

Two Erotic Novellas
From the Ming Dynasty

Translated from Chinese
with an Introduction

by

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Even birds know how to enjoy their conjugal relations.

Wu Zetian

How can we humans be deprived of such pleasure?

The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction

I find the romances I experienced in my youth especially precious. It would be a pity if I let them fall into oblivion!

The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation

INTRODUCTION

Two works are introduced in this volume and they are perhaps the earliest pieces of erotic fiction.¹ “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction”, according to general consensus, was approximately written in the late period of Jiajing reign of the Ming dynasty, equal to the mid-sixteenth century.² It was fifty or more years earlier than the well-known erotic novel *Jin Ping Mei* (The Golden Lotus, or Plum in the Golden Vase) and preceded *Fanny Hill*, a Western analogue, by almost two centuries. “The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation” came into being a little later, the publishing date of which, in my surmise, could be anytime within the range of the middle period of Wanli reign, i.e., around 1590.³

The sixteenth century in Europe was an epoch of the Renaissance. Creative writing there was no longer the epic sort of works focused on the celebration of heroes, gods, martial feats, and adventures. It was more concerned with human condition and with the vicissitudes of daily life such as joys and sorrows in love and marriage.⁴ At approximately the same time in China, a literary change or revolution, in scale and scope no less than that of the Renaissance,

¹ I am here discussing only the genre of erotic fiction. Erotic poems, often very mild, implicit, or euphemistic in terms of the presentation of sex, such as Sappho’s (6th century BC) on women’s homosexual love (lesbianism), the risqué Chinese lyrics collected in the earliest Chinese poetry classic *Shijing* (The Book of Poetry), and Ovid’s (43 BC - 18 AD) *Amores and the Art of Love*, appeared, of course, much earlier, but since they are generically different, they are not within the scope of my comparison. *The Kamasutra*, the ancient Hindu text chiefly on erotic pleasures, is simply a sex manual, not very much different from the ancient Chinese medical texts on sex such as *Sunu jing* (The Sunu Classic). Some of Boccaccio’s (1313-1375) *Decameron* tales are about sex or seduction, but not about the process of sex, since detailed description of copulation is largely absent. So they are not erotic fiction in the strict sense of this term. Later Renaissance writers like William Shakespeare (1564-1616) and Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) were sometimes quite erotic (for instance, some passages in Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labor’s Lost* and Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress”), but what they wrote are mainly drama and poems, not fiction. Antonio Vignali’s *La Cazzaria* (The Book of the Prick, translated by Ian Frederick Moulton, and published by Routledge, 2003) was written in 1525. Sexually, it is quite explicit, but it is not fiction.

² The story, as pointed out by the majority of scholars such as Zheng Zhenduo, Zhang Peiheng, and Wang Xiaotao, was possibly a product of the mid or late Jiajing reign. See Zhang Peiheng’s article on “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction”, in *Zhongguo jinshu daguan* (Compendium of the Banned Books in China), ed., Zhang Peiheng et al (Shanghai, Wenhua chubanshe, 1990), p. 312, and Wang Xiaotao’s preface to “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction”, in *Mingdai xiaoshuo jikan disan ji* (Fiction of the Ming Dynasty, Series 3) (Chengdu, Bashu shushe, 1997), vol. 6, p. 3. Liu Hui, however, argues that “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction” was published in the ninth year of the Zhengde reign, i.e., 1514, for the reason that the preface written by an anonymous literatus in the Ming edition available to us bears the cycling year “jiaxu”, which, in his judgment, corresponds to 1514. See Liu Hui’s article, “*Ruyijun zhuan* de kanke niandai jiqi yu *Jin Ping Mei* zhi guanxi” (The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction: The Year of its Publication and its Relationship with *The Golden Lotus*), in *Xuzhou shifan xueyuan xuebao* (Journal of Xuzhou Normal University), No. 3, 1987. True, Huang Xun (1490-?), in his book *Dushu yide* (Contemplation on the Books I read), which was published in 1562, mentions that he had read the story. But that could only mean that the story itself had been written before that year, not necessarily the preface, which could be later added when “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction”, in the spring tide of publication of fiction and drama in the early years of the Wanli reign, was re-printed. So the year *jiaxu* in which the preface was written, could possibly correspond to 1574 rather than to 1514 (Xiao Xiangkai argues that it was not unlikely that the year *jiaxu* could be 1634 or 1694 if Huayang Recluse was the same person as the author of *Yuanyang zhen*. See Xiao Xiangkai, *Zhenben jinhui xiaoshuo daguan*, pp.100-101.

³ After I have finished writing this introduction, I discovered that Xu Shuofang had already found a letter by Feng Mengzhen, written in 1589, in his *Kuaixuetang ji* (The Works from the Quick Snow Abode), in which the author mentions the name of Chipozzi, a piece of evidence that seems to be able to prove that “The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation” was in circulation before that year. See the postscript by Li Mengsheng to his reprinted edition *Zhongguo jinhui xiaoshuo baihua* (A Hundred Topics on the Banned Books in China) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1998), p. 549. In view of the date of its composition proposed by this newly found piece of evidence being quite close to that of my conjecture mentioned in this introduction, I have decided not to make the revision for the time being.

⁴ For a recent insightful discussion of Western culture, from the period of the Renaissance to the present, see Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).

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was also taking place,¹ and one of its more interesting facets is the emergence of a kind of fiction innovative in style or genre and characteristic of the defiance of ideological convention and morality. This type of fiction, with its emphasis on spiritual and physical emancipation and its interest in describing a generalized sensuality or even graphic scenes of bedroom enjoyment, is very different both from the historical romance popular since the Yuan dynasty² and from the novel of the supernatural³ that appealed much to the contemporary reader of the time. It formed an entirely new literary stream, and “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction” and “The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation”, both of which were many times banned in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) and is still censored in China because of their “obscene” descriptions of sex, are actually two pioneering works representing this surging trend in literature.

1

The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction (*Ruyi jun zhuan*) is a story of the Chinese Catherine the Great⁴ Wu Zetian (624-705) who indulges herself in illicit sex with her lover Xue Aocao. Its real protagonist, unlike what the title misleadingly suggests,⁵ is Empress Wu rather than her lover, Lord of Perfect Satisfaction. This is the reason why the story begins with an introduction to her background, and emphasizes at the very outset her initiation of incestuous sexual relationship with Gaozong, her future husband.

But indeed it is Xue Aocao who brings happiness to the widowed Empress in her later years when she is over sixty and is at the apogee of her power after she has disinherited her son Zhongzong (Li Xian) and proclaimed herself “emperor”. Though she has maintained her health so well that her body is “filled out with the sexy allure of a young woman”, the desire she has developed over the years for carnal pleasure remains unfulfilled until one day the eunuch Niu Jinqing introduces to her a young man named Xue Aocao, who has a member of

¹ In the discussion of the changes in late Ming literature, the mainland scholar Ma Meixin’s article “Wan Ming wenxue chutan” (A Preliminary Study of the Late Ming Literature), in *Zhongguo shoupi wenxue boshi xuwei lunwen xuanji* (The First Selected Batch of PhD Dissertations on Literature) (Jinan: Shandong daxue chubanshe, 1987), is worth reading.

² The historical romance refers to the novel that centers around real historical figures and uses historical events as background or plot. The most well-known examples of this genre are *Sanguozhi yanyi* (Romance of the Three Kingdoms) and *Shuihu zhuan* (Water Margin). For a comprehensive discussion of the historical romance, see Lu Xun, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue* (A Brief History of Chinese Fiction), chapters 14 & 15, in *Lu Xun quanji* (Complete Works of Lu Xun) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1989), pp. 127-153; for an in-depth discussion of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Water Margin*, see C.T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), chapters 2 & 3.

³ The novel of the supernatural refers to the fiction that is imaginary and allegorical, centering around personified gods, celestial beings, demons, animals and the like, pretty much like the novel *Gulliver’s Travels* by Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) in English literature. The most well-known representative work of the novel of the supernatural is *Xiyou ji* (Journey to the West or Monkey as translated by Arthur Waley) by Wu Cheng’en (1506-1582). Although the earliest extant edition of the novel was published in 1592, “it may not have been the earliest printed version” (see C.T. Hsia, *ibid.*, p. 116), and it has been generally agreed that the novel was completed during the mid-sixteenth century. See Andrew Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 183.

⁴ Catherine II the Great (1729-1796) was notorious for her libertinism - her illicit sexual relationship with numerous male favorites.

⁵ In fact, “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction” is only a partial title; the original full and unabridged title is “Zetian huanghou ruyijun zhuan” (Empress Wu Zetian’s Lord of Perfect Satisfaction).

extraordinary size. His entry into the palace to provide sexual services gives the Empress so much pleasure that she grants him the title “Lord of Perfect Satisfaction”. But Xue Aocao is not just sexually gratifying. He is also the Empress’ important “political advisor”. By taking advantage of her profound affection for him, he, out of loyalty to the Tang House, succeeds in persuading the Empress to restore Zhongzong as heir apparent, a good deed that leads him in the end to the attainment of Taoist immortality.

The story, like most of historical romances, is heavily based upon history. It is presented in a real (or semi-real) annalistic framework, and the characters, whose identities are preserved by the rich sets of names such as those given to emperors, empresses, concubines, princes, courtiers, and *mianshou* (male sex workers, as some might call them now), are drawn largely from official or unofficial historiographies. It goes without saying that Empress Wu and her husband Gaozong are authentic figures of the Tang dynasty. Even minor characters like the Zhang Brothers, Chu Suiliang, and Di Renjie are prominent in the sources.¹ Major events or incidents related to the Empress, such as her enthronement as Emperor and her demotion of Zhongzong as Prince of Luling, are well-attested, and to a certain degree, truthfulness is even preserved in the profusion of details and episodes, especially in those of a social nature, of which the most salient example is an edict of the Empress commanding in poetic form that flowers bloom in winter, which appears on record in a number of works published in Tang-Song times.²

Yet *The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction* transcends the well-established genre of historical romance.³ It is not really the historical novel it purports to be, any more than Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* is a genuinely historical play. If war and peace, heroic exploits, and palace coups feature most of the fiction of this kind, in “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction”, they serve only as a backdrop or a narrative outline. What the story mainly describes is a type of private history that, by and large, confined to the so-called “inner court”, or even quite frequently, to the bedchamber of the Empress. The author is clever in that he seems to follow the formulae requisite to the genre of *roman histoire*,⁴ yet in fact deviates ingeniously from the pattern as the major plot of the tale unfolds, taking the reader from the familiar arena of politics, with all its “sound and fury”, into an internal, sensual, and somewhat mystic world, which, without a consistent historical setting and concealed from the outside, consists only of

¹ Of Course, not all the details about the Zhang brothers, Chu Suiliang, and other minor historical figures in “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction” are authentic, and the obvious distortion of historical facts by the author is pointed out in my notes.

² *Tangshi jishi* (Events behind the Compilation of Tang Poetry) and *Guang zhuoyi ji* (Expanded Records of the Things Strange and Extraordinary) are two of them.

³ According to Robert Hegel, “most [of Chinese historical fiction] are set in periods of strife and generally narrate the rise and fall of dynasties.” Robert Hegel, *Reading Illustrated fiction in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 30.

⁴ Formulae are the conventions by which the author of the historical romance abode, such as the use of historical background and the creation of real and fictionalized historical figures. In “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction”, however, when the main story about the illicit relations of Empress Wu and Xue Aocao unfolds, the historical background fades away or is purposely distorted (see translator’s notes for the story), and the real historical figures are partially replaced by non-historical, fictitious personae.

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lust, female psyche of sexuality, copulation, and revelry in the delights of the flesh.

Thus *The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction* has a special claim on the attention of modern readers: it is the first piece of fictional work in China that presents carnality in all its fullness. Although Chinese fiction with themes centering around love and erotic pleasures can be dated back to earlier centuries, it is *The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction* that first broke through the taboos against explicit or graphic descriptions of sex in belles lettres. Such earlier stories as *An Unofficial History of Zhao Feiyan* (*Feiyan waizhuan*) written presumably by a certain Lingxuan of the Han dynasty¹ or *Visiting the Fairies' Grotto* (*You xianku*)² notorious for its amorous adventures in the corpus of Tang romances, may have touched upon sexual encounters here and there, but none of them can be regarded as erotica in the real sense of the term, for the reader is prevented from feeling their lasciviousness either due to their lack of racy descriptions in detail or to their abundant use of metaphors, symbols, or euphemisms that make the steamy scenes rather veiled.³ “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction”, with its unashamed portrayals of private parts, postures of intercourse, and bawdy conversations between Empress Wu and her lover Xue Aocao, may therefore have every right to claim the laurel as the forerunner in the constellation of prurient literature.

Sexual fiction seems nowadays to have been an overworked field. Four or five hundred years ago, however, the field was yet a virgin soil. It needed a daring and nonconformist pioneer, and Xu Changling, the author of “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction”, was just such a courageous precursor. Yet he is not a name we can easily come across in histories of Chinese literature, and his real identity, despite a belated curiosity in the last decade about him and his

¹ Lu Xun doubted that “Feiyan waizhuan” was written in the Han dynasty. See Lu Xun, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue*, chapter 11, p. 104. It is likely a work written by someone in the Five Dynasties.

² This story has recently been re-translated by Paul Rouzer under the title “A Dalliance in the Immortals' Den”. The following passage is the most graphic in the story: “The night was growing late and our feelings grew more passionate and intimate. The fish-oil lamp shown bright all around; the wax candles illumined all sides. Shiniang then called for Cassia Heart and also for Peony. They took off my slippers, folded up my robe, put aside my turban, and hung up my sash. I then helped Shiniang take off her damask cape, undo her gauze skirt, shed her red chemise, remove her green stockings. Her flower-like features filled my eyes, and a fragrant breeze assaulted my nostrils. My heart leapt uncontrollably; passion came irrepressibly. I slid my hand into her crimson trousers while we entwined our limbs under the turquoise coverlet. We held our mouths lip to lip, while I supported her head with my arm. I fondled and squeezed her breasts, rubbed and stroked her thighs. A nip brought elated feelings, an embrace brought a broken heart. My nostril throbbed, and my heart was tied in knots. Before long my eyes were blurred and my ears burned, my veins bulged and sinews grew slack.” See Paul Rouzer, *The Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early Chinese Texts* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 348-349.

³ Whether or not the love stories in the corpus of Tang romance have direct bearing on the appearance of “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction” is an issue worthy of further exploration. But it seems perhaps more rewarding in studying the environment of this first erotic story if we widen our horizon as to consider the factors or elements outside the scope of generic intertextuality, such as the sexual over-indulgence of Emperor Wuzhong (r. 1506-1521), the strong interest in the art of the bedchamber and the wide application of aphrodisiacs, the burgeoning and flourishing of printing and publishing business, and the less restriction on people's freedom of speech due to Emperor Shizong's (r. 1522-1566) noninterference (*wuwei er zhi*) policies and his devotion of most of his time to the Taoist pursuit.

notorious story,¹ has remained unknown except for a few ascertainable facts that he was a native of Suzhou² and flourished during mid-sixteenth century³ whom the author of the preface to *The Golden Lotus* referred to as a literatus of “the previous generation”. In spite of his obscurity, he should be entitled to a niche, if not a notable place, in Chinese literary history for his blazing a new trail as the creator of this special sub-genre of fiction.

Not many people realize that the tradition of lustful, full-flavored fiction in the late Ming started with this slender piece of work by this little known author. Classical as its language is, it was at that time shatteringly revolutionary in terms of the sexuality it presents, and was, therefore, greatly admired by novelists of later periods, including Xiaoxiaosheng of *The Golden Lotus*, Lu Tiancheng of *The Embroidered Couch*, and Li Yu of *Carnal Prayer Mat*, who, viewing it as an erotic Bible, either quoted in their works its words or sentences, or copied its juicy descriptions verbatim with little change, or listed it as one of the required readings for newly-wed women,⁴ acknowledging directly or indirectly that they wrote under its influence and were, to a certain extent, the heirs to its erotic heritage, of which two characteristics are particularly worthy of notice.

One is female fascination with penis size. Previous literature, if we do not exclude sex manuals, usually emphasizes sexual pleasures and benefits from a male perspective. What we see in “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction” is an entirely different picture: a female enjoys a man with a “huge member”. Empress Wu Zetian loves Xue Aocao not because he is handsome, romantic, or erudite, but because he has an endowment “the prodigious size of which verged on abnormality”. It is so huge, and with so tremendous a delight it provides the Empress, that it makes her realize what she truly wants from a man. If the Kronhausens are right in saying that one of the typical features of sexual fiction is its strong interest in the unusually big

¹ A number of articles appeared in the last decades or so about “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction”, including Zhang Peiheng’s “*Ruyijun zhuan*” (The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction), in Zhang Peiheng et al, *Zhongguo jinshu daguan* (Compendium of the Banned Books in China) (Shanghai: Wenhua chubanshe, 1990), pp. 312-314; Xiao Xiangkai’s “*Ruyijun zhuan liangzhong*” (Two Versions of *The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction*), in Xiao Xiangkai, *Zhenben jinhui xiaoshuo daguan* (Compendium of the Rare Versions of the Banned Books) (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji, 1992), pp. 98-102; Li Mengsheng’s “*Ruyijun zhuan*” (The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction), in Li Mengsheng, *Zhongguo jinhui xiaoshuo baihua* (A Hundred Topics on the Banned Books in China) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1994), pp. 24-29; and Li Shiren’s “*Ruyijun zhuan: Ming-Qing tongshu xiaoshuo xing miaoxie zhi lanshang*” (The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction: the Beginning of Sexual Description in Ming-Qing Fiction), in Li Shiren et al, *Zhongguo gudai jihui xiaoshuo manhua* (Informal Discourses on the Banned Books in Ancient China) (Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 1999), pp. 133-139. And some of them mention the authorship briefly. I was aware that Charles Stone had been working on *Ruyi zhuan* for years, and that his revised PhD thesis has just recently been published under the title *The Fountainhead of Chinese Erotica: Lord of Perfect Satisfaction* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), but unfortunately there had been no way of getting access to his work until I finished mine, about the same time his book was formally released.

² On the title page of the novella the author’s name Xu Changling is preceded by two characters *Wumen*, which indicate that he was a native of Suzhou, a city in the present-day Jiangsu province.

³ Zhang Peiheng extrapolates that since Xinxinzi indicates clearly in his preface to *Jin Ping Mei* (The Golden Lotus) that “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction” appeared after *Bingzhu qingdu* (Quiet Reading by the Candle) by Zhou Jingxuan, who mainly belonged to the period of the Jiajing reign, it is very likely that the author of “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction” was still alive during the late Jiajing reign and early Wanli reign. See Zhang Peiheng et al, *ibid.*, p. 312.

⁴ See respectively chapters 18, 19, 27, 29, 37, 50, 51, 52, 61, 73, 78, and 79 of *The Golden Lotus*, Part II of *The Embroidered Couch*, and chapter 3 of *The Carnal Prayer Mat*.

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penis,¹ then we should modify this feature by adding one more element: the story, obviously the fountainhead of inspiration for large genitals in erotica, is actually more about a female's lust or passion or obsession aroused by a man's large genitals than about the enormous genital size merely for the sake of flaunting its virile strength.

The second characteristic is fantasized abnormal sexual behaviors. Xu Changling, in celebrating desire that goes beyond normal limits, presents Wu Zetian as an androgenized nymphomaniac much more than as an old majestic lady with an understandable erogenous impulse. She is over seventy, yet she is so robust and lustful and replete with so much sexual energy that a single young man cannot satisfy her in bed.² The two Zhang Brothers, for instance, are about fifty years younger than she, outstanding for their male organs and stamina, but neither of them, even taking turns to serve her every other night, can "maintain their erection" in copulation with her. Xue Aocao is perhaps the only exception, since with him the Empress can indulge herself in intercourse for hours on end. Still that is not enough for her. It is only when she is able to fulfill her romantic or sadistic whims by, say, making Aocao hold her in his arms, his penis sheathed in her vagina, while strolling along in the garden with a band of musicians singing and playing in front of them, or with incense burning a spot on the head of her lover's genitals as a token of his loving affection for her, that she feels fully gratified and happy.

Whether or not the author was a perverse amorist I do not know, and it seems of little importance. I here wish only to call attention to one point: "The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction", with its proclivity for perversion, took the lead in recounting aberrant or quasi-aberrant sexual performance, from which have been derived, in bawdy stories and novels that followed, various kinds of more uncommon or queerer activities: rape, incest, anal sex, male or female same-sex, wife swapping, orgies, etc.

As a subversive version of genteel literature, "The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction" takes sex as its major subject and poses as its chief artistic goal the representation of salaciousness. Nevertheless, the unconventionality of the story goes much beyond its eroticism. If one turns from its intriguing potpourri of coitus to the contemplation of the serious yet implicit message it intends to convey, which, no doubt, is not as simple as the repetition of copulative twists and shrieks, one might be probably amazed: the story seems to comment on Wu Zetian

¹ Eberhard and Phyllis Kronhausen, *Pornography and the Law: the Psychology of Erotic Realism and Pornography* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1959), p. 221.

