes* T'ANG-SHAO *by the hair*, and T'ANG-SHAO *promptly seizes* HAI-T'ANG *in the same manner*.]

HAI-T'ANG. He grasps tightly his poor prisoner.
Without pity for my sufferings
He overwhelms me with blows.
He bruises, he kills me!

WINE-SELLER [*laying hold of them*]. Here!—pay me for the wine you have drunk and get out.

HSIEH-PA. Take this for payment!

[*He sends him up upside down with a kick, and goes out with the others*.]

WINE-SELLER. See how unfortunate I am. I wasted a good part of the day on my doorstep, waiting for customers. At length came three or four persons asking for wine. I served them and got a shower of blows in exchange. As for money, I have received not so much as a piece of brass. I have decided to close my shop and, from this day on, to go into some more remunerative business. This trade is far from a flourishing one. Every day the folk to whom I sell wine, make me lose instead of gaining. I shall draw the bolts and close my shop. I had

better go into the business of selling water-fowl, which pays in cash instead of in kicks. [*He goes out.*]

End of Act III

Act IV

[*The scene is in the Court of KAI FANG-FU.*]

[*The governor, PAO-CH'ING, enters, followed by the FIRST OFFICER of the court and several guards.*]

FIRST OFFICER [*imperiously*]. Order in the Court! Attendants, bring the writing desk of His Excellency the Governor.

PAO-CH'ING. I preside over this Court

By decree of the Emperor,

The Son of Heaven. [*With a reverential bow.*]

I hold at the same time,

The imperial Golden Token

And the Sword, symbol of power.

My family name is Pao, my surname Ch'ing and my honorary name is Hi-wen. I am a native of the village of Lao-eul in the district of Ssu-hiang, a principality of Chin-tiu in the province of Liu-ch'iu. All the public functionaries are aware of the unshakability of my moral fibre and my inflexibility in upholding the mandates of the law. They now consecrate themselves with zeal to the service of the State and fear to permit themselves to be swayed by self-interest and cupidity. They choose as their officers only those men who are renowned for their probity and their filial piety, and spurn the company of slanderers and flatterers. The Emperor has bestowed many honors upon me. I have lately received the title of Member of the Cabinet of Antiquaries, whose duty it is to preserve the ancient chronicles of the archives. In

conferring upon me the dignity of Governor, the Son of Heaven [*He bows low.*] bestowed on me the Golden Token, and the Sword, the symbol of power. He charged me not only to scrutinize the conduct of magistrates and employees unfaithful to their duties, but also to avenge the wrongs of the people and render justice to the oppressed. He permits me to order the decapitation of the guilty and to see that their sentence is carried out. Thus my name alone suffices to arrest the arms of those inclined to abuse their authority. Even my shadow is enough to petrify with fear the cruel and the debauched. Past the balustrade of knotted ropes and near to the walls of this enclosure, I have caused a prison to be built. In it rest those functionaries who have imposed upon their public office and those who have failed in their duty. On the stone tablet which flanks the entrance I have had engraved the words Iu-tchi, meaning By Order of the Emperor, so that all may see it and be filled with awe. At the foot of the Blue Staircase which leads to this, my courtroom, I have placed a sign which reads Ti-ching, or Speak Softly. Under the acacias, which cast their weaving shadows upon the stone flagging of the pathway, I have displayed twenty-four cangues of the largest size, and before the doors to this hall where I deliver my judgments and pass sentences, there are stacked many hundreds of clubs, all studded with the fangs of wolves. At the very entrance stands a bamboo cage containing the head of a robber, “for the punishment must match the deed and frighten evil-doers.”

Through all the days there comes no dust
 To soil the mind of the governor.
 The acacias alone cast shade
 Upon the path whereon he walks.
 In passing him,
 The men of evil still their tongues,
 And birds of prey
 Suspend their raucous cries.

I saw yesterday a report sent me by the governor of Ch'ing-ch'iu. It states that a Second Wife, named Ch'ang Hai-t'ang, has poisoned her husband in order to satisfy an illicit passion. Also, that she abducted

by force a child belonging to the First Wife and likewise stole goods from her. Such crimes are numbered among those punishable by immediate death, without waiting for the more formal regular Autumnal executions. In my opinion, one frequently finds women sufficiently depraved to murder their husbands. But what good did it do this one to abduct the child of the First Wife? I fear this affair may be the result of a calumnious imputation. Therefore I have secretly given orders to arrest and bring before me the accuser and her witnesses. Their presence is necessary if I am to pass correct judgment. This procedure proves my justice and impartiality.... Officer, bring me the tablet of cases submitted to me for final judgment. After which, bring before me the plaintiffs in the order of their arrival, that I may condemn the guilty and redeem the innocent.