² In fact, it is not altogether uncommon for an old woman to have strong sexual desire and competence. Empress Wu has long been viewed as an abnormal old bawd, but history tells us that she was not unparalleled. Her recent close match is an American sexagenarian (her current exact age is 66) named Jane Juska living in Berkeley, California, who, after having been retired as a high school teacher, embarked upon sexual adventures, broadcasting anonymously her desire in the section of *New York Review of Books*, indulging in phone sex, sending men living in different areas dirty e-mails, and dating them. She wished to "have a lot of sex" before she turns 67 the next year. The most youthful of her lovers was a 32-year-old man called David Duchovny, and she is able to juggle at the same time with "three different men". For an intriguing report of her sexual engagement, see Marcus Warren, "Sex with a Sexagenarian", in *The Vancouver Sun*, May 12, 2003, p. c1-c3.

as a “feminist”,¹ to reevaluate female sexual desire!

Wu Zetian, as some historians argue, was a seventh-century vanguard fighting for women’s rights, equality, and freedom.² She interfered in public affairs as equal partner with Emperor Gaozong; she ordered her subjects to be in mourning for the death of their mother for three years as they were obliged to for their father; she participated like a man in major ceremonials including the grandest *feng* and *shan* sacrificial rites performed at the foot and on the summit of Mount Tai;³ and finally, defying all the traditions, she even proclaimed herself emperor, the only female emperor in China’s history. Yet to the author of “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction” whose political stance seems to have been akin to that of orthodox critics,⁴ Wu Zetian’s female government was no more than ruthless personal vendettas, bloody suppression, and deliberate exploitation of factionalism regardless of ethics and principles.⁵ Small wonder that the story mocks her by quoting a verse that caricatures her as a hen “crowing in the vacated Purple Mansion”, and attacks her fiercely for her employment of cruel minions like Lai Junchen and Suo Yuanli in slaughtering the Tang Royal House and other dissidents.

Yet despite its criticism of Empress Wu as a female ruler, “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction” shows an undisguised sympathy when it comes to the depiction of her sexual life. Admittedly, Wu Zetian has, at her advanced age, an unusually strong desire for carnal indulgence, and “no one, whether a veteran prostitute or a lascivious wench, was able to equal her in lewdness”. But she herself, like any of those typical late Ming *femmes fatales* who loved sensual amusements and hated moral restraints, sees her passion or “wantonness” in grandly justified terms: it is an integral part of her basic female rights! “Even birds know how to enjoy their conjugal relationship,” she sighs. “How can we humans be deprived of such pleasure?”⁶

¹ The terms “feminist” or “female” or “feminine” is used as defined by Toril Moi. “What is the meaning of the word ‘feminist’ in feminist literary criticism? Over the past decade, feminists have used the terms ‘feminist’, ‘female’ and ‘feminine’ in a multitude of different ways. One of the main points of this essay, however, is to urge that only a clear understanding of the differences between them can show what the crucial political and theoretical issues of contemporary feminist criticism really are. Initially, I will suggest that we distinguish between ‘feminism’ as a political position, ‘femaleness’ as a matter of biology and ‘femininity’ as a set of culturally defined characteristics.” See Toril Moi, “Feminist, Female, Feminine”, in *The Feminist Reader*, eds., Catherine Belsey & Jane Moore (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 117.

² Cf. R.W.L. Guisso, *Wu Tse-t’ien and Politics of Legitimation in T’ang China* (Western Washington University Press, 1978); Lei Jiaji, *Humei pianneng huozhu* (Only her Foxy Fascination Could Captivate her Master) (Taipei: Lianming wenhua youxian gongsi, 1982); Lei Jiaji, *Wu Zetian zhuan* (Biography of Wu Zetian) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2001).

³ Empress Wu often dressed herself as a male emperor in participating grand ceremonies. See Lei Jiaji, *Humei pianneng huozhu*, p. 161.

⁴ The most recent orthodox critic was Lin Yutang (1895-1976), whose historical novel *Lady Wu - A True Story* (London: 1957) gives the extraordinary opinion that the Empress Wu was a mass murderer comparable with Stalin or Chinggis Khan.

⁵ See *Cambridge History of China: Volume 3, Sui and Tang China*, 589-906, Part I, ed., Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1979), chapter, 5, “Kao-Tsung (Reign 649-83) and the Empress Wu: the Inheritor and the Usurper” (written by Denis Twitchett and Howard J. Wechsler), p. 243.

⁶ These two sentences, with little changes, were used by the late Ming playwright Tang Xianzu (1550-1616) in his famous play *Mudan ting* (The Peony Pavilion). Tang’s play, widely acclaimed for its understanding of female situation and their demand for search of love and happy marriage, represents, in fact, the new trend of humanist literature in the late Ming period, a trend which was formed, to a considerable degree, as a result of the publication and influence of “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction”.

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And she is no timid woman. No sooner has Xue Aocao undressed himself than she reaches out her hand to fondle his penis. “How large this beastly thing is!” she exclaims, and meanwhile unbuttons her garb to reveal to him her pudenda, urging him, who has not yet dared to touch her, to stroke her privates. What is more, she looks to her engagement of “male sex workers” more for her triumph of achieving equality with men than for the mere satisfaction of her lust. “I still recollect,” she tells Aocao as they make love, “that when I was twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, I began to serve Gaozong, and he was much larger and stronger so far as that part of him is concerned. But every time he had sex with me, he cared only about his own enjoyment and rarely was he so considerate as to start or stop out of consideration of my gratification.” So after having ascended the throne, the Empress tries, to the extremity of her supremacy, to ensure not only the equal power as a male sovereign in the political domains, but also an active role in bed that enables her to choose a man to her liking and make him serve her instead of vice versa.¹

Yet Wu Zetian is not a castrating female whose feminist crusade is inspired by nothing more than “penis envy”. She may dislike the rationales and principles that subordinate women, but she is by no means a man-hater; her pleasure-seeking acts may be overwhelmingly hedonistic, but that does not prevent her from being a passionate lover. When the novella glides over from grotesque voluptuousness to lyrical sentimentality, we are shown a completely different Wu Zetian, a Wu Zetian who treats the Zhang Brothers nicely in spite of their incompetence of serving her in bed, a Wu Zetian who dotes on Xue Aocao as though she were a maiden first falling in love, and a Wu Zetian who cries over the wound on her lover’s genitals, heartbroken, and writes a love letter that, with stains of her tears on it, reveals her profoundest affection. In short, we see another facet of her we may perhaps not be able to see elsewhere, the facet which is kind, caring, generous, and compassionate, and which is tender, docile, attentive, and full of “femininity”.

This rather sympathetic attitude of the author toward his heroine’s feminist demand for freedom over her own body brings the story to an unexpected denouement. Usually, as in most of cautionary tales, people who engage themselves in adultery or other severe sexual transgressions are unpardonable, and their retributions, often in the form of death penalty, are inevitable. Yet “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction”, with its ambivalence in treating Empress Wu as an amalgam of relentless Machiavellian politician and strikingly feminine woman with a strong but natural biological urge (as if she were a split persona), not only exonerates her from punishment but also lets her *mianshou* Xue Aocao go scot-free, giving an astounding scenario that went against the conventions of traditional morality. This scenario, conceived at the risk of social ostracism, seems to serve both as a climax for the author, a seeming “royalist” like

¹ As early as in the sixteenth century, Huang Xun had already noted Wu Zetian’s “feminist” tendency. Wu Zetian, he remarks, was very different from the other two imperial concubines (one of them was the well-known Yang Guifei) of the Tang dynasty notorious also for their incest, because only Wu Zetian dared to play an active role in forming illicit sexual liaison. See *Dushu yide* (Contemplations on the Books I read), *juan 2*.

Balzac,¹ valuing himself upon being an *amoralist* with an unusual humanitarian understanding of the female condition of his heroine: her demands and desires, and her erotic impulses and physical transcendence of puritan restraints, and as, in the meantime, a narrative strategy for declaring himself to be a bold soul who dared to challenge the ethical code by putting the graphic details of genitalia and coition in a freely circulating book, with no thought given to protecting himself.

Critics with textual training are inclined to interpret the story as a political allegory. But since it is for the most part sexually and femininely oriented, it would be read more profitably if we apprehend both its “modernity” as a radical departure from the traditional literary primness and its implied apology – apology without antecedents – for Wu Zetian’s sexual openness, and hence, symbolically, for the sexual liberation of late Ming women as well. In fact, it is precisely because of these two revolutionary contributions that the story made a huge impact on the late Ming literati, especially on a female author known as Madam Hibiscus, who, following suit and even citing a couplet composed by Empress Wu, wrote dozens of years later a lurid memoir in a very similar vein.

2

The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation (Chipozi zhuan) may well be the earliest erotic work by a female author in the literature of the world. It reminds us of the earliest novel, Lady Murasaki Shikibu’s *The Tale of Genji*.² But in comparison with *The Genji*, which enjoyed a great reputation and was widely read from the Heian period to modern times, “The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation” has a worse fate. It has, ever since its birth in the late Ming, remained largely an unsung title, and few literary historians have ever approached the question of its

¹ Balzac (1799-1850), whose most famous novels are *Eugénie Grandet*, *La Pere Goriot*, and *La Cousine Bette*, portrays, in his fiction, the rise and triumph of the third estate (the bourgeoisie) with much sympathy, though politically he was a royalist.

² By the way, it should be pointed out that *The Tale of Genji*, the first novel of the world, is also quite sexy. But most of the times the erotic scenes are implicitly expressed in metaphoric poetic form. The following coquetry between Genji and an elderly lady called Naishi is a good example in point.

They talked for a time. Genji was nervous lest they be seen, but Naishi was unperturbed.

“Sere and withered though these grasses be,
They are ready your pony, should you come.”

She was really too aggressive.

“Were mine to part the low bamboo at your grove,
It would fear to be driven away by other ponies.”

See *The Tale of Genji*, trans. Edward Siedensticker (New York: Vintage Classics Edition, 1990), p. 125.

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female authorship.¹ The failure to raise this issue resulted in the first place from the insufficient attention to its feminine pseudonym, “Madam Hibiscus”.²

Late Ming fictional works, especially those nowadays categorized as erotica, were published, with few exceptions, under a pseudonym.³ The most familiar example is perhaps *The Golden Lotus*, which was attributed to an author called “Scoffing Scholar of Lanling” (Lanling Xiaoxiao sheng), who, despite many scholars’ laborious research, has remained an enigma.⁴ But no matter what kind of pseudonymous masks the authors put on and how difficult it is to figure out their real identities, one may, judging from their pseudonymity, have little doubt as to which gender they belonged to. “Scoffing Scholar of Lanling” was certainly a man, and so was “Master of Perverse Love”, and so was “Taoist Priest for Redressing Intemperate Passion”,⁵ because all those pennames adopted reveal clearly their masculinity. There are no literary work published in the late Ming, other than “The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation”, that used a pseudonym that is feminine.⁶

No one, of course, could fail to see the femininity of the pseudonym when s/he knows

¹ During the recent decade there have been at least half a dozen of articles or essays written by mainland scholars on “The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation”: Huang Lin’s “*Chipozi zhuan*” (The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation), in Zhang Peiheng et al, *Zhongguo jinshu daguan* (Compendium of Banned Books in China) (Shanghai: Wenhua chubanshe, 1990), pp. 316-318; Xiao Xiangkai’s “*Chipozi zhuan*” (The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation), in Xiao Xiangkai, *Zhenben jinhui xiaoshuo daguan* (Compendium of the Rare Versions of the Banned Books) (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji, 1992), pp. 109-115; Li Mengsheng’s “*Chipozi zhuan*” (The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation), in Li Mengsheng, *Zhongguo jinhui xiaoshuo baihua* (A Hundred Topics on the Banned Books in China) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1994), pp. 32-37; Wang Xingqi, “*Chipozi zhuan fafu*” (Reevaluation of the Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation), in *Ming-Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* (Studies of Ming-Qing Fiction), 1995, no. 1, pp. 107-122; Li Shiren’s “*Chipozi zhuan: Sibainian qian de yibu rensheng canhui lu*” (The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation: A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Confession), in Li Shiren et al, *Zhongguo gudai jinhui xiaoshuo manhua* (Informal Discourses on the Banned Books in Ancient China) (Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 1999), pp. 391-399; Wu Cuncun, “*Chipozi zhuan yu nuxing zongyu de shizhi xing beiju*” (The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation and the Real Tragedy of Female Sexual Indulgence), in Wu Cuncun, *Ming-Qing shehui xing'ai fengqi* (Sexual Practice in Ming-Qing Society) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2000), pp. 107-113. But none of them mention the question of female authorship or the possibility of female authorship of the novella.

² Madam Hibiscus originally consists of four Chinese characters, *furong zhuren*, meaning literally “owner of hibiscus”. Whether hibiscus refers to a beautiful face or a flowery vagina, its “owner” must be a female.

³ But obviously more efforts need to be made on the part of the scholars on both sides of the Pacific in studying the relationship of the pseudonym and the person who used the pseudonym, to improve the current state of scholarship on the authorship in late Ming fiction.

⁴ A roster of more than twenty names of scholars who lived either mainly in the Jiajing reign or mainly in the Wanli reign, including famous sixteenth-century literary figures such Li Kaixian (1502-1568), Xu Wei (1521-1593), Li Zhi (1527-1602), Wang Shizhen (1528-1590), Tu Long (1542-1605), Zhao Nanxing (1550-1628), and Tang Xianzu (1550-1616) has been proposed as possible authors for *The Golden Lotus*. For a well-informed survey in English of the studies of the authorship of *The Golden Lotus*, see Plaks, *ibid.*, pp. 55-72.

⁵ Master of Perverse Love (*qingdian zhuren*) is Lu Tiangcheng (1580?-1618?), the author of *The Embroidered Couch*, and Taoist Priest for Redressing Intemperate Passion (*qingchi fanzheng daoren*) is Li Yu (1611-1681), the author of *Carnal Prayer Mat*. Other famous pseudonyms with which one might be familiar, such as Jikongguan zhuren (Master of the Temple of Emptiness) for Ling Mengchu (1580-1644), the author of *Two Slaps*, and Mohanzhai zhuren (Master of Ink-Crazy Studio) for Feng Menglong (1574-1646?), the editor of *Three Words*, are also masculine.

⁶ In the Qing dynasty, one of the commentators for *Shitou ji* (Story of the Stone), an eighty-chapter version of *Honglou meng* (Dream of Red Mansions) used a female pseudonym, Zhiyanzhai (Carmine Studio), and judging from this, some modern scholars held that Zhiyanzhai could be a female cousin to Cao Xueqin, the author of *Dream of Red Mansions*. The use of female pseudonym is extremely rare in pre-modern Chinese literature, and Madam Hibiscus and Carmine Studio are perhaps the only two instances that I can recall.

that it is common in Chinese literary tradition to use “hibiscus”, another name for lotus flower,¹ to stand for a beautiful female face or vagina.² Yet few would go so far as to link this feminine pseudonym with the heroine of the story. Long ago the anonymous author of *My Secret Life*³ makes an audacious conjecture in the preface to his pornographic diary that it was possible that *Fanny Hill* was “written by a woman”.⁴ Whether or not he had any supporting evidence we do not know. But my assertion that the composer of “The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation” was a female is based neither upon my guesswork nor upon the pseudonym alone, which, for justification of its female authorship, is no doubt insufficient.

To delve into the mystery of the authorship, let me start with an explanation of the word *ji* that follows the author’s name on the cover of the original edition. Literally meaning “compile”, *ji* seems a little misleading in that it conveys to the reader a message that Madam Hibiscus was not the writer, but just the “compiler”, of the story.⁵ However, it is precisely this word that provides a key clue if we perceive the “coincidence” that in the story there is also a “compiler” called Yan Qiongke whose function it is to interview *Chipozi* (the Woman of Infatuation), jot down what she says, and get it published in book form. Some people assume that Yan Qiongke is a man’s name; in fact, the name is neutral in gender. One can take it as masculine, or one can take it as feminine as well.⁶ A close examination of it reveals to us that the name is a metaphor that implicitly delineates a person who is originally from the area called Yan (roughly equal to the present-day Hebei province), and now, with a bamboo staff in hand (“qiong”, the second character of the name, means bamboo staff), lives in an alien region as a “ke” (guest). This person, to our surprise, refers to none other than *Chipozi* herself, since she indeed resides in a different area called Zheng-Wei (which, very close to her native

¹ According to the Chinese dictionary *Cihai* (Sea of Words), *furong* (hibiscus) is an alternative name for *lianhua* (lotus). It was also used to describe female’s beautiful appearance or her vagina. But nowadays *furong* refers only to the species growing on dry land, not underwater. See *Cihai* (Shanghai: Cishu chubanshe, 1980), p. 554. So it is very possible that in the Ming time *furong* could be used interchangeably with *lianhua*.

² Hibiscus (*furong*), another name for lotus flower (*lianhua*) in Chinese, can also be used as a metaphor for female sexual parts. For instance, in *Vajracchedika-sutra* there is such a metaphoric sentence, “Buddha’s warrior attendant enters the lotus flower.” It actually means that the male organ enters the female vagina. See Liu Dalin, *zhongguo xingshi tujian* (The Illustrated History of Chinese Sexual Culture) (Jilin: Shidai wenyi chubanshe, 2000), p. 34.

³ Ian Moulton claims that Henry Spencer Ashbee, the well-known Victorian sexologist, is the author of *My Secret Life*. See his Introduction to *La Cazzaria: The Book of the Prick* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 2. But Moulton does not explain whether he has found new evidence to support his claim.

⁴ See *My Secret Life* (New York: New American Library, 1996), p. 18.

⁵ Cao Xueqin claimed, too, that he was a “compiler” of *Dream of Red Mansions*. In chapter one he says, “Cao Xueqin in his Nostalgia Studio read it [manuscript of *Dream of Red Mansions*] for ten years, in the course of which he revised it no less than five times, dividing it into chapters, renaming it *The Twelve Beauties of Jinling*, and adding an introductory quatrain.” (see *The Story of the Stone*, p. 51. The translation is David Hawkes’, but I have made some important changes). It is Hu Shi (1891-1962) who proved that Cao Xueqin is its author, and *Dream of Red Mansions* is autobiographical.

⁶ Someone might argue that in the story Yan Qiongke is referred to as *zi*, and since *zi* is an honorific form of address for man, Yan Qiongke must be a male. In fact, *zi* as an honorific form of address can be applied to both man and woman. For instance, on the first page of this story, the old lady refers to herself as “*wei zi*” (insignificant person). Obviously, this self-addressed appellation is deliberately employed for the purpose of suggesting that the gender of the old lady (*Chipozi*) and that of Yan Qiongke are same.

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place Yan, is roughly equal to the present-day Henan province),¹ and hunchbacked at the age of seventy, uses a staff. When we realize that the interviewer Yan Qiongke is a female and that she is the same person as the interviewee, we might well come to the conclusion that the heroine and the “compiler” and the author, different though they seem to be, are really a trinity – three in one!

A bit more of textual, as well as “extra-textual”, inspection of the heroine may further help confirm her resemblance to the authoress. *Chipozi*, when she was young, was a “beauty”, and even in her twilight years, still retains her “elegant manner and graceful bearing”. No wonder that she is given the name Enuo, which means she is a “pretty”, “lovely”, and “attractive” girl. Likewise, the name “Madam Hibiscus” suggests that the writer was also very beautiful, who, as her pseudonym implies, could be even comparable to the hibiscus flower.²

Not only in appearance are the women similar, but they have a great deal in common in their educational background. Enuo “studied the poems of Zhou dynasty” for years, and despite her parents’ injunction not to recite them because of their erotic nature, “read them silently in secret without their knowledge”. Correspondingly, Madam Hibiscus seems also to have received a strict training in the *Shijing* (The Book of Poetry). She was so familiar with this oldest classic of poetry that she could, as she wrote her memoir, quote or imitate a verse, a line, or a phrase from it wherever she deemed it necessary, and the total number of her citations amounts to approximately twenty,³ most of them coming from the rather risqué part, the Zheng and Wei sections, that Enuo as a teenage girl is most interested in!

One can also find that Enuo and Madam Hibiscus share a likeness even in a very specific respect, that is, their inharmonious or hostile relationship with Sha. Enuo dislikes or loathes Sha, her sister-in-law, to such an extent that she feels “uncomfortable being alone with her”. Though she and Sha later take part in incestuous liaisons with their father-in-law in the same bed, their discord is not much improved. Instead, their *ménage-a-trois* entanglement creates even more jealousy and covert contention between them. Similarly, Madam Hibiscus was, too, altogether antagonistic toward Sha. When Father-in-law is going to rape her, his hands already on her breasts and fondling them, and Sha makes no more resistance than “getting water from the basin and splashing it onto his face,” Madam Hibiscus comments as follows: “Splashing his face with water indicates that she has been interested already. So why strike a pose of innocence?!”