[The scene changes for a moment to the road outside the courthouse.

Enter HAI-T'ANG with GUARDS and CH'ANG-LIN.]

CH'ANG-LIN. Honorable Sister, when you are brought before the magistrate, he will not fail to interrogate you. He must be informed of the injustice of which you are a victim. This supreme judge will examine anew the evidence and end by annulling your sentence. If you do not wish to make your own explanations, keep silent and I will undertake to speak in your place.

HAI-T'ANG. How can I denounce this infamous calumny if I fail to make the most of this day's opportunity?

CH'ANG-LIN. It behooves us to present our case promptly. Let us hurry.

HAI-T'ANG. Who knows the injustice that weighs

So heavily upon my heart?

Alas! what can I do but groan;

Let flow these rivulets of tears?

Not having foreseen in the beginning

The misfortunes which have come upon me,

I am eating the bitter fruits

Of useless regret.

These cruel men drag me hither and thither

And allow me no repose.

CH'ANG-LIN. My sister, we have arrived before the entrance of the Court of Kai Fang-fu. Allow me to precede you, as you will enter in the custody of the police. Take courage. The judge is like a shining mirror which reflects in its crystal purity all the objects placed before it. The moment a matter is brought to his attention he sees it as clearly as if he were familiar with all the details. Make an effort to regain your poise and explain your situation to him in your own words.

HAI-T'ANG. Thou sayest the judge,
 Like a mirror of finest glass,
 Placed in the highest position
 In the tribunal of the South,
 Reflects all that is below
 With crystalline purity.
 Then what am I to fear?
 But alas! weighed down by this cangue and iron chain,
 I feel that I may lack the strength
 To adequately express myself.
 If I am unable to send conviction to his soul,
 I ask you, my brother, to aid me in my defense.

[CH'ANG-LIN *goes into the courthouse.* HAI-T'ANG *follows with the GUARDS.*]

[*The scene changes back to the courtroom.*]

T'ANG-SHAO. We bring before Your Excellency our prisoner, Ch'ang Hai-t'ang.

FIRST OFFICER. Honored Sir, deliver to these guards their official report, that they may return to render an account of their mission.

PAO-CH'ING. Let them remain here. You may furnish them with their report after I have judged the case.

FIRST OFFICER [*bowing*]. You are obeyed.

PAO-CH'ING. Ch'ang Hai-t'ang, is it true that you poisoned your husband in order to live with a paramour, that you abducted the son of the First Wife and stole her property? Reply to these questions in the sequence in which they were given. Speak, I am listening.

[HAI-T'ANG looks mutely at her brother.]

CH'ANG-LIN. You cannot? Ah well, I shall speak for you. [*He kneels.*] Honored Sir, Ch'ang Hai-t'ang has not maintained criminal relations with a lover, she has not poisoned her husband, she did not abduct the child, she has not stolen property. It is the First Wife herself who maintained guilty relations with a clerk named Ch'ao. When she accused my sister before the judge, it was that same Ch'ao who influenced the decision against her. I adjure you, Honored Sir, that if she admitted the crimes with which she was charged, it was under the intolerable anguish of torture.

PAO-CH'ING. How droll you are! Who requested you to answer for her? Officer, take this man and give him twenty blows with a stick. [OFFICER *grabs* CH'ANG-LIN *and begins beating him.*]

CH'ANG-LIN [*prostrating himself*]. This woman is my Honorable Sister. She has never come into the presence of a magistrate so imposing as Your Excellency, and is therefore bashful and timid. She has not the forcefulness necessary to make the truth known to you. That is why I presumed to talk for her.

PAO-CH'ING. If you are indeed her brother, I shall permit you to answer in her stead. But if you are not he, I shall slice your head with this large knife.... Come, woman, speak with all the sincerity and exactitude of which you are capable. You may count on my fairness.

HAI-T'ANG [*clasping her hands*]. Honored Sir!

Trembling, distracted,
I kneel at your imposing feet.
Your Excellency has bidden me unfold
The circumstances
Which have led to my present situation.
How, alas! can I endure the fury
Of the merciless guards
Who press and harass me
Like tigers and devouring wolves?
Will you, Honored Sir,
Listen attentively while I detail to you
The facts appertaining to my case?