¹ According to Gao Heng, the State of Zheng is located in the central part of the present-day Henan province, and the State of Wei covers partially the southern part of the present-day Hebei province and the northern part of the present-day Henan province, the capital of which was Zhaoge, i.e., the small town located northeast of the present-day Qi county in Henan province. See Gao Heng, *Shijing jinzhu* (The Contemporary Annotation of the Book of Poetry) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1980), pp. 7-8.

² In the second part of the story, Father-in-law remarks as he sees Enuo emerges from her bathtub: “Ha, a lotus flower (i.e., hibiscus) appears on a pond!” His words indirectly suggest the identicalness between the heroine and the authoress.

³ See notes for “The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation”.

It should be noted that from the beginning to the end Madam Hibiscus never behaved as a commentator remarking either positively or negatively on any other character. All the comments have been inserted in the spaces between the text by another person whose penname, “Qingchizi” (meaning “a man who is crazily passionate”), appears in juxtaposition with the “compiler” on the cover of the book. This extra-textual critique on Sha, the only one made by the authoress in the whole of the story, is a very unusual exception, and therefore is of particular significance. It demonstrates unmistakably how so much Madam Hibiscus, like her heroine, detested Sha that, as she found her mild or objective narrative tone incapable of expressing her strong feelings, she did not in the least hesitate to tear off her camouflage, to castigate her “Sister-in-law” directly and in person!

Yet who was this mysterious Madam Hibiscus if we now have no doubts of her gender? As with the question of the authorship of *The Golden Lotus*, a seemingly unsolvable puzzle, we know little about her background aside from the scanty details supplied by her own autobiographical account. Being identical with the central character, she was very likely a native of Hebei province,¹ and moved to settle, as is indicated by the first sentence of the story (“in a dilapidated town of Zheng-Wei there is an elderly woman”), in the province of Henan in her later life.² Her father was a learned scholar, and her mother could at least read and write.³ So hers, if not so rich and powerful as an official household, was minimally an intellectual family, and, based upon my inference from the change of her surname from “Tang” to “Shangguan” after she had been expelled by her husband, could be descended from an old and distinguished clan. This was perhaps the reason why she was able to marry into the Luan family, a wealthy “scion of a high-ranking official in the state of Jin”. Judging from the statement that she was over seventy when she began to write her memoir, I can also infer that she was basically a personage of the sixteenth-century, or to be more precise, was probably born around the year 1520 (late Zhengde reign or early Jiajing reign) and lived nearly to mid-Wanli reign.⁴

¹ I cannot exclude the possibility that the author was a native of the present-day Henan province. It seems, however, highly unlikely that she was from somewhere in the south, for the reason that her son’s tutor Gu Deyin was from Zhaoge county (in the northern part of the present-day Henan province and very close to Hebei province), and it would have been virtually impossible for her to hire someone from so faraway a place to tutor her son if she had lived, say, in Jiangnan area. The neighbors on her street were quite familiar with the name of Zhaoge (see the song they sang when they had heard about her scandal), and judging from this, we have reason to say that the author might have lived in a place in the present-day Hebei province which was fairly close to Zhaoge county.

² It was likely that, some time after her divorce, Enuo married Gu Deyin, her lover, and moved to live with him in Zhaoge county where he was originally from. That is the reason why she used the name Yan Qiongke to suggest her “immigrant” status in Zheng-Wei (Henan province). Zheng-Wei, I believe, is a pun. It is both a geographical name and a metaphor for the place of lewdness.

³ Her mother understands the couplet Enuo composes and is able to tutor Huimin with her husband. Judged from these, she seems to be an educated woman.

⁴ See note 3.

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This supposition is supported both by the evidence of the time frame and the intertextuality in which the story was written. At the beginning of the second part, where an incestuous harassment is being committed by Father-in-law, there is a citation of a couplet that Empress Wu improvised for Gaozong (“Even before our meeting within the brocade bed curtain /I’m favored by sprinkles from your golden basin”). Since this two-line verse is from “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction”, it sets an upper dating limit for “The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation”, that is, its composition cannot have been earlier than the mid-sixteenth century. Down to the period of the Southern Ming in the seventeenth century, both Li Yu’s *Carnal Prayer Mat* and the preface to *Dongxi Jin yanyi* (Romance of Two Jin Dynasties) mentioned its title, indirectly proving that it had, by that time, become quite popular.

Some scholar claims that the story, which shows not the slightest influence derived from *The Golden Lotus*, must have been antecedent to it.¹ I myself also tend to believe that it is indeed a work between *The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction* and *The Golden Lotus*, since after *The Golden Lotus* (the beginning part of which, according to some reliable sources, circulated among the circle of literati as early as 1595)², there was hardly a tale or a novella that was composed in *wenyan* style. But at the same time it must be pointed out that “The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation” cannot have been much earlier than *The Golden Lotus*. Taken in conjunction with the fact that Emperor Shizong (r. 1522-1566) and Emperor Shenzong (r. 1573-1619) were sharply different, one being a pious Taoist believer and the other fervently advocating Buddhism, and that their religious difference rendered the fiction produced during their two reigns distinctive one from the other accordingly, the story’s Buddhistic denouement of retribution and repentance, contrary to what we see at the end of “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction” which is tinged with a Taoist color, makes it seem highly certain that it could not but have been written in Shenzong’s Wanli reign.³

I may further pin down the timing by quoting another piece of evidence from the preface of *The Golden Lotus*. In that preface, the author Xinxinzi mentions a number of literary oeuvres, including *The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction*, which, according to him, were the products of “the literati of previous generations”. But the title of “The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation” does not appear on his list. Does this mean that he had not seen it or that to him it was a contemporary work, not belonging to what he called the “literati of olden times”?

¹ See, for example, Li Shiren, “Chipози: sibainian qian de yiby rensheng canhui lu” (The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation: a Four-Hundred-Year-Old Confession), in *Zhongguo jinhui xiaoshuo manhua* (Informal Discourses on the Banned Books in China), ed., Li Shiren, et al (Shanghai: Dacidian chubanshe, 1999), p. 394.

² See Yuan Zhonglang, “Shangzhen”, quoted from Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian* (Unofficial Records of the Wanli Reign) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), *juan* 25.

³ Shenzong’s mother was a devout believer in Buddhism and Shenzong was strongly influenced by her. He usually did not mete out the death penalty. See Frederick Mote & Denis Twitchett, eds., *Cambridge History of China: Ming Dynasty 1368-1644, Part I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), chapter 9, “The Lung-chi’ing and Wan-li reigns, 1567-1620) written by Ray Huang, p. 514.

Whatever the case, his testimony contributes to the verification of my speculation: the writing of the memoir could be nearly contemporary with that of *The Golden Lotus*, and which, in my judgment, was possibly in any one of the years of the early 1590s.¹

As a late sixteenth-century work, *The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation* has in recent years caught a fairly wide attention for its candid presentation of sex, and has been praised by one literary critic as an Augustinian confession.² True, *Confessions* by Augustine, with its sincere account of the sins committed by the author when he was young, and of the eventual transformation from heresy to Christianity that he achieved in his later years, does support some analogy with its Chinese female “counterpart”. But it should not be overlooked that there is at least one ostensible difference between them. In Madam Hibiscus, spirituality was never really triumphant over carnality, as it had been for Augustine her “predecessor”. Her conversion to “Triratna” after she had failed in the middle stage of her life was an enforced option attendant on her divorce rather than a pursuit arising from her own volition, and even when she recollected the dissipation of her younger days, she expressed not so much as a modicum of repentance. The relating of her own personal history, as she says right at the beginning, was simply to save her “especially precious” romances when she had “one foot already in the grave,” and the poem, with which her lubricious memoir concludes, also purports to deliver, in an implicit manner, the justification that she, born with “lustful roots of previous life”, was essentially “innocent”, and should be pardoned if she were considered along with “more than a handful” of women of the younger generation who had had similar or even more sensational affairs.

But this novella, if not truly a work of confession, is clearly autobiographical. In the literature of ancient China, works of autobiography, particularly those related to one’s private or sexual life, are very few, and to most readers, Shen Fu’s *Fusheng liuji* (Six Chapters of My Floating Life) published in the heyday of the Qing dynasty seems the sole example of this kind. In fact, however, about two hundred years before Shen Fu, a female author, employing the techniques of flashback and first-person narration, had already recorded her “boudoir” experiences, which, whether premarital or extramarital in nature, were hardly known even to her own family members or to the persons with whom she was closely associated. Her

¹ We should note that the story, when completed, might have first been circulated in the form of manuscript among friends and a small group of people, and it could have taken a few years or even dozens of years before it was formally published, for the last paragraph, which has been indicated in the translation as “Critique”, was obviously added by someone else as a comment while the manuscript was in circulation. But unfortunately, the publisher, without paying too much attention to the difference in tone, took this comment as the ending part of the story as he published the book.

² See Li Shiren, *ibid.*, p. 391. Augustine’s *Confessions* is largely a philosophical work, in which the author meditates on the self and his intimate testimony to God by moving from his life before baptism to his entrance into a holy life and embrace of the Trinity. Completely unlike what Madam Hibiscus does in her memoir, Augustine seeks to fathom his own inner life, and emerges as a visionary. If “The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation” is indeed Madam Hibiscus’ confessions as is claimed by Li Shiren, we would say that it bears more affinity with Jean Jacques Rousseau’s (1712-1778) *Confessions* (1782) than with Augustine’s work of the same title. For the reason that it basically consists of prayers to God, testimonial rather than confessional, Augustine’s *Confessions* has been lately aptly re-translated by Pulitzer Prize winning writer Garry Wills as *Testimony*. See Gary Wills, *Saint Augustine’s Memory* (New York: Viking, 2002), p. xi.

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husband, after catching wind of the scandal about her adultery with their son's teacher Gu Deyin, cast her off by sending her back to her parents' home, but he knew nothing of her intimate relations with eleven other men. In the story, all of her sexual encounters, normal and abnormal alike, are displayed daringly in minute detail, running the gamut from her first taste of "clouds and rain" with her cousin and her seduction of house slaves to such breathtaking secrets as her rape by her elder brother-in-law and her incestuous involvements with her father-in-law and other relatives.¹

Intriguing and astonishing as these unusual occurrences are, none of them, perhaps, seemed to the author so precious as the disclosure of her innermost thoughts about the mystery of love experienced as a young girl in her early teens reading erotic poems in *The Book of Poetry*, or of her consultation with a married woman about sexual matters and of thereafter her eating of "the forbidden fruit". These initial psychological and copulative activities, as made clear at the end of her recollection through the mouth of Yan Qiongke, "would not have been known to anyone else" had she not revealed them.² In other words, one may say that "The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation" is valuable "simply because it is related by [the authoress] herself", or simply because it provides first-hand materials of female emotion, libido, and licentiousness in the way that no one else, male authors in particular, could possibly provide.

In the late 1920s, a woman writer known by her penname Ding Ling (1904-1986) published an autobiographic novella entitled *Miss Sophia's Diary* (*Shafei nushi de riji*), and it was hailed by her contemporaries for its courageous self-exposé of her triangular amours with two men.³ Nevertheless, the heroine in Ding Ling's fiction is but an inexperienced young girl in the arena of love, and all her erotic fantasies and carnal behaviors are confined to a romantic kiss or an embrace, which cannot be mentioned in the same breath as the fleshly openness of Enuo who makes her first attempts at sex before even reaching the age of fifteen, and after joining in wedlock with the Luan household, embarks upon what one might call an "adulterous career", where well nigh everything amatory, seduction, rape, anal sex, group sex,

¹ In terms of its utterly unabashed presentation of sex, Madam Hibiscus's memoir, in my opinion, seems an ancient version of the guiltless sexual autobiography, *The Sexual Life of Catherine M.* written by the French writer Catherine Millet, which has recently been translated into English by Adriana Hunter and published by Grove Press.

² In the erotic literature that I have read, none, except for the short story "Tennessee" by Pat Williams (see *Herotica 3*, ed. Susie Bright, pp. 22-37), can be compared with "The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation" for its verisimilitude and emotional strength in presenting a teenage girl's vague yearning for sex, her naïve amatory experience, and her genuine feeling and infatuation in love.

³ In her real life Ding Ling had a triangular relations with Hu Yeping (1905-1931) and Shen Congwen (1902-1988), and her *Miss Sophia's Diary* seems to have been largely based upon her personal experiences. For more information of the relationship of Ding Ling with her lovers, see C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 262-268.

and incest included, is not outside the realm of possibility.¹ But reviewing her life and comparing it with that of other indulgent women, she finds, with hindsight, that there was nothing in her “misconduct” that has been extraordinary. “Pretty woman with romances now are more than a handful,” she sighs, concluding her reminiscences by reminding her readers of the general situation of debauchery and decadence in the late Ming period. Her libertinism, especially her honest frankness, might surprise even her modern Western *camarades* who have been baptized by the sexual revolution.

Yet *The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation*, however straightforward and shocking it is in illuminating the sexual dynamics of a woman, possesses a highly distinctive feminine quality, which sets it apart from a multitude of similar works by men.² In the majority of late Ming pornography, male authors usually dwell, with relish, upon nothing more than genitals and coitus, and more often than not, exaggerate them to an inappropriate or unbelievable degree. Even those renowned carnal epics, like *The Golden Lotus* and *The Embroidered Couch*, are liable to such a deformity. However, the memoir by Madam Hibiscus is as realistic as one can expect it to be, devoid of excesses and overstatements. A man’s penis can be as large as that of a donkey, but like an ordinary penis, it, too, from time to time, becomes fatigued, unable to perform its nocturnal duty satisfactorily until it has been nursed back to strength on *yang*-strengthening tonics. The greatest rapture of sexual congress can make the female party fall into the state of delirium, unconscious, but many a time the copulation fails to bring about female climax, and on some occasions even hurts the woman at play. The story, like a picture of manners, presents the world of a female sexuality and amorous engagement in a way so authentic and natural, and with details so finely executed, that one can enjoy its sheer delight without being troubled by the melodramatic raunchiness and hyperbolic whims and fancies that most often mar the erotica penned by male authors.

In describing the life of a woman apt to yield to her lust and wantonness, there stands out another strikingly “feminine” feature, i.e., the emphasis on the full range of female emotion, passion, and love. The story gives us such a sense of looking at its heroine in the round, that we can feel not only her lechery and intemperance but her feelings, her yearnings, and her sentimentality as well. We are told how Enuo spends time seeking pleasure and making merry, and how she copulates with men, sometimes with several of them in a row. But we are shown, at the same time, how she falls deeply in love with the ones who genuinely please her.

For instance, Enuo takes her cousin Huimin as her paramour and transcribes a love poem

¹ This is just a historical comparison, not, of course, a value judgment on Ding Ling’s *Miss Sophia’s Diary*, which, obviously, has its own merits. For a comprehensive discussion of Ding Ling’s works, *Miss Sophia’s Diary* included, see Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling’s Fiction: Ideology and Narrative in Modern Chinese Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

² Simone de Beauvoir, the French Author of *The Second Sex*, believed that a woman’s sexuality is intrinsically different from a man’s. “Her eroticism, and therefore her sexual world have a special form of their own and therefore cannot fail to engender a sensuality, a sensitivity, of a special nature.” Quoted from *Erotic Stories by Women*, eds. Richard Glyn Jones & A. Susan Williams (London: Penguin Books, 1996), Introduction, p. ix.

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to lay bare her tender affection for him. After Huimin has been sent back home, she misses him so much that every time she thinks of him at night, she cries, scarcely able to “sleep a wink”. Her fondness for Xiangchan, a beautiful boy actor, seems to bear more the imprint of Platonic love. Xiangchan is “extremely graceful, elegant, and charming”, and his beauty can be favorably “compared to that of a lady fair”. Yet his member is not “extraordinary”, and “having made its way inside” her vagina, “hung in the middle the way a vibrating cymbal hangs in a bell”, incapable of giving her much pleasure. But that does not stop her from dotting upon him. “Your beauty is a feast to my eyes,” she says to him, “and I feel I am too ugly to be your match. The reason I insisted that we make love was simply out of the consideration that it would make us not forget each other afterwards.”

Certainly, we cannot stretch the point that there is in Enuo more love than lust.¹ A man without emotional appeal (like Datu) is unwelcoming and intolerable to her, just as is a man whose virility and stamina are substandard (like Ketao). What Enuo really desires is an ideal combination of gentlemanly tenderness and gratifying sexual performance, which she finally finds in the man who is her son’s tutor. The author, perhaps due to her female talent and instinct, does not present in her memoir a monochrome picture of sex for the sake of sex that one may expect to see in many similar works. Instead she presents a picture in which sex and love are juxtaposed and well blended.

Commenting on this story in his *Bibliography of Popular Chinese Fiction Seen in Tokyo, Japan* (*Riben Dongjing suojian tongsu xiaoshuo shumu*), the late Ming-Qing fiction researcher Sun Kaidi (1902-1992?) says that it is “a masterpiece [in the literature] about the ‘northern community’” (*beili zhi xiong*),² that is, in today’s plain language, the best work in pornography. Patrick Hanan, the translator of *Carnal Prayer Mat*, also expressed a similar opinion in his conversation with me a few years ago.³ Both remind us of the significance of a work that has too long been ignored.

I have commented above on several features of *The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation*: its autobiographic realism, its extravagant and audacious lasciviousness, and its distinctive feminine mode of presentation,⁴ and I should point out that the story strikes me as significant not merely because of these features. Its profound, feminist, and sophisticated

¹ For a detailed discussion of the concepts of love and lust in late Ming, see Martin Huang, *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), chapter one, pp. 5-22.

² See *Riben Dongjing suojian Zhongguo tongsu xiaoshuo shumu* (Shanghai: Shangza chubanshe, 1953), p. 165. But this comment is deleted in Sun’s revised version *Zhongguo tongsu xiaoshuo shumu* (Bibliography of the Chinese Popular Fiction).

³ Patrick Hanan wrote a paper on six Chinese erotic novels entitled “The Erotic Novel: Some Early Reflections”, which was presented at Indiana Conference in 1983, but has never been formally published.

⁴ In many erotic stories written by men, women are presented simply as the object of desire, while men are active subject. “The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation” is good simply because it avoids replicating the language and assumptions of male sexual discourse and presents the female erotic consciousness from a female perspective. In this sense, it is even comparable with Pauline Réage’s *Story of O* (1954).

social content, absent in most fiction in the same category, is equally worth noticing. Sex in the story is not an isolated activity; it is, instead, set in the milieu of the families in which it occurs. Enuo, at an early age, is filled with a curiosity about concupiscence, and it is shown to have a close relationship to her scholarly family background and to her childhood education in *The Book of Poetry*. The environmental atmosphere – her father’s homosexual relations with his house-slave’s son, her mother’s leniency in disciplining her daughter, and her female neighbor’s instruction on the ecstasy of lovemaking – makes its further contribution to her premature decision to sleep with her cousin before getting married. Her husband’s family, with its wealth and nobility, its magnificent buildings and its garden with serpentine verandas, may recall the prosperity and lavishness of the Daguan yuan in *Dream of the Red Mansion* (*Honglou meng*), but inside its seemingly decorous compound, nearly everyone, up from Father-in-law down to Elder Brother-in-law and Younger Brother-in-law, “scratches in the ashes” (*pabui*),¹ enjoying the delights of incest without much scruple. Surrounded by these shameless kith and kin, how could Enuo withstand their contamination and preserve her “purity” even though she might have wished to? The story, in describing the process of Enuo’s “degeneration”, manifests its unique strength, that is, connecting her voluptuous life with her familial and social circumstances, and thereby shedding much light on the *fin-de-siecle* typicality of the morals, as well as of the ways of living, of the late-Ming gentry class.

Madam Hibiscus, in relating her life in a big, patriarch-controlled family, is at once an objective narrator and a sympathizer/critic with her own love and joy and her own suffering and resentment, the subtle mixture of which renders her memoir both true to life and full of ironies. Of her own incarnation in the story, she is a staunch defender, with both self-pity and forgiveness. While there is no doubt that Enuo is a loose woman, a seductress, and an active adulteress, the revelation of her unwillingness to have intercourse with someone she dislikes,² and of her passion for the tutor to whom she is more than willing to devote her life, calls our attention to a different aspect of her psyche – her pursuit of an ideal partner and a happy married life!

In sharp contrast, she shows acrimony rather than compassion as she comes to the portrayal of her “closest kin” such as Father-in-law. Pitiful as he may seem, since his wife is on medication incapable of giving him the conjugal delight he desires, Father-in-law is among the last whom the author would pardon. There is little in his molestation of his daughters-in-law, especially in his peremptory claim at his “right” to sex with them, which will not assault our sensibilities. And he makes himself even more repugnant toward the end of the story as he utters, “My second son, it is your misfortune to have a wife so lewd and unfaithful,” for

¹ A Chinese idiom that refers to incest.