PAO-CH'ING. Very well, Ch'ang Hai-t'ang. Who were you as a girl? What was your estate when you were married to Ma Chun-shing in the rank of Second Wife?

HAI-T'ANG. I was a Flower of the Weeping Willow Tree. I entertained one man after another and my occupation was singing and dancing.

PAO-CH'ING. Ah! ah! you were a sing-song girl! And this Ma Chun-shing, he treated you well?

HAI-T'ANG. We lived as two doves
Most tenderly united.

PAO-CH'ING. Is it true that Ch'ang-lin is your brother?

CH'ANG-LIN. Ch'ang Hai-t'ang is the sister of your unworthy servant.

HAI-T'ANG. It came to pass, one day,
That my brother,
Raggedly clad and dilapidated in fortune,
Came to seek my aid.

PAO-CH'ING. And you helped him?

HAI-T'ANG. Yes, Honored Sir,
I gave him some robes
And head-ornaments.

CH'ANG-LIN The money with which I purchased new clothing was obtained from the sale of part of these effects.

PAO-CH'ING [*to* HAI-T'ANG]. Your husband did not inquire what had become of the robes and ornaments?

HAI-T'ANG. He did indeed. But this woman, who had herself advised me to give the things to my brother, accused me before the lord Ma of having secretly given them to a lover. Was not that enough to make him expire with wrath?

Transported with ire,
My husband
Addressed violent reproaches to me
And fell ill.

PAO-CH'ING. Since it was that which killed your husband, why the accusation that you had poisoned him?

HAI-T'ANG. Dragged, despite my innocence,
Before the tribunal,
I was subjected
To all of the tortures.

PAO-CH'ING. Your husband being dead, what was your idea in abducting the child?

HAI-T'ANG. Death having taken my spouse.
That woman would now separate me
From my son.

PAO-CH'ING. They say she is the mother of the child.

HAI-T'ANG. Driven by natural perversity and the basest jealousy....

PAO-CH'ING. The neighbors affirmed that she was the mother.

HAI-T'ANG. She bought the testimony
Of the witnesses,
Both men and women,
With silver,
And involved them in her scheme.

PAO-CH'ING. Can it be that the magistrate did not verify their depositions?

HAI-T'ANG. Not every magistrate
Takes the pains
To sift out the truth
From falsehood,
Crime from innocence.

PAO-CH'ING. Is it possible that the magistrate of Ch'ing-ch'iu could compel you to undergo the severities of the torture ?

HAI-T'ANG. How could I resist?
What chance had I against a magistrate
Who tortures the accused
Without investigating
On which side is the crime

Or which the innocence!
 And that is not all.
 I found in that same tribunal
 A most implacable enemy
 Who seconded the cruel officers
 And I was left before them
 Without defense and without support.
 Oy-ah!
 I heard a sudden scream like a burst of thunder.
 A shower of blows rained on my back and bared it.
 On the one side,
 They afflicted me with wounds
 Which caused intolerable distress.
 On the other side, the witnesses,
 Bought with silver,
 Received no chastisement whatsoever.
 My teeth chattering,
 My movements stiff with agony,
 My bones breaking under the blows
 Of my tormentors,
 Their sinewy arms rest not until I fall
 Unconscious and motionless.

OFFICER [*heard outside*]. People of Ch'ing-ch'iu, you who are about to be judged, assemble in the court.

PAO-CH'ING. Have them come in.

[MRS. MA, *with the young child* SHIU-LANG, *the* NEIGHBORS *and the* TWO MIDWIVES *enter and fall on their knees.*]

OFFICER [*to* PAO-CH'ING]. They are before you.

PAO-CH'ING [*to* MRS. MA]. Woman, who is the mother of that child?

MRS. MA. It is I who am the mother.

PAO-CH'ING. And you, neighbors, tell me who is the mother of that child.

ALL [*together*]. We swear that the First Wife is his mother.

PAO-CH'ING. Very good.... Ch'ang Lin, there is some one yet to come.

[He makes a gesture and CH'ANG-LIN goes out.]

PAO-CH'ING. Officer, fetch a piece of chalk. You will trace below the bench a circle, in the center of which you will place the young child. Then you will order the two women to wait, each of them at opposite sides of the circle. When the real mother takes hold of him, it will be easy for the child to come outside the circle. But the pretended mother cannot lead him out.