² As Susan William states, “For the most part, it is men rather than women who pay for anonymous or impersonal sex - whatever straight or gay - with those who can be hired on city streets.” See *Erotic Stories by Women*, Introduction, p. ix. The revelation of Enuo’s unwillingness as she is forced into intercourse with men she dislikes is actually a revelation of the author’s female sexual sub-consciousness.

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despite all his attempts to whitewash himself, his words only further betray his hypocrisy and his double-faced duplicity.

“The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation” is no ordinary erotic tale. It implies an outcry for the freedom of women and their personal emancipation, and it is also a condemnation of patriarchal power and the inveterate moral prejudice against the women who deviated from their marriage. Yet for all its meaningfulness, this important work could not but go underground when the Manchu reigned over China, and to the present day, has still remained a banned book to which most Chinese are oblivious. One Western scholar, who had not seen the work, once claimed that first-person flashback, a literary technique used by it four hundred years ago, was “imported” from Europe at the turn of the twentieth century,¹ and the present young generation, whose encounter with traditional Chinese literature is shallow, will certainly be unable to perceive that *Shanghai Baby* (*Shanghai baobei*), a recently published “avant-garde” sexy novel,² is a semi-resurrection of Madam Hibiscus’ memoir in a new, open China. If there are only a handful of classics of which we can say, “They are so important that without them, Chinese literature would have been imperfect, and without them, our knowledge of Chinese literature and society would have been incomplete,” I would make the bold declaration that *The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation* – an erotic autobiography with aesthetic sophistication – belongs exactly to that small group of works.³

These two novellas are translated together here, not so much because they were both products of the sixteenth century, both salacious, and both composed in the literary language (*wenyan*), as because they are both focused on the female sexual life, both encrusted with femininity, and are both “feminist” in the sense that they see female sexuality from the female perspective and espouse equal rights for women to enjoy a freer life – which, to be sure, were the first signs of female awakening in history.⁴ I have arranged the two stories in chronological

¹ “The first-person personal narrative mode is certainly an innovation in the history of Chinese vernacular fiction. Wu Woyao’s *Strange Events* is the first occurrence of the first-person narrative in *baihua* literature. Its appearance is especially significant in comparison with occidental literature, where first-person narrative has been well established since classical Greece.” See Milena Dolezelova-Velingerova, “The Narrative Modes in Late Qing Novels,” in Milena Dolezelova-Velingerova, ed., *The Chinese Novel at the Turn of Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 66.

² *Shanghai baobei* by Wei Hui has been translated into English, and its English version, *Shanghai Baby*, was published by Pocket Books in 2002.

³ What the English translator of *Story of O* says about Pauline Réage’s novel is also quite applicable to “The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation”: “*Story of O* is the work of an original writer, who has dared to present us with certain truths, or intimations of truth, rarely found in literature. However much one may disagree with, or even profoundly dislike, these truths (or, if you will, these ideas), Pauline Réage has done what all good artists aim for and, from the lethargy or our set ways and routine lives, prick us into consciousness, provoke a reaction (whether positive or negative, it matters little) within us; in short, to make us think. That in itself is a rare enough occurrence so that we should be grateful indeed whenever we have the good fortune to encounter it.” See *Story of O* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), p. xii.

⁴ In the context of Chinese literary tradition, female expression of their enjoyment of sexual pleasure can be traced back to the female poet Yu Xuanj’s (844-871) erotic poems and Empress Wu Zetian’s *Shengxian taizi bei* (The Tablet Inscribing the Ascending Immortal Son), which, according to Qigong, was composed and transcribed by Empress Wu herself, describing how she enjoyed her *mianshou* Zhang Changzong, who, dressed like an immortal and riding on a wooden horse, danced for her in the palace. See Qigong, *Lunshu jueju* (Quatrains on Calligraphy) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1990), p. 90-91. But these poetic works lack the social significance as is implied in “The Memoir of a Woman of Infatuation”.

order, despite my personal preference for Madam Hibiscus' memoir, and also by chronological order, have interpreted them, with much emphasis focused on the female eroticism and feminism with which they have a great deal in common.¹ The hardest task for me has been to understand the historical context that made them similar.² Although I have tried the best of my capability, I am not certain whether my comprehension of it is sufficient and correct, except for one thing: it is here where appeared the world's first erotic fictional works, perhaps also the ones of its finest, from which one can see, and hear, and feel what one perhaps cannot in the traditional Chinese literary canons.

¹ I have tried to apply a feminist approach to the analysis of the two stories. But if someone asks me: "What is a feminist approach?" I shall find it hard to answer, for, as Elaine Showalter puts it, feminist criticism combines with "every other approach from formalism to semiotics". See Elaine Showalter, "The Feminist Critical Revolution", in Elaine Showalter, ed., *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory* (New York: Pantheon Books), p. 3. Fortunately I have found that a feminist critic Cheryl Torsney was once in the same dilemma trying to answer the question as I do, and I would like to quote a passage from her essay "The Critical Quilt: Alternative Authority in Feminist Criticism" as my reply to such a question: "Just as we cannot reasonably discuss a single female sexuality, neither can we discuss a feminist literary criticism. Although the underlying impetus for the various 'schools' may be similar..., the permutations are various, making the feminist critical field resemble a pieced quilt. Behind the top is the batting, that which gives the quilt its utilitarian substance, the insulating material that each piece of the top shares in common with each other piece... The pieced top, however, is that which presents the alternatives. The blocks may vary as to pattern or fabric, in structure and texture... Yet each block is stitched to sister blocks. They share and make a space, creating feminist critical quilt, *offering myriad alternatives to androcentric criticism* (italics are mine). So... feminist criticism offers us a critical quilt of plurality, strong and varied, pieced in community. As Annette Kolodny states, 'Only by employing a plurality of methods will we protect ourselves from the temptation of ... oversimplifying any text.'" See G. Douglas Atkins & Laura Morrow, eds., *Contemporary Literary Theory* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), pp. 180-181.

² Late Ming was a very interesting period, perhaps one of the greatest eras in Chinese history. Two recently published or re-republished books, *Wan-Ming shifeng yu wenxue* (The Mood of Literati and Literature in Late Ming) by Xia Xianchun (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 1994), and *Wan-Ming sixiang shilun* (Historical Interpretation of Late Ming Thoughts) by Ji Wenfu (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1996), approach this era from different angles, and may be of some help in the further exploration of the social context for the origins of the late Ming erotica.

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THE LORD OF PERFECT SATISFACTION

PREFACE

What is “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction” about? It is about Empress Wu Zetian’s sexual life. The story may be risqué, yet it is as enlightening as history. Long ago, due to the arrangement of the Marquis of Liu,¹ the Four White-haired Recluses came to the assistance of the Crown Prince and the Han dynasty thereby continued.² What a great contribution the Marquis made to his country! Empress Wu Zetian, tyrannical and shamelessly dissipated, deposed the legitimate successor of the Tang and proclaimed herself Emperor, and no one was able to stop her. Had it not been for Aocao’s endeavors, notwithstanding that his influence arose through illicit sexual relationship, the re-enthronement of Zhongzong would have been out of the question. Was not Aocao a man meritorious to his country? Without him, even persons with the ability of the Marquis of Liu or of the Four White-haired Recluses could not have helped restore Zhongzong as Heir Apparent, however hard they had racked their brains. “Entering through a window” as *Book of Change* says was precisely the method that Aocao adopted. So the story may be risqué, yet isn’t it as enlightening as history?!

An anonymous literatus of Huayang

¹ The Marquis of Liu was Zhang Liang (? – 186 B.C.E.), who, after helping Liu Bang establish the Han Dynasty, was enfeoffed in Liu, or Liucheng, of Xuzhou, where he had first met the emperor.

² Liu Bang, the founding emperor of the Han dynasty, intended to depose the Crown Prince, the son by Empress Lu, and to install Prince of Zhao, the son by his favorite concubine Lady Qi, as heir apparent. The Marquis of Liu, giving in to the entreaty of Empress Lu, sent for the four old recluses of noble character and high prestige, whom Liu Bang respected most, for help, and they successfully persuaded Liu Bang to give up the idea of deposing the Crown Prince. For details, see Sima Qian, *Shiji* (Records of the Grand Historian) (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1976), vol. 6, pp. 2044 – 46.

THE LORD OF PERFECT SATISFACTION¹

By Xu Changling

Wu Zetian, the empress of the imperial palace, was the daughter of Wu Shihuo,² governor-general of the Jingzhou prefecture. Her child-name was Mei-niang.³ When she was fourteen years old, Emperor Wen⁴ heard of her beauty and took her into his harem, conferring upon her the title of *cairen* (consort of third rank).⁵ Long afterwards, the Emperor fell victim to his disease. The future emperor Gaozong,⁶ then heir-apparent, came into the inner palace to look after him, and with all attentiveness fed him decoctions of herbal medicine. Mei-niang was waiting upon the Emperor by his bedside. At the sight of her Gaozong conceived a deep passion for her and wished to enjoy her favors. Yet a chance did not present itself until he went to the privy, where Mei-niang, after following him in, went down on her knees before him, with a golden basin of water held deferentially in her hands. Gaozong teased her by splashing its water upon her, intoning:

*Suddenly I feel as if I was on Mount Wu,⁷ with a girl of my dreams,
But alas, though she is within my sight is yet far beyond my reach.*

Mei-niang replied at once by improvising another two lines in the same rhyme:

*How fortunate that before even in the brocade tent we meet,
I have sprinkles of den⁸ from the golden basin received.*

Gaozong was greatly delighted, and led her, hand in hand, to an empty room inside the palace, where they engaged in sexual congress until both of them, in tender affection, had tasted immense pleasure. After having finished, Mei-niang held on to Gaozong's clothes, sobbing.

¹ This novella is also known as "A Story of Enjoyment in the Bedchamber" (Kunyu qing zhuan).

² Wu Shihuo (577 – 635) came from a rich family in Bingzhou and had been engaged in lumber business for many years before serving Taizu in his establishment of the Tang dynasty. He was later appointed Minister of the Board of Work. He died at his post as Governor of Jingzhou.

³ "Mei-niang", in Chinese, means "charming girl". This was a name Emperor Wen gave to Wu Zetian when he selected her as his concubine at the age of fourteen. No historical accounts mention her original name. But according to Lei Jiayi's guess, "Wu Yue" might possibly be her original name. For details, see Lei Jiayi, *Wu Zetian zhuan* (Biography of Wu Zetian) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2001), chapter 2, pp. 22-32.

⁴ Emperor Wen, whose name was Li Shimin (r. 627-650), is now usually called "Emperor Taizong".

⁵ In the Tang dynasty, consorts of the third rank consisted of 27 concubines, and nine of them were called *cairen*, literally meaning "talented woman".

⁶ Gaozong, whose name was Li Zhi, was on the throne from 650 to 683.

⁷ Mount Wu is a metaphor for the trysting place.

⁸ A euphemism for the ejaculation of semen.

“Although I am a low-ranking concubine,” she said, “I have long been serving His Majesty. Now to fulfill the wish of your Highness, I have violated the statute against illicit fornication. I don’t know, My Lord, that when you are enthroned, how you will treat me?”

Gaozong undid the translucent, nine-dragon jade buckle from his belt and gave it to her. “Upon my accession,” he vowed, “I will make you my empress!”

Mei-niang bowed twice and took it. From that time onwards they would make love whenever Gaozong came in to attend the moribund Emperor. On the verge of his death, the Emperor had Mei-niang sent to the Ganye Temple,¹ where, as was the custom, she shaved her head and entered the Buddhist orders as a nun. After his enthronement, Gaozong went to the Ganye Temple to burn incense. He privately told Mei-niang to allow her hair to grow, and when her hair grew seven feet long, summoned her back into the imperial harem and conferred upon her the title of secondary Zhaoyi (consort of second rank).

Lady Wu, after her entry into the Zhaoyi Palace, entered immediately upon a rivalry with Empress Wang as well as with the concubine Xiao Shufei² for the Emperor’s favor. That year she was thirty-two years old.

“Your Majesty is on the throne now,” she one day said to Gaozong, sobbing. “Don’t you remember what you promised me when you gave me the buckle of your belt?”

Gaozong considered the idea seriously and began to estrange himself both from the Empress and Xiao Shufei. Finally he decided to dethrone the Empress and replace her by Lady Wu. The next morning, at the morning audience, he told Changsun Wuji³ of his intention.

“Empress Wang is childless whereas Lady Wu has sons,” he said. “I am planning to remove the Empress and install Lady Wu in her place. What do you think?”

Wuji did not dare to utter a word. An elder statesman standing close to the throne, whose name was Chu Suiliang,⁴ made so bold as to offer his opinion: “Empress Wang was crowned in the grand coronation. Our late Emperor, ere his decease, held Your Majesty’s hand as he said to me and other ministers, ‘I am entrusting my good son and good daughter-in-law to your care.’ His words still ring in my ears and I dare not forget them. Empress Wang has not committed any crime and there is no reason to demote her. If Your Majesty really wishes to replace her with someone else, pray select one from those most distinguished aristocratic clans in the country. Lady Wu served our late Emperor and then entered a Buddhist temple as a nun. This is known to everybody and there is no way of covering it up. As a humble servant, I

¹ Ganye Temple was also called Anye Temple. See Wang Diwu, *Wu Zetian shidai* (The Era of Wu Zetian) (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chuban she, 1991), p. 73.

² Her name was Xiao Liangdi. Shufei was the title granted her indicating her status as a concubine. In the Tang dynasty, Shufei, together with Guifei, Defei, and Xianfei, were consorts of ranks below empress.

³ Changsun Wuji (? – 659), a native of Luoyang in Henan province, was the elder brother of Empress Changsun, Taizong’s brother-in-law. In the palace coup taking place at Xuanwu Gate, he helped Taizong seize power. He was a top official during Taizong’s reign, and was appointed *taivei* (official of first rank) when Gaozong ascended the throne.

⁴ Chu Suiliang (596 – 658) was a high-ranking official in Taizong’s reign, and after Gaozong’s enthronement, was appointed Prime Minister. He was a famous calligrapher.

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should not give Your Majesty counsel against your will. I deserve the death penalty for my offence.”

Having so said, he removed his official cap and bumped his head violently on stairs until his forehead bled. “I am returning my ivory tablet¹ to Your Majesty,” he said. “Pray permit me to go back to my native village.”

Lady Wu, hidden behind the screen, heard every word Chu Suiliang had said. She roared ferociously, “Why not flog this sharp-tongued traitor to death!”

Furious, Gaozong put Chu Suiliang immediately to the cruelest torture, which ended his life at once.² Changsun Wuji was then demoted to the prefecture of Tanzhou as governor-general.³ A historian of later times, upon reading this incident, composed a poem as follows:

*Lord, how loyal you were as a minister,
And how selfless your word of advice!
How can we find your valor so upright,
Elsewhere but in Bi Gan the advisor?⁴
Your heart changed not its color of blood,
Even when you were going to resign.
Hitting your forehead on the royal flight,
You were shedding red rivulets of flood.
O, the dominance of the relentless phoenix,⁵
Silenced all who dared to speak with no fears.
Incestuous relations⁶ she enjoyed for years
Muddling the emperor through her lips.
But sage rulers were on the throne finally,⁷
Rehabilitating you with overdue respect;
Your devoted heart was then at long rest set,
Appreciated by all and admirably.*

With Chu Suiliang sentenced to death and Changsun Wuji banished to a distant

¹ This is another way of saying “I am going to resign.” In ancient times, officials were obliged to hold a board in a long, narrow shape, usually made of ivory or jade, when attending meetings at court, so that they could jot down on it anything important. The ivory tablet therefore became a token of the tenure of one’s official position.

² In history, Chu Suiliang was not tortured and executed. He was only demoted.

³ In history, it was Chu Suiliang, instead of Changsun Wuji, who was demoted to the prefecture of Tanzhou as governor-general. Changsun Wuji was demoted to Qianzhou, where he died of illness.

⁴ Bi Gan was the uncle of the tyrannical King Zou (r. 11th century, B.C.E.). He, despite great risks, offered admonitions against the king for many times and was finally killed by the King.

⁵ Empress Wu.

⁶ Emperor Wen (Taizong) and Emperor Gaozong were father and son, and Wu Zetian had sexual relations with both of them.

⁷ “Sage rulers” refer to the later emperors of the Tang dynasty such as Zhongzong (r. 705 – 710), Dezong (r. 780 – 785), and Wenzong (r. 826 – 841). Zhongzong transferred Chu Suiliang’s family back to the capital when he was on the throne, Dezong bestowed upon him a posthumous title, and Wenzong appointed his offspring to some important official positions.

provincial post, no one else dared to voice any more his opinions. Lady Wu was then enthroned as empress.

Empress Wu, now on the throne, was willful and unbridled. She presided over the court as equal partner with her husband Gaozong, overstepping her authority and wreaking tremendous havoc on the imperial regalia. Gaozong showed great favor to her and was also very much afraid of her. People therefore called them “sovereigns in tandem”.

Later, suffering from dizziness and impaired vision, Gaozong was unable to write instructions on the memorials submitted to the throne, so very often he had to rely on Empress Wu in reading reports and making decisions for him. The Empress was by nature intelligent, and was also learned and widely-read in history and literature. She was capable of handling matters to his taste most of the time.

She framed a case against the former Empress Wang and the concubine Xiao, and after convicting them of the crimes they had allegedly committed, flogged each of them with two hundred strokes, cut off their hands and feet, and threw them into a wine vat. Then, after they had been thoroughly wine-saturated, she had their corpses dismembered and buried in the rear courtyard.

After her enthronement, Empress Wu ennobled her father Wu Shihuo as the Marquis of Zhou, and later bestowed upon him the title: Prince of Taiyuan.¹

When Gaozong passed away, Heir Apparent Li Zhe,² posthumously titled Zhongzong, ascended the throne. He installed his principal consort, née Wei, as his empress. Yet his reign did not last long, and in the fifth year of his sovereignty³ he was suddenly set aside by Empress Wu⁴ as Prince of Luling. His younger brother Li Dan⁵ was then designated to replace him, but was allowed to reign only in name. After seven years of his nominal rule, Empress Wu demoted Li Dan to “Emperor Expectant” and proclaimed herself the Peerless Empress. She built seven temples to her appropriately-titled ancestors, and soon afterwards, dispatched troops to kill the Prince of Langya, Li Chong, and the Prince of Yue, Li Zhen, and had the Tang royal clan slaughtered. She re-named herself Wu Zhao,⁶ called her reigning dynasty Zhou, and gave herself a grandiose new title: the Peerless, Holy, and Golden-wheel Emperor.⁷

¹ When Wu Zetian reigned as Emperor, she bestowed upon her late father many other grandiose titles.

² Li Zhe, or Li Xian, was Gaozong’s seventh son and Empress Wu’s third son.

³ In history, Li Zhe reigned less than a year before he was set aside by Empress Wu as Prince of Luling. He was banished to Junzhou first, and was then transferred to Fangzhou.

⁴ In the original Chinese text, the words *tailhou* (meaning “empress dowager”) or the word *hou* (meaning “empress” or “empress dowager”) are used alternatively after the enthronement of Li Zhe. But in the translation, for the sake of consistency, I still refer to the female protagonist as “Empress Wu” or “the Empress” without making the change accordingly.

⁵ Li Dan was the fourth son of Empress Wu.

⁶ The character *zhao*, which consists of two parts, the top part meaning “bright” and the bottom part meaning “sky”, was a new word coined by Empress Wu. At that time she coined more than ten new characters, and *zhao* was one of them.

⁷ In Chinese history Wu Zetian was the only empress who called herself “emperor”, and it was said that she often dressed herself in male attire as she presided over the court or attended a grand ceremony. But after her death, her son, Zhongzong, changed her title “emperor” back to “empress”.

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She was attempting to appoint her nephew Wu Sansi as Heir Apparent when Prime Minister Di Renjie¹ remonstrated.

“Your Majesty,” wrote Di Renjie, diplomatically, “there is a problem in your appointment of Wu Sansi as heir apparent. After cessation of your life, your nephew would ascend the throne. Yet since Your Majesty is his aunt, how can he erect a monument in your memory in *his* ancestors’ temple?”