OFFICER. You are obeyed.

[He traces a circle with the chalk and motions the boy to stand in the center of it. MRS. MA takes the child's hand and leads him out of the circle. HAI-T'ANG fails to contend with her.]

PAO-CH'ING. It is evident that this woman is not the mother of the child, since she did not come forward to draw him out of the circle. Officer, bring Ch'ang Hai-t'ang hither and beat her.

[The OFFICER does so.]

PAO-CH'ING. Have the two women try once more to lead the child outside the circle.

[Again MRS. MA leads him out, while HAI-T'ANG again fails to contend.]

PAO-CH'ING. I have the proof twice over. I saw that neither time did you make the slightest effort to draw the child outside the circle. Officer, fetch your largest stick and flog her vigorously.

HAI-T'ANG. I supplicate you, Honored Sir, to calm your wrath which frightens me like a roll of thunder. Soften this menacing aspect, which is like that of the wolf or the tiger.... Very soon after your unworthy servant was married to the August Lord Ma, she presented him with a child. After giving him the great gift of life, I nourished him with milk from my breast and cared for him with maternal love for the period of

three years. When he was cold I would gently chafe his jade-like limbs. Delicate and fragile as the first young shoots of the bamboo tree, one could not, without wounding him grievously, take him to opposite sides of the circle. If I cannot, Honored Sir, obtain my son without dislocating his arm or bruising his baby flesh, I would rather perish under the blows than make the least effort to take him out of the circle.

How could a tender mother
Decide otherwise?
Honored Sir, see for yourself.
The child's arms are fragile
As the first tender stalks of the bamboo tree
In the flush of springtide.
How could this cruel and inhuman woman understand my fears?
And you, Honored Sir,
How is it that for all your sagacity,
You have not been able to discover the truth ?
Alack! how different our positions!
She has a reputation and a fortune,
While I am humiliated and an object of scorn.
Yes, if between us
We would tear apart this tender child,
You would not hesitate to see him
Torn limb from limb.
You were ready to break his bones
And you would have seen his flesh torn to shreds.

PAO-CH'ING. Although the articles of the code are often difficult to interpret, it is possible to penetrate the sentiments of the human heart. A sage of old once said: "What man can hide that which he really is, once you have observed his actions, found the motive for his conduct and recognized the intent of his purpose?" Behold the power of the chalk circle! In the depths of her heart, this woman desired to seize the fortune of Ma Chun-shing, and with that end in view, took the child to bring up. How could she have doubted that the hidden truth would reveal itself?

For the purpose of gaining the inheritance,

She raised the young child.
But the chalk circle augustly brought out
The truth and the falsity.
She has an engaging exterior,
But her heart is corrupt.
The true mother
Is at last recognized.

I have instructed Ch'ang-lin to fetch here the adulterous lover, and shall be surprised if he does not appear.

[*Enter CH'ANG-LIN, conducting the clerk CH'AO.*]

CH'ANG-LIN [*kneeling*]. Here, Honored Sir, is the clerk Ch'ao whom I have brought before you.

PAO-CH'ING, So, my friend Ch'ao, you've got yourself into a pretty mess. Come, confess, point by point. that in order to satisfy an illicit passion, you poisoned Ma Chun-shing. You assisted in the retention of the child in order to profit by his fortune, and bribed these men and women to render false testimony in your interests.

CH'AO. Your servant is employed at the court in the capacity of clerk. All that occurred is to be imputed to the governor of Ch'ing-ch'iu, who is nicknamed Su Mo-lun. When the court is in session I am only an instrument in his hands. I hold the ink-brush and write down the replies of the accused. If there has been a slip or an error in the verbal process, it is not the poor clerk who should be blamed.

PAO-CH'ING. I am not inquiring if there was any verbal slip or error. Tell me only that in order to satisfy an illicit passion you poisoned Ma Chun-shing.

CH'AO [*indicating MRS. MA*]. Excellency, do you not see that this woman's face is a mask of paint and powder? If one were to remove with water the artificial coloring, one would no doubt find beneath it a most hideous visage. How could she have been able to seduce your servant and entangle him in an illicit love-affair?

MRS. MA. Oy-ay! And in private you used to tell me that I was more beautiful than Kuang-yün! Now you treat me in this insulting fashion. Perfidious as thou art, you are not worthy of being called a man.