Empress Wu, after reading the memorial, set up Li Dan as emperor instead. But she made him adopt her surname Wu, which raised much opposition from people who were anxious to topple the Zhou House and re-establish the Tang royal lineage. But

*With the parrot’s² dream shattered thanks to Di’s advice,
Back on the throne was her young son from high skies.³*

Empress Wu knew that being a notorious adulteress, people were reluctant to accept her. She was therefore relentless in suppression, and those falsely accused by her of staging armed rebellions and thereafter condemned to death were numerous. Indeed she was a ruler both of easy virtue and of cold-blooded cruelty. A historian of later times satirized her in the following poem:

*A hen crowing in the vacated Purple Mansion,⁴
Showered flowers crimson;⁵
On the throne sat a woman,
Who drove Emperor to the East Habitation.⁶
She and the Zhangs⁷ enjoyed their intimacy,
Restoring order was left to Lord Di.⁸
Yet the coup d’état was foreseen,
Even today one bears Li Chunfeng in memory.⁹*

Since the Empress placed her reliance on the Zhang brothers and employed evil minions like Lai Junchen and Suo Yuanli in carrying out her unlawful orders, no officials dared to offer their admonitions. Had it not been for Di Renjie’s effective remedies, the state affairs would

¹ Di Renjie (607 – 700) was a capable and upright official, renowned especially for his courage in remonstrating with Empress Wu. He was also known as Judge Di, and is a famous protagonist in numerous *gong’an* novels, a large part of which has been adapted and translated into English by the late famous sinologist Robert van Gulik.

² “Parrot” refers to Empress Wu, for in Chinese, “parrot” (pronounced *wu*) is homophonous with the surname Wu.

³ “High skies” is a hyperbole for a faraway place to which the Heir Apparent was banished.

⁴ The Purple Mansion (*zichen dian*) was a building in the inner section of the imperial palace in Luoyang, where Empress Wu often did her routine works. See Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian* (Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government) (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1987), vol. 14, p. 6419.

⁵ This line innuendoes Empress Wu’s bloody suppression of her dissidents. “Jishu” (several trees) in the original Chinese text is obviously a mistake; it should be “jishu” (a tree with a chicken on top of it). For its allusion, see *Xin Tang shu* (New History of the Tang) (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1997), vol. 11, p. 3483.

⁶ East Habitation (*donggong*), i.e., the east wing of the palace, was where an heir apparent, not an emperor, lived.

⁷ The Zhangs refer to the two Zhang brothers, Zhang Changzong (? - 705) and Zhang Yizhi (? - 705); both of them were Empress Wu’s favorite lovers.

⁸ The Prime Minister Di Renjie. Cf. note 29.

⁹ Li Chunfeng (602-670) is a Taoist seer.

have no doubt fallen into disastrous shambles and the Empress would have had no time for sexual enjoyment with a newly-introduced man named Xue Aocao,¹ whose intriguing story is well worth relating.

Back at the end of the Sui dynasty (589-618), Xue Ju called out his troops in revolt in Longxi and proclaimed himself Emperor of Qin. His second son Xue Renjing,² together with his elder brother Xue Rengao, was defeated in a battle at the Shallow Waters,³ and after his surrender, was executed in Chang'an.

Renjing's favorite concubine Suji had previously had a liaison with their house servant and had just become pregnant. After having been kicked out by Renjing in a fury, she lived at the Six Waters, and when Renjing was defeated and executed, she alone escaped. She gave birth to a son called Yufeng.

Yufeng, when grown up, was very fond of reading *Master Sun's Art of War*⁴ and *Wu Qi*.⁵ Due to his family's calamity, however, he had no intention of pursuing an official career. He married in Cao and had two sons, the elder one named Xue Boying, and the younger one, Xue Aocao. In the third year of the Yifeng reign (678) when Gaozong was on the throne, Yufeng passed away, and Aocao and his elder brother moved to settle in Chang'an. But in the first year of the Yonglong reign (680) Boying died also. Aocao then traveled to Luoyang and there he sojourned. That year he was eighteen years old.

A man of seven feet in height,⁶ Aocao was light-skinned and handsome, with finely chiseled facial features. His arms were strong and muscular, and his strides were agile and vigorous. He not only had extensive knowledge of the classics and history, but was good at calligraphy, painting, musical instruments, and chess as well. Since he had a great capacity for liquor, he also often went on chivalrous adventures.

He had a huge member, the prodigious size of which verged upon abnormality. Having heard of its reputation, nosy young men in his neighborhood would invite him to drink if they ran into him on street, and would then beg him to display it for their amusement.

"I am encumbered with such a large object and have yet to taste its carnal delight," Aocao would reply. "I can't even put it to use for myself, how, then, can it provide you fellows with pleasure?"

Upon their insistence, however, Aocao would produce his member, which, in full display, revealed the luxuriance of a ridgy and colossal trunk. There were four or five dented areas

¹ Xue Aocao is a fictitious character, of whom there are no records in both official and unofficial histories. He is largely based upon the historical figure Xue Huaiyi, who later also appears in this story, briefly.

² Xue Renjing is a fictitious character. *Xin Tangshu* (New History of the Tang) only mentions two sons of Xue Ju (? – 618), the elder son Xue Rengao and the younger son Xue Renyue. See *Xin Tangshu*, vol. 12, pp. 3705 – 3708.

³ Shallow Waters (Qianshui, or Qianshui yuan) are in Gansu province.

⁴ *Master Sun's Art of War* (Sunzi bingfa) is a book on military affairs by the famous strategist Sun Bin, a contemporary of Mencius (372 – 289 B.C.E.).

⁵ *Wu Qi* is also a book on military affairs by the famous strategist Wu Qi (? – 381 B.C.E.).

⁶ This is perhaps not an exaggeration, for the measurements in ancient China were a little different.

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around its unbonnetted head, and as the gristle arose fervently, the flesh protruded slightly as if snails were emerging out of their shells. From its head to its base, twenty odd veins and ridges jutted out like worms, so lustrous and shining that they could be perceived even in a dark cave. This was simply because he had never immersed himself in female fluids.

The viewers, astonished upon seeing it, would try to hang on the top end of his erection a bag containing a peck of grain, and Aocao's ability to bear the weight with little difficulty would make them all convulse with laughter.

Someone once took him to a brothel. The courtesans there all became very excited as they saw a beautiful young man coming in for a visit. They drank with him while singing and playing games of chance, and there was none who did not take a fancy to him. However, as Aocao undressed and exposed that object of his to them, they all ran away with loud shrieks except for a lecherous old prostitute, who tried every possible means to get it into her, but without success.

Having become famed for his extraordinary endowment, Aocao found no woman willing to marry him. Being alone at home, he could not but feel lonely and bereft.

By that time, Empress Wu was already over sixty. Princess Qianjin introduced to her a man called Feng Xiaoyao,¹ to whom the Empress showed a great favor. Xiaoyao had been a rascal selling potions in the city of Chang'an before entering the palace. He had an endowment both large and hard, and with some medicinal aphrodisiacs applied to it, was capable of intercourse with women for a whole night without feeling tired. The Empress fell deeply in love with him. On the pretext that she needed a man with clever ideas, she had him tonsured as a monk, gave him a religious name Xue Huaiyi,² and thereafter often summoned him into the palace to supervise work, which provided her with excellent opportunities for tryst with him. Huaiyi was therefore promoted to the chief stewardship and enfeoffed with a dukedom.

Now being rich and powerful, Huaiyi became haughty and arrogant. He not only kept a large harem outside, but also started to contend with the court physician Shen Huaiqiu³ for the Empress' favor. His jealousy resulted, in a fit of fury, in his arson on the Yanming Hall of the White Horse Temple.⁴ Empress Wu consulted with Princess Taiping, and then had some strong palace women tie him up and kill him.⁵ When his corpse was carried back to the temple, he was reported to have died of a sudden illness.

Shen Huaiqiu, who was good at the art of the bedchamber and hence was promoted also,

¹ Princess Qianjin, the eighteenth daughter of Emperor Gaozu, was about the same age as Gaozong.

² The reason that Empress Wu changed his surname to Xue was simply because her daughter Princess Taiping's husband was surnamed Xue, and the Empress was therefore able to tell people that Xue Huaiyi was an uncle of her son-in-law.

³ In official histories, his name is Shen Nanqiu.

⁴ In history, Xue Huaiyi set fire to Ming Tang (or Bright Hall) in the palace, not to the Yanming Hall of the White Horse Temple.

⁵ According to *Zizhi tongjian* (Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government), Xue Huaiyi was killed by Prince of Jianchang Wu Youning and his stalwart bodyguards. See *Zizhi tongjian*, vol. 14, p. 6502.

did not equal, after all, the Empress in sexual capacity, and collapsed after lengthy service to her. He died of seminal depletion.

Empress Wu had now turned seventy.

Although she was of advanced age, she maintained her health so well that her teeth showed no sign of deterioration,¹ her hair remained as thick and smooth as before, and her body was well fleshed with the sexy allure of a young woman. With her vital powers well conserved, she developed a stronger desire for carnal indulgence. No one, whether a veteran prostitute or a lascivious wench, was able to equal her in lewdness.

It so happened that at that time someone introduced to her Zhang Changzong,² a beautiful youth with an enormous member. Empress Wu, in her interview with him, found him indeed supremely handsome and attractive.

Changzong then introduced to her his elder brother Yizhi,³ who, too, was fair-complexioned and had an oversized male organ. After having tried him out, the Empress concluded that he also lived up to her expectations.

Both brothers then became her favorite lovers. They were respectively appointed Director of Horses and Carriages⁴ and Director of the Library and the Archives,⁵ and were granted fiefdoms as well.⁶ There were none, within and without the palace, who did not stand in awe of them. All and sundry called Changzong Chancellor Six and Yizhi Chancellor Five, and likened the beautiful Chancellor Six to the lotus flower.

In the second year of the Tianshou period (691) when winter set in, Empress Wu, seized by a whim to enjoy the bloom of flowers, decided to make an excursion with Changzong and Yizhi to Shangyuan the imperial park.⁷ She issued an edict to her officials:

*To Shangyuan I'll go tomorrow,
Posthaste you should let spring know.
Overnight must flowers grow,
Make sure no morning wind to blow.⁸*

Obedying her edict, hundreds of flowers were in blossom the next morning, and because of this, people nowadays still call the tenth month⁹ *xiao yangchun* (small spring). Does this mean that Heaven, too, succumbed to the will of the Empress? Someone wrote a quatrain in commemoration of this unusual phenomenon, with his attention much focused on

¹ In fact, when the empress was sixty-nine years old, she grew a new tooth, and she took this as a sign of her longevity and therefore changed the reign name accordingly (the new reign name was called Changshou, meaning “longevity”).

² The Zhang brothers' grand uncle Zhang Xingcheng served in the early years of Gaozong's reign as Prime Minister.

³ It is not quite clear whether Yizhi and Changzong were real brothers, or cousins.

⁴ Director of Horses and Carriage was an official of rank 3b in Tang dynasty. See *Xin Tangshu*, vol. 4, p. 1253.

⁵ Director of the Library and the Archives was an official of rank 3b in Tang dynasty. See *Xin Tangshu*, vol. 4, p. 1214.

⁶ Changzong was granted Dukedom of Ye, and Yizhi, Dukedom of Heng, each governing three hundred households.

⁷ Shangyuan, also called Shanglinyuan, was built in the Latter Han, and its location was in the eastern quarter of the city of Luoyang.

⁸ According to *Tangshi jishi* (Historical Events behind the Poetry of Tang), Empress Wu, in the third year of Tianshou Reign (692), did issue such an edict, written in poetic form.

⁹ The tenth month on Chinese lunar calendar is roughly equal to December on the Western calendar.

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Changzong's flowery beauty:

*After the audience the Empress went out into sunlight
An edict urgent brought an early spring to her sight
Everywhere were flowers with various colors of mix
Yet the most beautiful was Lotus the Chancellor Six*

There was another poem, written by a contemporary of the time, describing how Changzong looked like the reincarnation of Wang Zijin¹ as he, by order of the Empress, rode on a colorfully-painted wood stork with a robe of feathers draped upon him:

*In talent you could equal Fuqiu Bao of olden times,²
And were as beautiful as Ding Lingwei³ in appearance.
Had historiography not linked your name with crimes,
O Zhonglang,⁴ who could deny your unusual eminence?*

Changzong and Yizhi took turns to enter the palace every other night to perform their services to the Empress. On the days they were off duty, they would seek the company of beautiful women, indulging themselves in wine and orgiastic revelry all through the night. No wonder they were often tired as they lay down with their Empress, and without sufficient energy, would from time to time fail to maintain their erection. Empress Wu was of course not satisfied.

This was the second year of Yanzai (694).⁵

One day, after a banquet, the Empress sat in the Happy-spring Garden enjoying the enchanting scene and balmy air. Flowers were falling, piling layer upon layer on the ground; catkins were flying, lighting on her clothes. Hidden birds were chirping wildly, neither the male nor the female being willing to be outshone by the others' high pitch, and bees and butterflies darted up and down busying themselves searching for right spots in flowers for their invasion. Deeply moved by the sights and the sounds, the Empress felt amorous, wishing to disport herself in bed with Changzong and his brother immediately. But she hesitated to summon them, thinking that they might be too tired to meet her demands.

She sighed.

The eunuch Niu Jinqing,⁶ noticing her restlessness, went up the flight of stairs and asked, "Is something troubling Your Majesty today? Are you missing your favorite son, Prince of Luling, so long absent?"

Jinqing actually knew very well what the Empress was sighing for. His inquiry had a

¹ Wang Zijin, or Wang Ziqiao, is a character in Chinese mythology. It is said that after thirty years of practice on Mount Song, he became a Taoist immortal and ascended to Heaven.

² Fuqiu Bao was an erudite scholar in Han dynasty. It is said that he was a student of Xun Qing (313 – 238 B.C.E.).

³ A character in Chinese mythology.

⁴ Zhonglang refers to Changzong. Zhonglang was one of the numerous official titles Empress Wu granted him.

⁵ There was only one year in Yanzai period. In the following year (695) the reign name was changed to "Zhengsheng". The author purposely made a mistake about the year here. Cf. note 76.

⁶ Niu Jinqing is a fictitious character. In history there was an official named Zong Jinqing, and he was not a eunuch.

purpose.

The Empress was vexed.

“How stupid you are to ask a question like this!” she said. “You, old servant, have worked a long time in the palace. How can you still not know me?”

Jinqing prostrated himself on the ground at once and then ventured to say, “At the risk of beheading, I, your humble servant, wish to say something important to Your Majesty.”

“Go ahead!” said the Empress. “I will not punish you.”

Jinqing continued:

“Observing your holy condition, I have found that men like Yizhi and Changzong are often not good enough to sate Your Majesty’s desire.”

“Ah, you are right, smart boy!” said the Empress, breaking into a grin.

“In my view,” Jinqing went on, “Yizhi and Changzong have abused their wealth and power. They deride you as being senile, and are often unwilling to fulfill their duties if not summoned again and again. Their attendance is forced and their affection unnatural. They pretend they enjoy your charms, but in fact, they do not. That is why they are feeble in merrymaking and shrink even before Your Majesty has achieved total gratification. And, Gracious Lady, it is rumored that their mansions are filled with singing boys and dancing girls on top of the bebies of beautiful concubines they possess. How can they serve Your Majesty heart and soul?”

The Empress fumed.

“I have been deceived by these slaves!” she cursed. “They claim that their energy is limited. It has never dawned on me that they have other women. I can rid myself of them like meat on my table!”

“Pray calm your fury, Royal Lady,” said Jinqing. “They are not worth getting your axe and anvil smeary. I have someone, a handsome young man about thirty years of age, to introduce to you. This young man lives in the city of Luoyang; his name is Xue Aocao. He is endowed not only with beauty and talent, but with a virile member much larger than those of Yizhi and Changzong. Your Majesty needs simply to issue an order, to authorize me to bring him to the palace. Surely he will be able to serve Your Majesty well, and his company, whenever needed, shall be guaranteed.”

“Do you know him?” asked the Empress.

“No, I don’t know him personally,” Jinqing replied. “But according to what the young men in his neighborhood say, his endowment is so large that they can’t even wrap their hands around it nor measure it by a ruler. Its head is similar to a snail, its body resembles a skinned rabbit, and its veins look like worms. They also claimed that it could bear a bag of grain without bending even slightly.”

Empress Wu, her back leaning against a screen, heaved a sigh.

“Pray say no more,” she said. “I understand.”

She ordered a servant to take out from the Imperial Treasury two gold ingots, two pieces

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of white jade in round, flat shape, four bolts of colorful brocade, and a carriage with four horses,¹ and personally drew up a summons, which ran:

Occupied with myriad of state affairs, I have long been lacking a private moment to heed my own secret yearning: to invite a man of supreme caliber for an intimate chat. I have heard that your aspiration is as lofty as your endowment is great and extraordinary, and I am anxious to make your acquaintance to allay my longing. Detailed instructions regarding related specifications will be given you upon your arrival, and it is my sincere wish that you would not be so proud and aloof as to refuse my kindness.

Jinqing, carrying the edict as well as the gold and the brocade, went to call upon Aocao, who, upon seeing the envoy, said, "I am of humble origin and might profane the august virtue of Her Majesty. I am not a worthy person and must beg your pardon for my inability to obey your order."

"Sir," said Jinqing, "if you miss this golden opportunity for a rapid advance in your career, you might all your life remain an ordinary fellow languishing in your neighborhood."

"There are proper ways to advance," said Aocao. "It is shameful to use one's sexual organ for social climbing!"

"Do you think that you can fly so far and high as to leave this world?" the eunuch whispered in his ear. "Besides, you scarcely have knowledge of intercourse. Who else would be able to accommodate you but Her Majesty?"

Aocao saw no option but to go with him. On the road he sighed, "A man of ability should advance through his talent. What subject is there in the Civil Service Examinations that is designed for what I have today been recommended for?"

Jinqing sped away and reported to the Empress, who dispatched at once both officials and guards on horseback to welcome her guest. Upon his arrival, Aocao was ushered by Jinqing into the presence of the Empress in the Rear Hall. Aocao kowtowed, and then by her order, took a seat and was served tea. When he was finished with tea, the Empress ordered her female attendants to conduct him to the translucent jade bath-house to be bathed.

The bath that the Empress bestowed on him was called "marrow-refreshing spa bath". All the female attendants waiting upon him removed their clothing, and tempted by their alluring sensuality, Aocao's penis naturally stiffened, rising big and riotous under their watchful eye. They could not help giggling and had to cover their mouths with their hands.

"Her Majesty has found the right person!" they remarked covertly.

After having bathed, Aocao was given a fresh set of apparel – a coat resembling a hovering crane in the clouds, a sword inlaid with seven precious objects² accompanied by a belt, and an emerald hat of majestic splendor which bore on its top a black kerchief. Aocao

¹ Only a dignitary could ride in a carriage with four horses.

² There are, in the Buddhist scriptures, a variety of explanations about seven precious objects. According to *Lotus Sutra*, they refer to: 1) gold, 2) silver, 3) colored glaze, 4) tridacna, 5) agate, 6) pearl, 7) rose.

put them on, looking, at a distance, as beautiful as a celestial being.

The Empress was delighted. Clapping her hands, she exclaimed, “An immortal is descending into my residence!”

At her bidding, a meal was immediately served. Jinqing was invited, and the three of them sat around the table eating and drinking. The drinking vessels they used were ruby-made goblets in the shape of a lotus flower,¹ and the beverage was renowned grape wine made in Xiliang.² They drank several toasts, and Aocao was about to quaff another when he noticed that the Empress, her face slightly red, was quite aroused. With her interest no longer in wine, she instructed those waiting upon her to go prepare the East Chamber of Huaqing Palace with soft and warm bedclothes, and after having told Jinqing to clear out, she repaired there with Aocao, hand in hand.

Inside the chamber they sat side by side. Two young maids entered holding a golden basin of rose-water bestrewn with flowers. No sooner had they placed the basin in the room than the Empress waved them off. She closed the golden-phoenix door herself and latched it with the nine-dragon bolt. However, the female attendants working outside could still peep through the door chinks to view what was going on inside as they passed by, and consequently, knew each and every detail of the ensuing scene.

Empress Wu was now washing her privates in the rose-water.

She asked Aocao, “Jinqing says that you are still a virgin and have yet to experience nuptial delight. Is that true?”

“It is very unfortunate that my endowment is oversized,” Aocao replied, “and this is the very reason why so many years have elapsed and I have still remained a bachelor. Today an imperial edict has brought me here, and I don’t know, in my state of trepidation, what to show to Your Majesty. As my contour is wretched and my fleshly form unrefined, I am afraid that I might not be sufficiently qualified for the services I am to perform to Your Majesty’s holy configuration. Pray allow your female attendants to have a look at my nether region first. It is my humble suggestion that Your Majesty proceed no further till you have received their favorable reviews. A sudden exposure of my frame to your Majesty’s eye might too strongly stir your senses, of which I fear I might not be able to make amends even though I died ten thousand deaths.”

“Your endowment is really so large?” asked the Empress. “I would fain see it.”

She bade Aocao remove his underclothes, and remaining seated, looked askance his organ, which indeed appeared huge and lengthy. The Empress kept looking at it for a long moment.

“Sir,” she then said jokingly, “you must depart at once, for I can’t tolerate so extraordinarily fierce a man as you!”

¹ The emperors of the Tang dynasty, claiming that they were offspring of the Taoist philosopher Lao Tzu (his real name was Li Dan), worshipped Taoism. But Empress Wu, since she had joined the Buddhist order before re-entering the palace, more interested in Buddhism than Taoism. The lotus flower is the symbol of Buddhism.

² Xiliang was in the western part of the present-day Gansu province.

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In the meanwhile she reached out her hand to fondle his penis, which was still rather limp. “How large this beastly thing is!” she remarked. “And it has not yet had sex!”

She unbuttoned her garb; her pudenda were clearly displayed. The pubic area was a little swollen, and its flesh was corpulent and hairless. Aocao did not dare to touch her. The Empress grabbed his hand and then guided it to where her privates were situated. Aocao stroked them under her direction, his penis becoming gradually engorged. Suddenly, it straightened up, and the concavities around the knobby head all filled up, with its veins and ridges protruding visibly. The Empress seized it the moment she saw it standing stiff, as if she had obtained a most valuable treasure.

“What an enormous treasure!” she exclaimed. “It is, to be sure, not an earthly thing. I have seen many men, and yet not one of them possessed an object like this. In ancient times, there was Wang Yifu¹ whose livid handle² was as smooth and bright as white jade, and there was no counterpart that could match it for its beauty. Now that your member is also so beautiful, I might as well call it ‘white-jade livid handle.’”

She fondled it tenderly. In a state of sweet confusion, she was overwhelmed with lustful sensations and threw herself down on her back, with her head resting on the Guizi-made immortal pillow³ and her hips bolstered up with a cushion in the shape of a crescent-moon. Lifting her feet up, Aocao placed himself against her vulva, and she guided him in with both her hands. At the beginning, the Empress’ vagina was rather dry; Aocao found it hard to cleave a smooth entrance into her.

“Go slowly,” said the Empress.

Being impelled to enter, Aocao battered against her in hard pushes. The Empress, uneasy in receiving him, frowned her eyebrows and clenched her teeth, only to manage to sheath the tip of his instrument. It was not until a stream of liquids had oozed out and her passage had become smooth that Aocao was able to wedge himself further in. Yet feeling hurtful as he was encroaching, the Empress made haste to pull out a string from her drawers and tied it around the middle portion of his organ.

“Both the size and the stiffness of your livid handle are beyond my comfortable endurance,” she said. “It hurts me so much that I can’t stand the pain. You must cease a few moments and then re-commence.”

Before long, Aocao found her wriggle her body toward him, her eyes looking dull, her hands burning, and her cheeks turning vermilion. She gasped, and out her female fluids flowed. Aocao resumed his penetration at once and started to thrust back and forth. He did

¹ A historical personage living in the Six Dynasties.

² “Livid handle” (*chenbing*) is a euphemism for penis. *Chenbing*, as a term of Buddhist tinge, is not easy to translate into English, for the first character “chen” in Chinese implies both the meanings of “being dusty” and “being something that can be stained by desire”, that is, it, in this phrase, both indicates the color of the object in question and its sexual function. My translation has tried to cover both its meanings, although, I am afraid, the reader might find it far from satisfactory

³ Guizi was in the present-day Xinjiang Autonomous Region.

so for about two hundred times. The Empress, in her ecstatic trance, clasped Aocao's waist and moaned, her voice thrilling, her eyes closed, her sweet sweat exuding, her limbs stretched out on the cushion, languorous.

"Royal Majesty," Aocao called, "are you all right?"

The Empress made no response. Aocao was about to withdraw when she quickly embraced him, saying, "Oh my darling son, keep it in there until I have been completely satisfied."

Once again Aocao thrust into her, each time driving vigorously in yet pulling out gently. After about a hundred times of piercing thrust, the Empress' vaginal fluids secreted abundantly, soaking the string she had tied on Aocao's livid handle.

"Oh my dear! How you are satisfying me!" she blurted, caressing Aocao's shoulder tenderly. "I should grant you the title: Lord of Perfect Satisfaction. The next year I am going to change the reign name. I shall call it the Reign of Perfect Satisfaction!"

"Royal Majesty, it is amazing that you are filled with so much vigor and vitality," Aocao flattered. "Your features and complexion, well kept in healthy condition, have struck me as if you were still a young lady glowing with a pristine juvenescence. As a humble servant of yours, I would consider it my greatest honor to be able to provide you with the satisfaction you desire. In my previous years of living in the mortal world, I have not been able to meet a single woman. It is Your Majesty who has given me such a delightful pleasure. On my part, I have been entirely sated. Yet Your Majesty must have been suffering immensely as my ugly object took liberties with your jade body. Oh, how so numerous offences I have committed to you that I can't even count them with the hair on my head! I only wish Your Majesty not to abandon me. I would die contented should I be allowed to continue to serve Your Majesty in your bedchamber."

"Lord of Perfect Satisfaction," said the Empress, "if you never slack off in your services of me, I would never for a single moment forget you. From now on, don't call yourself 'servant' nor address me as 'Majesty'. You and I are as intimate as husband and wife, and all the protocols between sovereign and subject should not apply to us any more."

"Having not brought upon myself any unforeseen disaster," said Aocao, "I should consider myself the most fortunate person in the world. How could I dare to expect Your Majesty to reduce yourself so considerably as to condescend to me? Your loving affection for me is already very profound!"

Now busy with talking and joking, Aocao was unconscious that his livid handle, though still lodged inside her private quarters, had slightly slowed down its motion.

"Are you tired?" asked the Empress.

"Not yet," answered Aocao. "I haven't even had enough!"

"You are just beginning to learn to employ that object and don't know quite yet how to enjoy its pleasures," said the Empress. "It takes some while to taste its greatest delight. You must not stop if I am not yet satisfied."

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Aocao lifted her feet again.

“Wait a moment,” he said, and hastily fetching a towel, put it before her vulva. He then wiped his penis dry. As it became erected again with his own rubbing, Aocao re-entered her.

“What a hungry man you are!” said the Empress. “I might never be able to fill up your hearty appetite.”

The Empress wished to take a little break, yet at the sight of Aocao being aflame with lust, re-placed herself in a posture to receive him. The more Aocao thrust, the happier the Empress became. Vehemently she rocked and wriggled her belly, her fluids flooding, and her vagina, filled with steaming heat, issuing forth incessant gurgling sounds. Aocao raised his waist and then pounded at her harder than ever.

The Empress embraced him tightly. “Oh, my dear Lord of Perfect Satisfaction! How cruel you are!” she moaned in an affected tone. “I was almost dying at the climax of pleasure!”

For a long while, they remained cuddled in each other’s arms.

“Let’s stop now,” said the Empress. “We must not overindulge ourselves.”

“Then what is the point of this invitation?” said Aocao. “If Your Majesty wishes to treat me nicely, you shouldn’t fear my big tummy.”

“Sir, how much do you eat and drink?” asked the Empress.

“I eat as if to fill a huge gully and drink as if to pour water into a river,” Aocao replied.

“Well, well,” said the Empress, “if what you said is true, Lord of Perfect Satisfaction, you are bound to consume a huge amount of materials of your hostess.”

“Needless to say, Madam,” said Aocao. “But I sincerely wish that Your Majesty could tolerate me, for I am now beside myself with inflaming passion.”

Aocao stealthily loosened two circles of the string and penetrated more deeply.

Feeling a sudden twinge in the central spot of her delight, the Empress knew that Aocao must have done something without her knowledge.

“Dare you take liberties with no permission?” she burst out.

“Royal Madam, my audacity is but a little test of your generosity to me,”¹ said Aocao. “Should you be able to tolerate me further, I would very much appreciate it.”

“Toleration is certainly a good virtue,” said the Empress. “But what if one enjoys pleasure while the other suffers pain?”

Aocao took no notice of her words and forced the entry of another two inches. Being unable to bring herself to part with him, the Empress had no alternative but to yield to his assault. Aocao thrust to this way and that until he felt he was about to ejaculate. An inexperienced man in sex, he had no iota of idea that his penetration had gone so far as to

¹ This sentence, *guanguo si zhi ren yi* in the original, is a quotation from Confucius’s *Lun Yu* (The Analects), and D. C. Lau has translated it as follows: “Observe the errors and you will know the man.” See *The Analects*, trans. D. C. Lau (London, Penguin Books, 1979), chapter IV, p. 73.

reach the deepest niche of the Empress' orifice. The niche of a woman, located in the innermost recesses, is fleshy resembling the bud of a flower in shape, slightly open. When a man's glans touches it, he can feel its contracting pressure and will then feel a delight throughout his entire body, so good as there is no giving a description of. Conscious of the fiery tip piercing her most interior spot, the Empress clipped it hastily and kept it in there until Aocao spent, his ejaculation giving her an enormous rapture. Having long been living in celibacy, Aocao shot his sperm like a spout of water, which, joining the Empress' female fluids, formed a surging torrent and gushed forth.

The Empress clutched him tightly.

After a while, she said, "I am worn out."

She wiped her privates with her pants, got up, and ordered the door to be opened. Looking out, she found that it was already late afternoon.

She then had a feast laid out in the front veranda and dined with Aocao. Her happiness being at its height, she summoned Niu Jinqing and promoted him to the position of the Lieutenant of Imperial Entrance Guards.¹ She also conferred upon him the title of Supervisor of the Inner Services, and granted him a gold vat containing a full load of pearls, two silver vats filled with gold and silks of different colors, and thirty thousand strings of cash.

"You are superior to Wei Wuzhi!"² she said after rewarding him. "Even thousands of pieces of gold and jade can't repay you."

The next day Empress Wu proclaimed the inauguration of the Period of Perfect Satisfaction,³ and also granted an amnesty, its pardoning and remitting of punishments exceeding what had normally been permitted.

The Prime Minister Yang Zhirou⁴ raised opposition.

"After receiving the edict of Your Majesty," he said, "officials have been rather confused in understanding the meaning of the new reign title. It seems neither a symbol of luck nor is it related to the principles or the achievements of your administration. I suggest to use another name."

"It is I who ordered the name to be thus changed," the Empress yelled. "Who dare disagree with me?"

She removed Yang from his position. Everyone else at the court was flabbergasted; they ceased babbling on the subject.

The Empress, now so deeply in love with Aocao, intended to deprive the Zhang brothers of their official positions and properties and give them to Aocao. She also considered building a mansion for him.

¹ Lieutenant of Imperial Entrance Guards was an official of rank 3b in the Tang dynasty.

² Wei Wuzhi introduced Chen Ping (? – 178 B.C.E.) to Liu Bang, for whom Chen ping designed six ingenious strategies, which finally led to the establishment of the Han dynasty.

³ In history, the reign period of Perfect Satisfaction was 692.

⁴ In history Yang Zhirou (i.e., Yang Zaisi) was good at flattering Empress Wu.

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Aocao declined her.

“Your Majesty has a large number of favorites,” he said, “and it is no doubt very harmful to your reputation as a sovereign of virtue. For this reason, I beg Your Majesty not to grant me anything. Besides, you know I am single; a big mansion is entirely useless to me.”

The Empress could do no more than defer to his wishes.

The next year, the consorts Liu and Wu of the Emperor Expectant¹ came to learn, after some prying, the real meaning of “Perfect Satisfaction”. They remarked, “Aocao’s member is as large as that a mule, and yet Empress Wu can receive it more than comfortably!”

The Empress, upon hearing their gossips, flew into a towering rage. “Those bitches dared to laugh at me!” she cursed, and ordered both women to commit suicide.

The Empress was by nature suspicious. When Gaozong had been alive, numerous concubines and female attendants had been killed by her with a variety of excuses simply because she had doubted them. Now due to Aocao’s intervention, a great number of palace women escaped her punishment.

Having now developed an extreme intimacy with Aocao, Empress Wu would habitually place her legs across his thighs as they sat together, or cuddle herself in his arms while sleeping. They enjoyed tremendously in their carnal affinity.

One day, the Empress expressed to Aocao her most profound loving affection.

“Reading *The Annals of Spring and Autumn*,² she said, “I was surprised at Duke of Jin’s infatuation with his concubine Liji. I thought he must have been crazy to kill his heir apparent Shensheng and banish his own sons Yiwu and Chong’er without feeling guilty. Now that I have deeply fallen in love with you, I can’t help but laugh at Duke of Jin as I compare myself with him, for his love of Liji seems to me rather superficial now.”

Aocao was astonished.

“When I first entered the palace,” he said, “the transference of Heir Apparent to Luling had been completed. Obviously it is not appropriate to compare me with that concubine since I did nothing of sowing discord between you and your son. Outsiders, should they hear Your Majesty’s words, might wrongly blame me, which is bound to give me a great deal of troubles.”

The Empress comforted him. “It was simply because I so doted upon you,” she said, “that I unwittingly made such an indiscreet remark.”

On the second month of the first year of Yanzai (694),³ the Empress had a balmy pavilion built in the inner garden, and invited Aocao to drink with her. When she was in the middle stages of intoxication, she laughed and babbled to Aocao lustfully, “You have had intercourse with me many times, but never once did you put all of your livid handle within

¹ In history Empress Wu killed the consorts Liu and Dou (not Wu). See *Xin Tangshu*, vol. 11, p. 3489.

² The earliest annalistic history of China edited by Confucius.

³ Notice the disorder of time here. Cf. note 62.

me.”

At her bidding, a gilded, exquisitely wrought tent was set up in the pavilion. The Empress took Aocao into her arms, saying, “Let’s indulge ourselves heartily today! You may enter the entire length of your organ, but mind you go slowly.”

“Royal Madam, there is in fact not much of it that has been left unused,” said Aocao. “You know in my services I did utmost to make Your Majesty feel happy and satisfied. Today Your Majesty are in so high spirit as to permit me a deeper penetration, but what if you end up suffering? Then all my loyal efforts would be wasted.”

“Don’t worry,” said the Empress. “I fear only that you might push too hard and too fast. If you act gently, there is certainly nothing to be afraid of.”

She laid her head on a high pillow and bolstered her waist with a folded quilt. Aocao, holding his livid handle, place it against her vulva. But instead of sticking it into the opening immediately, he moved only in mild gyration to get its tip moist. Trembling with eager desires, how the Empress wished that he would go straight into her deepest recesses without delay! However, Aocao purposely postponed his in-depth insertion and made only shallow poking at the gate of her grotto, until a stream of genial juices flowed down like secretions oozing out from a snail. The Empress was about to compel his compliance when Aocao abruptly drew out.

“You short-lived knave!” cursed the Empress in sweet voice. “Why withdrawing?”

Obligingly Aocao re-entered her at once. Taking a pause at where she had once circled her string, he asked, “Is Your Majesty feeling all right with so deep a penetration?”

The Empress smiled, her eyes remaining closed.

“Don’t go very fast,” she said.

Turning a deaf ear to her request, Aocao entered another two or three inches.

“Too rash!” she screeched.

Aocao then bent down a little, and raised her buttocks with his hands to see how he was being received. As he noticed that with his gentle motion she was being highly wrought up, he entered another two or three inches.

“How wonderful!” exclaimed the Empress. “I am now in a state I have never experienced before. I am dying!”

Though rather limp in her delirium of pleasure, the Empress, her tone trembling, her breathing broken, lifted her feet up and set them across Aocao’s shoulders, and then, with all her might, wallowed ten times or so. Aocao grabbed her hips and moved back and forth with her, in fast tempo.

“Are you hot and itchy down there?” he asked, teasingly.

“No words can describe how good I am feeling,” the Empress answered. “I am wondering how much of it has yet to enter?”

“About two inches,” said Aocao.

“It is getting larger here,” said the empress. “You’d better slow down to ensure that you

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won't drive all the way to the hilt."

"But in my state of ecstasy," said Aocao, "I am no longer able to contain myself."

Aocao rammed forcefully against her till he had gained a complete admission, leaving virtually no room for a single hair to squeeze in. The Empress was beside herself with rapture. Voluptuously she snuggled close to him, rocking and wriggling as vehemently as she could. After a hundred times or so she came to a halt, and looking at Aocao, said weakly, "Darling, let's take a break now. I am feeling very dizzy and don't know what is going to happen to me."

At the height of his titillating ardor, Aocao continued without stop, however. Pleasure had overtaken him and he had been carried away. After another hundred thrusts or so, wisps of heat emitted from inside the Empress' vagina.

"Oh my sweet daddy, I am dying!" she cried. "Cease! I really can't endure it any more!"

Aocao paid no attention and went on pumping and pounding as before. The female essence of the Empress was exuding and dripping, making sounds like one will hear when several men are wading through a puddle. Presently the Empress' limbs were stretched out and she was swooning, her eyes shut, teeth clenched, and breathing getting weaker and weaker. Aocao, alarmed at the sight of her coma, hastily pulled himself out and helped her sit up. It took her a long while to be brought around.

"My dear Madam, what is the matter?" Aocao asked upon her revival. "I was terrified by what was happening to you and don't dare to do it with you any more."

The Empress stared at him for some moments before embracing him.

"Never ever again be so rash!" she said, with tears in her eyes. "If you had not desisted and I had passed away, how would you handle the situation?"

"Royal Madam," Aocao murmured, "I had not been aware that I could make you lose consciousness. How terrifying it was! I am impotent now, unable to make it with you again."

Because of this shock, Aocao's livid handle had shrunk.

"We'd better stop now," said the Empress. "How fortunate for you that I am not dead and you may later on continue to enjoy my body!"

She laid her head upon Aocao's lap, and in a manner of licentiousness, toyed his genitals with her cheeks.

"I had always been preoccupied with yearnings for a man of extraordinary ability," she said. "But never had I expected that Jinqing would find me a fellow with so huge a member. My regret is constant that I has not encountered you earlier. Now that I have been blessed with the possession of you, I hope only that you won't be in like a lion and out like a lamb the way Yizhi and his brother did to me."

"Surely I won't," said Aocao. "Should I dare to be unfaithful to Your Majesty, may God punish me! Royal Madam, you hold the power over my life. Should you find me in any way not keeping my word, execute me with your sword and tear my body into thousands of pieces! It is only that I would not know what would become of You Majesty afterwards. I had been an

utterly useless person before making your acquaintance. Had it not been for meeting Your Majesty, the taste of so delicious a pleasure inside the skirt would have been unimaginable to me!”

“No one but I can receive you,” said the Empress, “and no one but you is able to satisfy me. I still remember my experience of serving Taizong¹ at the age of fourteen. Though his member was only of medium size, since I was at the time very young, it hurt me so much that I could hardly bear it, and consequently, during the entire first half a year of sleeping with him, I enjoyed no delight whatever. When I was twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, I began to serve Gaozong, and he was much larger and stronger so far as that part of him is concerned. But every time he had sex with me, he cared only about his own enjoyment and rarely was he so considerate as to start or stop out of consideration of my gratification. Fortunately, after his death, I obtained Huaiyi the monk, whose endowment, though appearing at the beginning not so large as that of Gaozong, would gradually grow longer, harder, and hotter once it had entered my furnace, and his engagement could last a whole night without stop for a wink of sleep. Also very virile was Shen Huaiqiu, my late personal physician. In order to satisfy me, he took no break even after ejaculation. His overexertion eventually resulted in his illness and loss of life. The two brothers Changzong and Yizhi, who had been with me from time to time before you, are both beautiful youths. While Yishi was remarkable for the largeness of his organ, Changzong’s was more characteristic of its length, which was about six or seven inches. Both of them could provide me with much pleasure. It was only that after discharge they could achieve no more erection, and sometimes even in the midst of action occurred impotence. How I resented them because of this! All those men I have just now told you about are among the most outstanding ones in the world. Nevertheless, in comparison with my Lord of Perfect Satisfaction, they are not worth mentioning. From now on, Sir Might, you need not thrust all the way to the root. Enter half of your object and it should be good enough for me!”

The Empress was at the time in her twilight years. Yet she was still very nice-looking and sexy, and her teeth and hair, kept in excellent condition, remained little changed. However, with such a big gap in age, one being young and the other approaching her last phase of life, it was inevitable that their coition would harm one while benefiting the other. That was why Aocao often looked exhausted.

One day Aocao and the Empress reposed in Jinfang Palace. Crabapples outside the front veranda were in full bloom, and the Empress plucked a flower to decorate her hair. As she leaned herself against a green screen, she enticingly made a half exposure of her buxom breasts and ogled sideways at Aocao with seductiveness. Aocao was set aflame instantly. He moved to her side and pressed his mouth against hers, and no sooner had blankets been spread out on the ground than he started intercourse with her, their merry-making lasting until

¹ See note 4.

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they had achieved total satisfaction.

Later they made love in the same fashion a number of times, which goes without saying. One of those days when their copulation had been finished, the Empress went to hold her morning court. Changzong and Yizhi were among the officials being present, yet the Empress did not even cast a glimpse at them, not to mention granting them gifts. Nor did she summon them in private after the court session was over. The two brothers were surprised at her change of attitude. In spite of their suspicion, however, they knew nothing of the cause.