CH'ANG-LIN. Yesterday, when the snow was falling in great flakes, Ch'ao, with Mrs. Ma, took the road in pursuit of the police-guards, in order to come to an understanding with them. Is it not evident that he was her lover? For the rest, Honored Sir, if you will question the two guards, it will then be easy to recognize the truth.

T'ANG-SHAO. This morning we ourselves took them into custody.

PAO-CH'ING. Officer, seize the clerk Ch'ao and let some one beat him vigorously with the biggest stick.

OFFICER. You are obeyed. [*He beats CH'AO.*]

HAI-T'ANG. You hoped to dwell forever

With Mrs. Ma.

You hoped that I should never

Return from whence you sent me.

With what intention

Did you both follow me

On the way here?

Answer me that

The pair of you.

[*CH'AO assumes death.*]

PAO-CH'ING. The rascal is feigning death. Officer, restore him to life with a jug of cold water.

[*The OFFICER throws water in his face and CH'AO revives.*]

PAO-CH'ING. Come, confess at once.

CH'AO. For a long time your servant has been having an affair with this woman. According to the law I am guilty of nothing more than adultery. My crime is not among those punishable by death. Regarding the poisoning of Ma Chun-shing, I purchased the poison. That part is true enough. But it was not I who conceived the idea. It was this woman who took the poison and put it in her husband's broth. I had nothing whatever to do with the retention of the child. In

fact I said to Mrs. Ma, "Since you are not his mother, why not give him up?" She replied that if she could keep the child she would become mistress of the entire fortune left by the lord Ma. I am only a poor employee and I never could have found the money with which to buy the testimony of the neighbors and these old women. She alone bribed them in order that she might, on the way here, get Hai-t'ang into her clutches. Yes, it was she, yes, it was she.

MRS. MA. Coward that you are! Make haste with your confession. Go on! What do you expect me to say? It was I, it was I who did everything. After all, is it such a misfortune to die? After we have lost our honorable lives, shall we not be reunited forever in the other world, like two turtle-doves?

[A gong sounds and all are silent.]

PAO-CH'ING. You who are here present, listen to my final sentence: Su-shun, the governor of Ch'ing-ch'iu, for having transgressed the law, will be despoiled of his bonnet and his sword-belt. He will return to the rank of the people and, to the end of his days, he shall never obtain employment. The Neighbors and the two old Midwives will never more receive bribes for rendering false testimony. Each of them shall be given twenty-four strokes with a stick and then be banished to a place three hundred *lis* distant. T'ang-shao and Hsieh-pa, in their positions as guards, will never again accept presents. They will be punished with great severity. Each will receive one hundred strokes of the stick, besides being banished to the frontier, in an arid and uninhabitable country. The adulterous woman and her infamous accomplice, for having killed Ma Chun-shing with poison, for having appropriated the young child that they might fraudulently obtain his inheritance, will be dragged to a public place where they will suffer a slow and ignominious death. Each of them will be cut into twenty-four pieces. Everything that they possess will be awarded to Ch'ang Hai-t'ang and her son Shiu-lang, in order that she may continue her tender care of him. As for Ch'ang-lin, he may now quit his profession and go to live with his honorable sister.

Because the clerk Ch'ao
 Would indulge a criminal passion,
 Ch'ang Hai-t'ang was calumniated
 In a manner most odious,
 And unjustly accused.
 But with the aid of the chalk circle,
 The truth has this day been brought to light.
 Those who permitted themselves
 To be bribed with money
 Will be sent into exile.
 The two principals in the crime
 Will be decapitated in a public place.
 Ch'ang-lin himself will take the sword
 And execute the sentence.
 And the little boy and his honorable mother
 Will henceforth augustly remain reunited.

[CH'ANG-LIN *and* HAI-T'ANG *prostrate themselves before him.*]

HAI-T'ANG. Old women! did I hear you swear
 That after the long years
 You found you could not gather up
 The scattered threads of memory?
 Clerk Ch'ao, did you assure me
 That your magistrate
 Observed the law?
 Dame Ma! did you say that you occupied
 The place of First Wife
 With prudence and sagacity?
 But in the end
 The Augustly Supreme Judge
 Uncovered the odious plot.
 These men are exiled
 To an arid and uninhabitable land
 And the two chief culprits
 Are publicly to receive their just chastisement.
 Honored Sir, this history

Of the Chalk Circle
Is worthy of being spread
Over the four seas
And over all the kingdoms
Of the Celestial Empire.