One day, on her visitation of the Hualin Garden, the Empress summoned all the scholars of the Northern Gate, including Changzong and Yizhi, and entertained them with an extravagant banquet. Changzong's cheeks looked as beautiful as peach flowers, and his smile was alluringly charming. The Empress was aroused at the sight of his fascinating appearance and ordered each of the brothers to toast her longevity with a jade goblet. Raising his glass, Changzong deliberately revealed a portion of his arm, which appeared almost the same color of jade. Unable to restrain herself, the Empress pinched his tender muscle with her nails, and told Changzong, as the feast was drawing to completion, to go back to the palace with her. This naturally led him to the expectation of making love with her. However, as they reached the gate of the palace, the Empress stopped.

"I can't do it with you," she said, ogling him with affection for a while. "But trust me, I love you as dearly as before."

She instructed her servants to give a thousand catties of gold to Changzong and another thousand ounces of gold to Yizhi. The receipt of her largess, to be sure, increased no more than their deeper suspicion. After making inquiries, the two brothers found out that it was Aocao who was in her favor. They could not but sigh in vain. The Empress felt guilty. In order to show her kindness and affection, she paid visits to the Northern Gate from time to time, and drank and flirted with the two brothers as if there had been nothing changed in their relationship. She also often bestowed gifts upon them. But never did she once again make use of their sexual services.

Now came the first year of the Yuantong period.¹

Early in the summer, when the skies were clearing after a shower, Empress Wu and Aocao took a stroll in the rear courtyard, hand in hand. Hearing birds hidden in the thicket of green willows chirping and calling each other, the Empress was moved, an impetuous desire surging up abruptly in her mind.

"Even birds know how to enjoy their conjugal relations," she sighed. "How can we humans be deprived of such pleasure?"²

¹ This is a fictitious reign name. Judged from the context, it should be Shengli reign in history, and the first year of Shengli reign was 698.

² This sentence, with a little alteration, was later used by the Ming playwright Tang Xianzu (1550 – 1616) in his famous play *Mudan ting* (Peony Pavilion).

At her bidding, the female attendants hastily fetched her embroidered blankets of Shu,¹ as well as her cushions and quilts, and spread them out at a secluded spot.

“Today let’s imitate the way birds make love!” said the Empress, laughing.

They removed their lower garments. To perform the act of love in a different way, the Empress lay prostrate on the blanket and then stuck up her buttocks, telling Aocao to make a rear entrance. Aocao did as she said, and meanwhile reached out his hands to fondle her breasts, like a calf eagerly desirous of getting milk from its mother. Their immeasurable delight, accompanied by intermittent pumping sounds, is indescribable.

One day the Empress said to Aocao, “The other day I saw Chancellor Six. Being basked in the morning sunlight, he streamed a beauty as lovely as a lotus flower emerging from water. Chancellor Five appeared also strikingly neat and charming.”

“A gentleman is delighted in seeing other people share pleasure,” said Aocao. “Why not summon them and let them serve Your Majesty at night?”

The Empress laughed.

“Having had a taste of the fresh lichee from Nanhai,”² she said, “I can’t but feel that the plum is as insipid as wax. Nor have I found the small amount of water useful any more after viewing the magnificence of the ocean. I would rather not summon them.”

“But I am not jealous!” said Aocao.

“Surely you are not a sour grape,” the Empress agreed. “It is just that I don’t know how to deal with too much sweetness.”

With this she burst out laughing.

The sixth month of that year was extremely hot. The Empress found the only place that could provide her with some coolness was the Pavilion of Breeze, where she went to retire at night. A gold basin of water containing Longlin stones was placed in her sleeping chamber, sending out wafts of cold air, and her bedclothes, made of greenish gauze, were imported from a state called Quxu, very soft and dustproof, upon which was spread a Korea-made split-bamboo mat. The Empress would be supinely stretched out on the mat, naked, with the incense manufactured in Funan³ burning at her bedside to repel mosquitoes.

One night, in her sound sleep, Aocao sneaked in. Sidling up to her couch, he found her nude body shining in the moonlight like a piece of jade, so pretty as if it were a painting. Aocao was stirred beyond bearing. He pulled out his penis and slowly inserted it into her vagina. The Empress moaned in her dream. Presently she woke up, and opening her eyes, was surprised to find herself being mounted. By that time, she had been thrust about ten times already.

“You dared to enter the forbidden chamber without my authorization!” she said, joyfully. “What punishment do you suppose you should get?”

¹ The present-day Sichuan province.

² Naihahi refers to the south China.

³ Cambodia.

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“Ay, my dear Queen Lady,” Aocao teased back, “my entry into the Pink Gate¹ was a dangerous task, yet in facing such a risk, I was thinking of no more than the loyalty to Your Majesty.”

Amused by his repartee, the Empress let her thighs disclosed more widely, to invite Aocao’s ravishing assault. Instead of launching into a fierce attack, Aocao put her arms around his neck, raised her two legs, and then taking her upon himself, began to walk around in the room.

“My goodness,” the Empress cried, giggling, “even the most lecherous prostitutes or the wildest women would shy away from trying this sort of lewd pranks! Only you and I in this world can so wantonly indulge ourselves in such a play without restraint!”

Later, on the mid-autumn night, Aocao was invited to enjoy the moon at the Hall of Fairies in the Shangyang Palace. He drank toasts to the Empress, and conversed with her in an intimate undertone. Cheerful and lighthearted as he was on this happy occasion, Aocao nevertheless could not help sighing as peals of mirth brought him a mixed feeling of joy and sorrow. When happiness reaches its climax, sadness comes in, and it occurs to almost everyone.

Among the palace women present, the most intelligent one was Shangguan Wan’er, a consort of the second rank.² Being capable of perceiving the Empress’ intention, she lifted her cup to drink a toast to her health, and then began to sing:

*Wind, the autumn wind, is blowing gently,
On the merry night of tranquility;
Dews, crystal dews, are shining brightly,
When the moon beams beautifully.
O, how I am honored to have the opportunity,
Of serving your heavenly Majesty;
As you and your celestial intimate fairy,
Enjoy each other affectionately.
Sir, why do you still appear so melancholy,
And sigh, from time to time, sadly?
Look, how numerous men of immortality,
Live on the moon, very lonely!*

The Empress was delighted. She ordered Shangguan to sing a song to Aocao, to urge him to imbibe more wine. Shangguan sang once again:

Bright, how very bright, is the moon tonight,

¹ Hongmen, a place where Liu Bang, who later became the founding emperor of the Han dynasty, visited his rival Xiang Yu at the great risk of his life and would have been killed but for the help of Fan Kuai and Zhang Liang, is, in Chinese, homophonous with “pink gate”, a euphemism for vagina. Here Aocao is playing a punning game.

² Shangguan Wan’er was Zhongzong’s concubine. She also had illicit relationship with Wu Sansi. Her father Shangguan Yi was killed by Empress Wu.

*Breeze gentle and light brings aroma inside,
The palace at midnight is as joyful as in the daylight.
In the flight of love the couple of phoenixes¹ delight,
Time is going by, and the younger days are finite,
May Sir Knight serve our Highness till she's satisfied.*

Aocao drained his cup. Raising his re-filled vessel, he presented to the Empress an impromptu song:

*The empyrean palace I could not see,
Its beautiful scene was concealed from me.
As far apart as soil and cloud we used to be,
How profoundly I am indebted to thee.
Long long live thine Imperial Majesty,
May thou like Heaven enjoy eternal longevity.
How I wish to follow thee to the heavenly city,
Soaring in the Milky Way with conviviality.*

The song having been sung, Aocao, taking advantage of his intoxication, took the Empress into his arms. He no longer cared about the proprieties between sovereign and subject, steeping one of her breasts in his goblet. He drank half of the goblet and urged his Empress to finish off the remaining half. The Empress complied with pleasure.

Then, hand in hand, they went to retire to the Comfort Pavilion. After a brief rest, the Empress removed her clothes, wearing nothing but her Lingnan petticoat. She encircled her arms around Aocao's neck and ordered a female attendant to fetch her a small fragrant Guilin cake. She chewed it slowly, and then stuck out her tongue to send it into Aocao's mouth.

Aocao, as she set her leg across him, plunged his livid handle sideways into her vagina. Both being highly passionate, the entrance was not difficult. Transported with delight, the Empress turned her body further toward him, the favorable movement of which engulfed the entire length of his inserter up to the hilt. Aocao kept it where it was and made all shakes within her. The Empress felt no pain at all. She then called her female attendants to hold candles in their hands and stand nearer to her, and meanwhile bade Aocao lie on his back. She sat astride him, and using her delicate hand, guided his penis into her vagina. Now on top of him, she bounced up and down till she had got the large part of his penis sheathed: only the scrotums, about three or four inches long, were left outside. Aocao rammed her from below.

"You knave!" the Empress gasped, grinning. "You know you could make me die in your hands! Don't move! Let me see how it enters and exits."

She bent to look how they were merged, with her hands supporting herself on the couch. In overpowering orgasms, her female fluids streamed out profusely, and she had to change her towels five times. However, the Empress showed no sign of fatigue till about the third watch

¹ Empress Wu and Xue Aocao.

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(1 am). By that time she could hardly control her limbs with facility. Noticing that her weariness had stretched to the utmost bearing, Aocao let her lie down. He then mounted her and pounded her vigorously hundreds of times, each time driving all the way up to her deepest recesses. The Empress, her eyes closed, moaned and groaned loudly without cease.

“Oh, what a pleasure!” she exclaimed. “This time is very different. I feel I am dying. Harder! Thrust into me harder! One more moment of such rapture and I would be willing to die without regret!”

For a long while afterwards, she said no more words. Feeling his imminent discharging, Aocao raised himself and then thrust with all his strength. The Empress clenched her teeth, her face turning pink.

“Oh my son,” she blurted, “I am truly dying!”

The sperm, like a spout of water, shot out.

Exhausted, Aocao drew himself out and lay down beside her. After having cleaned him with her towel, the Empress laid her head on Aocao’s thighs and let her face stroke his member, and then set to sucking it. She was blushed red when she found that her female attendants, standing at the bedside with candles in their hands, were riveting their curious eye on her fellatio.

“Come lick it,” she said to them. “Its head is so large that I am afraid you might not be able even to put it into your mouths. But you can at least lick it to have a taste.”

After a while, she remarked, “Only I can deal with such a beastly object, though quite a few times I almost failed to sustain myself. Girls like you, I believe, might have long been dead.”

The female attendants smiled only, making no replies.

The Empress embraced Aocao tightly. When Aocao was re-erect, she engaged him in copulation once again. Aocao thrust back and forth hundreds of times until she was limp, totally satiated.

One day, Empress Wu invited Aocao to drink when peonies in the rear courtyard were in blossom. They sat outdoors sipping their wine while viewing the blooming flowers.

“You are muscular and robust,” said the Empress, tipsy. “Could you carry me in your arms and make love with me while strolling along in the garden?”

“Certainly,” said Aocao.

They both removed their clothes. Aocao entered her after locking her arms around his neck and setting her two legs at either side of his waist. They ambled along the flower nursery, and every few paces took a brief pause. A musical band was playing for them the tune “The Red Peony is Right in Front of me”, with its words altered according to the situation. The Empress sipped wine from her golden cup and then transferred it to Aocao’s mouth. Agitated by their felicitous intimacy, two white deer and two dancing cranes in the garden also pressed their buttocks or tails against each other. Everyone observing the scene tittered in secret. But

the Empress paid little attention, as though she and Aocao were all alone by themselves.

One night, they slept a sound sleep after excessive enjoyment in sensual pleasure, their naked limbs entwined with each other. They did not rise until the sun was high in the sky.

“Lord of Perfect Satisfaction,” said the Empress when she got up, “you could not have had so happy an encounter even if you had been a State Graduate with distinctions and had been appointed Prime Minister. You have served me with all your heart, and in return, I have given you the privilege of enjoying the food and clothing provided only to the monarch. No one can say I am not kind to you. I could even have ennobled you but for your adamant rejection of it. But I will honor your brothers or your relatives by promoting them to the positions of eminence. I promise you I will never go back on my words.”

“I have told Your Majesty before that I have neither family nor siblings,” said Aocao. “Since my meteoric rise has no bearing on my personal talent, I am not very interested in titles or wealth. What I am concerned about is only one thing, which I shall tell Your Majesty despite that you might be unwilling to hear and might therefore execute me. Yet I really wish Your Majesty to grant me a chance. Nothing could honor me more than your willingness to incline your ear to what I am going to say to you. Even if my words might cost me my life, I would have no fear in facing the consequences.”

“Tut, tut!” said the Empress chidingly. “You should not say so inauspicious words, Lord of Perfect Satisfaction! You are my better half, and how could I not listen to you?”

“I appreciate very much your kindness of respecting me,” said Aocao. “For what reason was Prince of Luling demoted and banished to the remote Fangzhou? Did he commit a serious crime? And to my knowledge, he has been mending his ways lately. Should people misunderstand that Your Majesty has an intention of destroying the Tang Royal House, is it not unlikely that after you are gone a disaster that befell the clan of Empress Lu¹ will re-take place? People are not yet tired of the Tang dynasty. In my humble opinion, Prince of Luling should be summoned back to the capital and reinstated. Your Majesty is of noble character, enjoying high prestige and commanding universal respect. What other happiness can be compared with this?”²

The Empress was hesitated.

“Royal Majesty,” Aocao went on, “if my petition grated on your ear, I shall have no choice but to castrate myself. This is the only way I can make my apology to the people.”

He took up a knife and plunged it into his genitals. Though the knife was swiftly snatched away by the Empress, the head of his organ had been injured already, its cut being about half an inch deep, bleeding badly. The Empress fetched a clean cloth immediately and wiped the

¹ Empress Lu, after the death of her son, Emperor Hui, enfeoffed a number of her relatives and installed them to most important positions. But when she died, they, together with numerous members of Lu clan, were slaughtered. For details, see Sima Qian, *Shi ji* (Records of the Grand Historian) (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1985), vol. 2, pp. 395 – 412.

² In history, it was the Zhang brothers, instead of Xue Huaiyi, who persuaded Empress Wu to summon Prince of Luling back to the capital.

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blood dry. When she breathed on the wound to warm it, she could not help crying.¹

“Oh my very silly son!” she scolded him, weeping. “How could you do such a stupid thing!”

“I am not your real son,” said Aocao. “You might take me as your temporary son, yet I can’t supplant your permanent offspring who is your own flesh and blood. You really can’t abandon him.”

The Empress swayed.

Henceforward, Aocao would find every opportunity to give his admonitions until Prince of Luling, with the strong backing of Lord Di, had been summoned back and restored as Heir Apparent. Those who had resented Aocao for his illicit relationship with the Empress had always been harboring an intention of murdering him, and upon hearing his assistance in re-establishing the Tang dynasty, however, they changed their attitude and praised him to the sky.

It was now the second year of the Yuantong.² Empress Wu was seventy-six years old. She often felt indisposed, and her daily diet was accordingly reduced. One day she said to Aocao, “Quite a few years have elapsed since I knew you. Although we have been enjoying each other’s company, our happy time can last no longer. My health is now rapidly declining, and it makes me rather worried about your situation.”

“I would not dare to bring the matter up had Your Majesty not mentioned it,” said Aocao. “Sexual intemperance is detrimental to well-being and Your Majesty might thereafter have to abstain from overindulgence in order to maintain fitness. You are now in your venerable age. Should you in any case surrender you life, I, your humble servant, certainly have no reasons not to follow you. I care little about my own body, I should assure you. But I am worried that my corporeal coarseness might profane your holy spirit.”

“Don’t worry,” said the Empress. “I will find out a way for you.”

Several days later, she said to Aocao, “Here is my plan for you. My nephew Wu Chengsi, Prince of Wei whom I love dearly, is very kind. You may go to lodge at his residence. Once you learn that I have passed away, change your name and escape. With all your money and treasure I have given you, it should be easy for you to find in the South or in the Southwest a comfortable place for yourself.”

The next day, the Empress summoned Wu Chengsi.

“You know my relationship with Xue Aocao,” she said to him. “I love you more than any of my own sons and today I entrust him to you. Let him take refuge at your home and treat him nicely. Don’t intervene if he wishes to go out. But mind you must be very careful. Should outsiders know his sojourn at your place, you are bound to have a great deal of troubles.”

¹ In history, someone did suggest in his memorial to Empress Wu that Xue Huaiyi should be castrated since he spent too much time inside the palace supervising the building of the Ming Hall, but the Empress ignored that memorial.

² The fictitious second year of Yuantong corresponds in history to the second year of Shengli, i.e., 699.

Wu Chengsi was appalled.

“I will do as you say!” he replied

That evening Empress Wu gave a farewell banquet in honor of Aocao. Displayed on the table were delicacies from land and sea, including fetus of leopard, hump of camel, tail of red goat, dried meat of green snail, as well as a variety of the most renowned wine paid to the Tang Imperial House as tributes by the surrounding vassal states, such as Xiliang in the west and Thailand in the south. The Empress, holding her gold goblet studded with seven precious objects, toasted Aocao, and her low-toned murmurings, intermingled with her sobbing, accompanied each cup she drained. Aocao, in return, drank his fill. As he got intoxicated, he could not help weeping, too.

“Royal Majesty,” he whimpered, “from now on I can’t hear the tinkle and jingle of your jewelry and trinkets any more. Take care of yourself, and eat nutritious foodstuff whenever your appetite allows you. I am so terribly sorry for not being able to carry out to the end my duty of serving you. Should you, after your ascension to Heaven, still need me, may your spirit descend, and I would be at bedside waiting for you...”

His words unfinished, the Empress had been already drowned in tears, weeping and wailing loudly, incapable of uttering a word.

“Lord of Perfect Satisfaction,” she said when she was much calmed, “I appreciate your deep affection for an old woman who is now on the verge of death. I have heard that branding a scar on skin is a popular practice among those who secretly love each other, and I believe that it must be wondrous. Perhaps you and I should also follow suit?”

The Empress ordered her servants to fetch some ambergris, and after swearing and twice bowing to Heaven, burned a spot on the head of Aocao’s penis. Then she burned a spot on her own pudenda.

“It was in pain that I started my relationship with you,” she said, “and in pain it is now coming to the end. Marvelous!”

Then they retired to the bedchamber.

The Empress said to Aocao, “There is no regret in my life that pains me so much as the separation from you. Tonight I must enjoy myself to my heart’s content! I wish I could die this way happily!”

At her bidding, Aocao repeated, one by one, all different types of amorous games they had previously played and had greatly enjoyed. The Empress, in each posture, would receive at least ten thrusts from Aocao. By the dawn of the next day, they were both utterly worn out, stretched out in bed like two corpses.

That day, the Empress had three hundred catties of gold, a peck of pearls, a large amount of coral and jade, and fifty pieces of men’s garment prepared for Aocao, and then had them loaded on a cart and sent to Chengsi’s residence.

She said to Chengsi after Aocao had taken his tearful leave, “Take good care of Mr. Xue as if you are taking good care of me!”

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Chengsi, by day and by night, did his utmost to be a hospitable host. He feasted Aocao as frequently as possible, and on each banquet, would have his most favorite concubine Wen Boxiang to cheer Aocao with her beautiful singing. Boxiang had been a famous courtesan in Chang'an before marrying Chengsi as his concubine. She was so smitten with Aocao's handsomeness and virility that she would ogle Aocao whenever she could. One night, she sneaked into his bedroom in the hope of making love with him, yet however hard she tried to get his huge penis in, ended up getting only its tip moist. Boxiang was quite embarrassed. She bit Aocao on the shoulder and left.

Empress Wu, after her skin ulcer had been cured, was gradually recovering. She was now able to stroll slowly in the rear courtyard. One day she had a feast laid out in the garden to entertain the Zhang brothers. She was deeply impressed by their extraordinary beauty and talent, and her loving affection for them was re-kindled.

She summoned Changzong into the palace.

"For the past few years I seem to have been possessed by spirits and have not been aware of your existence till today," she said.

Changzong did not dare to interrogate the authenticity of her explanation. But after their intercourse commenced, Changzong was surprised to find that her vagina was much looser than before. On her part the Empress also experienced a similar shock about the smallness of his member. Passionlessly they hung on in engagement, and neither of them was satisfied. The Empress then summoned Yizhi, who, too, failed to give her the gratification she desired.

A month later, the Empress sent a young eunuch to Chengsi's to secretly give Aocao a small package, which contained a shining pearl, ten red love peas, a hundred pieces of ambergris, and a pair of mandarin ducks in golden purple color. When Aocao opened the package, he found a letter inside, which, written on gold-flecked letterhead with the background figures of flying dragons and dancing phoenixes, read as follows:

Since our parting with slapdash, nothing has made me feel more regretful than the loss of you. Flowers in the morning see me drink alone, and the moon at night witnesses my sleep in solitude. Girls beautiful and youths handsome are not wanting around me, yet I just cannot find a lover whose company I enjoy. My tears have become my constant companions, leaving their stains on my clothing, on my desk, from time to time. Oh! How happy I was in the past! And how sad I am now! How short the days were in former times! And how long they are of late! After a brief farewell, we have been split, like the split between heaven and earth; with a short distance, we are no longer able to reach each other, as though we live in two faraway countries. Life is too short to endure the suffering of separation like this! Today I am writing you in the hope that you can return for a brief reunion with me. I am going to send for you the night when the moon is full, and you may hide yourself in the provided ox vehicle and enter the palace through the Spring Gate. Our predestined relationship has not yet completely run its

course, and with your sojourn in the palace for a few days, we might even establish our new intimacy for the next incarnation. Don't fail to keep this appointment. Should you take for granted that I have companies and therefore refuse to pay me a visit, I would be extremely disappointed. Bring the letter with you when you come, and I will be awaiting you.

And there was a poem attached to the letter:

*Are green and red different colors or same?
I can't tell as the state of my mind is insane.
My cheeks sallow, and my body in bad shape,
I am pining for you, and only you, in vain.
O, should you disbelieve that tears on my face,
Have been constant since you moved away,
Come and find evidence in my storage place,
Where on my dresses is still left their trace.*

Aocao, before even having read the letter through, burst into tears. Since the young eunuch was waiting outside for his reply, he had to apply himself to its composition without delay, and no sooner had the letter been completed than he handed it to the messenger, who departed immediately.

Now, with no one else around him, Aocao sighed.

"If I return," he deliberated, "I shall never be able to get away again. I must be discreet. People say that we have two sovereigns. Isn't it quite true! Lucky for me to have moved out of the palace!"

That night, he took a small portion from his gold and treasure, and riding on a winged steed he had stolen from Chengsi's stable, fled. He sneaked out from the Western Gate, and Chengsi was not aware of his escape until much later.

Startled, Chengsi dispatched at once his cavalry to search for him in every possible place in the surrounding regions, but without success. He was then obliged to report to the Empress about Aocao's disappearance, asking for her punishment. The Empress said nothing, however. The news made her feel sad.

Changzong, having learned the unhappiness of Empress Wu, spent ten thousand ounces of gold purchasing the special Nanhai aphrodisiacs renowned for their enlargement of men's endowment, and for a full month or so he and Yizhi nursed themselves on the acquired tonics to raise their "turtles".¹ When ready, they entered the palace to resume their sexual services. Once again they became the Empress' most favorite paramours.

But both brothers, in the last year of her reign, were killed by Heir Apparent and Prime Minister Zhang Jianzhi² in a surprise attack, and their bodies were dismembered outside the

¹ Penis.

² Zhang Jianzhi was a protégé of Di Renjie, and the coup was mainly planned by him.

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Empress' bedchamber.

The Heir Apparent, after his enthronement, honored Aocao and everywhere sought after him, but his searching endeavors were unsuccessful. Many years later, in the Tianbao Reign when Xuanzong¹ was on the throne, someone saw Aocao in the city of Chengdu,² wearing a robe made of feathers and a hat of yellow color. His complexion being ruddy and his hair black, he looked as though he were still in his twenties. People said that he had attained to the state of *Tao*. No one, however, knew exactly anything of his later life and when he died.

Postscript

History needs romances just as the classics need annotations. What is unclear in the classics, annotations explain, and what is unsaid in history, romances complement.

With much detailed bedroom descriptions, the stories about Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty or about Feiyan³ reveal the aspects that are only vaguely mentioned in the historical records, and modern readers would surely find these stories helpful in understanding history as they find annotations useful in their study of the classics.

Just now I got a copy of “Story of the Lord of Perfect Satisfaction”. As I was reading it, I was deeply impressed by its meticulous and lifelike narration and description, which, I should say, are far more entertaining than any of those historical romances I have ever read. For this reason, I have decided to publish it, so that other interested readers may also enjoy delight from reading this wonderful piece of work.

Liu Bosheng⁴

¹ Xuanzong, the third son of Lidan, Emperor Ruizong (r. 710-712) was on the throne from 712-756. The Tianbao Reign refers to the years between 742-756.

² Chengdu is in Sichuan province.

³ I believe they refer to “Han Wudi neizhuan” (An Internal Story of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty) and “Feiyan waizhuan” (An Unofficial History of Zhao Feiyan).

⁴ This is perhaps a penname.

THE MEMOIR OF A WOMAN OF INFATUATION

PREFACE

What is passion? Passion is human nature that is stirred. Human nature, which reveals itself through the form of passion as it is stirred, is actually the embodiment of mind. If mind is not upright, human nature deviates, and when it deviates, it is no longer restrained and controllable. Guided by the mind full of desires without restraint, passion will burst out incontinent, which can be seen especially in the bedchamber.

I have observed women of great passion. At the outset it was no more than a single errant thought. However, once they pursued their inclinations, their desires knew no bounds. Some of them fell deeply in love with men who were much older or younger in age, or who were related to them, or were their servants or clergymen. Being crazily passionate, they indulged themselves in carnal pleasures without any sense of shame or moral principles. But there were none who were not deeply regretted of their misconduct as their passion faded and their beauty was no longer fascinating. Alas, had they bridled themselves beforehand, they would have had no chagrin; had they made love within their conjugal confines rather than carry on illicit liaisons with a bunch of men from outside their marriage, they would not have stained their family reputation.

So I suggest that girls are taught to constrain their minds when they are young, in order to curb themselves in advance and to preclude any laxness in passion. When their minds are upright and their passion is contained, where could one find even a single lewd female as a laughing stock?

Tiaolangyue

1764

THE MEMOIR OF A WOMAN OF INFATUATION¹

By Madam Hibiscus

Part I

In a dilapidated town of Zheng-Wei² there lives an elderly woman, seventy years old, white-haired, and toothless. She dwells on a small narrow street and loves talking about her past, never feeling fatigued with her long hours of reminiscent prattling.

Enjoying the privilege of visiting nobles of the local region, she, one day, at the residence of a dignitary, encounters a gentleman by the name of Yan Qiongke,³ who curiously inquires:

“My dear old lady, in spite of your hunchback and your use of a staff, I can tell, from your elegant manner and your graceful bearing, that you must have been a beauty when you were young. As a person from the younger generation, however, I know nothing of your life. Now that I have fortunately made the acquaintance of you, a charming lady at an advanced age, I wish you to grant me an opportunity to listen to some of your stories. It would be my greatest pleasure should my request not be denied.”

The old woman laughs.

“How, sir, can I relate to you my unworthy personal history?” she says. “But since you are so very interested, I am afraid I have no choice but to obey you.”

“I will write down what you are going to tell me,” says Qiongke.

The old woman, who is dressed in plain clothing, raises herself slightly from her seat, her hand pressing the front part of her garb and her long sleeves drooping.

¹ The word *chi* in the title (rendered as “infatuation”) is hard to translate, for in the story it means both “silly” and “crazily passionate”, and I cannot find an English equivalent that can cover both the meanings.

² Zheng-Wei, abbreviations of the State of Zheng and the State of Wei of the Zhou dynasty, are located in present-day Henan province. For their exact locations, see Gao Heng, *Shijing jinzhu* (The Contemporary Annotation of the Book of Poetry) (Shanghai, Guji chubanshe, 1980), pp.7-8. Zheng-Wei is also a metaphor for the place of lewdness.

³ Yan Qiongke is a neutral name in gender, which, in fact, stands for none other than the authoress herself, as has been pointed out in the Introduction. The reason that in this translation I have taken it as a man is simply to follow the original narrative strategy of covering, instead of revealing, the truth that the oral narrator was the same person as the writer, so as to help create a suspense to make the story more intriguing.

“I am old and have one foot already in the grave,” she says with a smile. “Thinking that my body is soon to rot like grasses, I find the romances I experienced in my youth especially precious. It would be a pity if I let them fall into oblivion!”

My surname was Tang, which originally had been a branch of the clan of Shangguan but had later been separated from it. That is the reason why I have now adopted the surname Shangguan. In fact, I do not belong to any Shangguan family. My father’s personal name was Ji, and my mother’s name was He Lian. She bore only two daughters. I was the elder one, called Enuo, and her second daughter, my younger sister, was called Xianjuan.

I can still recall that at the age of seven or eight, my sister and I were playing in the courtyard when my father asked each of us to improvise a poem on the blooming plum-trees. I composed a couplet:

*They are not vying for glamour after snowing,
Yet toward the moon are charmingly smiling.¹*

My father was angry.

“She may become an ill-behaved woman in the future!” he said.

My sister also composed a couplet:

*They are not so beautiful as the scene of a deep valley,
But like the spring in the Shanglin Park are pretty.²*

Smiling, my mother commented, “If Enuo turns out to be what she describes in her poem, she may just be a lovely flowery girl. Xianjuan is graceful, but she will not go wrong.”

From the age of twelve or thirteen, I no longer cut my hair. I would have it loosely dressed into a bun, and would often pace to and fro in front of the mirror, looking at myself admiringly.

“How lucky you are to have had them think so highly³ of you!” I said to my younger sister one day, sighing. “Life is short, and we certainly can’t wait until the Yellow River runs clear before enjoying ourselves.”⁴

“Elder Sister, what would you like me to do for you?” my sister responded with a smile as she heard me complain. “You are not fifteen yet, so why not play cockfighting or football with your cousins?”

It had been years since I studied the poems of the Zhou dynasty.⁵ My parents forbade

¹ In Chinese literature, snow usually stands for chastity, whereas the “moon” (*yue*) can be understood as a part of the phrase *fengyue* (breeze and moon), which is a euphemism for prostitution.

² The second line refers to a famous *fu* composition by Sima Xiangru of the Han period that describes in great detail the imperial hunting park, the Shanglin yuan.

³ The original Chinese text for “think so highly” is “xiangcui”, meaning “fragrant and crisp”, which is obviously a printing error. So I made the change in my translation according to my understanding of the context.

⁴ This idiom comes originally from *Zuo’s Commentary on Spring and Autumn Annals*. The Yellow River has always been muddy, so it is hopeless, or too long a time, to wait for the Yellow River to become clear.

⁵ “Poems of the Zhou dynasty” refer to the poems in *Shijing* (The Book of Poetry), the earliest collection of Chinese verses compiled by Confucius.

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me to recite them because of their erotic nature,¹ and I read them silently in secret without their knowledge. Though at the beginning I was rather confused with the descriptions of love between male and female, I later attained some understanding. I said to myself, “What is described in those poems is simply the relationship like what I have seen between Mother and Father. The only difference is that they make love in private while those poems of love are available to everyone.”

However, I still knew nothing of the pleasure that people in love enjoyed. How is it that a “sly lad” makes a girl forget to eat and sleep² and a “gentleman” comes to see a lady in the early morning ‘when wind and rain are chill’?³ Why does a woman throw a peach to her beloved man in order to get his reply,⁴ and another one wishes to hide with a stranger amid the grass when she “meets him by chance”?⁵ Is it an exaggeration to say that “one day seems like three months” as a girl can’t see her sweetheart?⁶ I really did not quite understand.

A young married woman living on the north side of our house was sexually experienced, and I consulted her one day when she was unoccupied.

“Man and woman are different,” I said. “But why does a man called Mang miss a woman so much as to cross the River Wei and the River Zhen to see her?⁷ A man may take troubles to simulate a fox, naked, in order to court a woman he loves;⁸ but if he does not love her, can she love someone else?⁹ Does the description of a ‘sly lad’ and a woman’s love of him suggest that she is crazed for him for no reason at all or does it refer to the loving affection that is most profound?”¹⁰

“You are not married yet,” replied the young woman, “so you should not ask these questions.”

“It is precisely because I am unmarried that I have these questions,” I said. “Can a woman go to a man’s home and rashly declare, ‘We are husband and wife’? Why does she not seize a man on the road and call him ‘my husband’?”

“Young lady, it seems that you are getting mature,” said the young woman. “Are you now harboring some thoughts of love and wishing a handsome young man to seduce you? Well, let me tell you the difference between men and women. A man is same as a woman so far as his ears, eyes, nose, mouth, and limbs are concerned. The difference lies at the base of his belly

¹ *The Book of Poetry*, especially the sections of Zheng and Wei, contains many risqué love songs.

² The reference is to the poem “Jiaotong” (Sly Lad) in the section of Zheng of *The Book of Poetry*.

³ The reference is to the poem “Fengyu” (Wind and Rain) in the section of Zheng of *The Book of Poetry*.

⁴ The reference is to the poem “Mugua” (Papaya) in the section of Wei of *The Book of Poetry*.

⁵ The reference is to the poem “Yeyou Mancao” (Wild Grass in the Wilderness) in the section of Zheng of *The Book of Poetry*.

⁶ The reference is to the poem “Zijin” (A Man’s Garments) in the section of Zheng of *The Book of Poetry*.

⁷ The reference is to the poem “Mang” in the section of Wei of *The Book of Poetry*.

⁸ The reference is to the poem “Youhu” (Fox) in the section of Wei of *The Book of Poetry*.

⁹ The reference is to the poem “Qianshang” (Open the Clothes) in the section of Zheng of *The Book of Poetry*.

¹⁰ The reference is to the poem “Sly Lad” in *The Book of Poetry*.

and between his thighs, where there is a thing at once supple and hard, contractible and extensible, its shape like a pestle or a spear, or like a snail. That thing we call 'penis'. Beneath it is the part that looks like a warrior holding a spear or a sheath containing a sharp weapon. That part is called 'scrotum'."

I was surprised.

"I have no such a thing below my belly and between my thighs!" I said.

"That makes men different from women," the young woman replied. "You and I as women are endowed with feminine sexual parts, which, located below our girdle and at the inner side of the crotch of our pants, resemble a clam if viewed at a distance, or appear to be a split melon when gazed closely. In comparison with the male organ hanging between their thighs and sticking out as it erects, we find that our privates have only a passage of entrance and yet have no protruding bulge. That is how women are innately endowed."

"They have something superfluous whereas we lack something," I said. "But that difference is not enough to resolve my doubts as to why men and women find so much pleasure in loving each other."

"Well, I can perhaps only make an explanation by ascribing it to the will of Heaven," said the young woman. "In the primordial ages, men and women, though created different, lived together in the caves they had built. They wore barks and leaves as clothes in winter, protecting themselves from the freezing cold. But when summer came and weather was sweltering, they would remove their barks and leaves, stark naked. As they shamelessly walked around without wearing anything, they saw their different female and male forms, one being concave and the other convex. The convexity of a man, when following the impulse of *yang*, would become tumescent and virile, and would therefore be able to drive into a woman's concavity if she happened to meet it as she was passing by him. The man might have been astonished by her lack of the same protruding organ as he had, and certainly did not know at all that his entry into her was to open the door of perpetual reproduction, create endless life, plant the root of lust, and germinate the sprout of love. Now he had gone into her, he felt so pleasant a sensation that he could not help moving once again. Realizing that her concavity was no more than a grotto capable of being penetrated, he kept moving with great enthusiasm. The more he moved, the more pleasure he felt, and the titillating feeling prompted him to repeat his motion without cease till at length, a jolt of delight raced down his spine to his groin, making his secretions flow out. His emissions gave him such great ecstasy that he could not contain his joy. He then told others about his experience, and that is how men and women came to take pleasure with each other."

"Really?" I said, not without doubts. "Was this really how man and woman began to love each other?"

"Well, what I have told you is simply my own guess," said the young woman. "Yet the real circumstances shouldn't have been far too different. It is just that at the beginning, the entry of a man's convexity into a woman's concavity would usually hurt her rather than give her

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pleasure.”

“Such being the case,” I said, “where does delight come from?”

“Delight has something to do with the size of a man’s convexity,” she said. “The larger it is, the more it will hurt a woman in her initial intercourses. A woman can’t receive a man with comfortableness until after her pain disappears, and then she will enjoy a delightful feeling, so wondrous that I find words incapable of describing it. As for a convexity of small size, it may not make a woman suffer much, but it will not bring her much pleasure either.”

I became even more bewildered.

“Why does pleasure come from pain and why will there be no pleasure if there is no pain?” I asked.

“The female concavity,” said the young woman, “is like the bud of a lotus ready to burst, very tight and dry the first time it allows a man entrance. Even a tiny convexity may hurt it, not to mention a huge one.”

“Then how can a woman have enjoyment?”

“Inside her concavity,” explained the young woman, “there is a part in the shape of a fleshy budding tongue, and as it slightly extends touching the tip of a man’s stiffened convex object that has entered her, the woman will feel so tickly that a sense of delightful pleasure will gradually overcome her pain and become dominant. Such a sense of delightful pleasure will be lacking if that object of a man is short and small, unable to reach that part in question. So make sure you get one that is large, lengthy, and strong, capable of filling up every corner of your interior space and poking and wriggling in it forcefully. You must first endure the wear and tear of coupling till you feel you are itchy and hot in there. Then there will come an ecstatic delight.”

The young woman had hardly completed her explanation when, suddenly, I felt a faint thrill in my loins. I quickly took leave of her and went back home, desirous eagerly of a try with a man. I did meet a youth when I was returning, but found him not the type I liked. Without better recourse, I secluded myself in a hidden spot and inserted my finger into my vagina, stroking it for some time with my head bent down. Despite an arousing sensation, I enjoyed no satiety of desire.

A younger cousin of mine by the name of Huimin, who had come to our home to study with my parents, was at the time living with us. He lodged in an outer room. Being in his teens, he was strikingly comely and elegant, and I, finding him desirable, could not help taking a fancy to him.

One day, Mother and Father were both away. I invited Huimin to play with us. As we gathered around our bed, Huimin grabbed hold of my sister’s arm, insisting that they have a contest of the strength of their hands. My sister contended with him, and for a long while, Huimin could not beat her. Seeing that night was getting late, I stopped them.

“Hey, you have been playing for the whole day!” I said. “Aren’t you tired? It is time to go

to sleep now. You'd better give up your contention for today. Huimin, you may bed with us if you wish."

"He is a boy!" said my sister. "How can he sleep with us?"

"I am very afraid of ghosts," said Huimin. "I wish to share the bed with you."

I persuaded my sister, saying, "He is too young to know things outside food and clothing. You need not concern yourself too much."

We then undressed and slept, with my sister taking the outer side of the bed, me in the middle, and Huimin occupying the inner section. Exhausted, Huimin soon dropped off. As I was unable to fall asleep, I stole my hand onto Huimin's belly to caress it, and found that there was indeed something convex at its bottom precisely like what the young woman had described to me. Only it was very small.

"How can such a puny thing do me harm?" I said to myself. "If I allure him to insert it into me, I shall have a taste of how it feels in my body, and with such an experience, I shall no longer fear a man's genitals. Why should I care about its small size? I must do it with him tonight!"

Once again, I stroked Huimin's object and felt that it had become hard and erect. Moreover, it was unyielding despite its smallness. I was excited, shaking him until he woke up, and then took his hand and guided it to my orifice.

Huimin chuckled.

"Elder Sister, it is funny that yours is like this," he said.

Without replying, I seized his hard swollen erection with one hand and turned sideways toward him, and then used the other one to embrace him and twist his body to make him turn around. Under my direction, Huimin's hard swollen object moved closer to me and was finally placed against my vulva.

"What are you doing, Elder Sister?" he asked.

"I want you to stick it into me," I replied in a low voice.

"What for?" said Huimin, rather confused.

"Do what I tell you and don't ask," I said. "Just stick me hard."

Huimin did with all his strength, his penis moving forward through my hand into my private quarters. But it missed the hole in the middle and hit only the urethra located above. This was not where it should go. To make it enter the right channel, I turned my body over him, the adjustment of which, however, left my hole a little too low for it. I then turned around with my back toward him so that he could drive it into me from behind. Still he was unable to reach that hole no matter how I adjusted my posture to meet him.

"I think I must lie on my back," I said.

I lay on my back and drew Huimin upon me. It was only when Huimin renewed his efforts that I found my hole was still too far away. I then parted my thighs to let him squeeze into the space in between, and meanwhile my hand helped him till he touched the main cavity.

"Here you go," I said. "This is where you should enter."

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“Good!” said Huimin, trying to drive it all the way up.

I felt a sharp pain.

“Stop!” I cried.

As Huimin ceased moving, I thought that the pain seemed not intolerable though it did hurt me to a considerable extent. I then asked him to resume his exertions. This time, however, I felt such a stabbing twinge as though I were being stung by needles. Huimin, with his penis being chafed, felt hurtful too.

“Elder Sister,” he complained, frowning, “why are you obliging me to do so agonizing a thing? I have found it very dry inside, and the pain seems to have been caused by the dryness. What should I do?”

“Take a break then,” I said.

I stroked and kneaded his organ with my hand. It was only about half an inch longer than my finger, no skin on the tip, and its head felt as if there were a ridge surrounding it. I was amazed. Yet forcing an introduction of it into that part of me seemed not easy.

“Spit some saliva,” I suggested, suddenly having an idea. “Then it won’t be dry any more.”

Huimin spat some spittle as I told him, which, surprisingly, did help him make a smooth cleavage into me. Despite my excitement at the confirmation of my hearsay knowledge that saliva was useful in opening the vaginal blockage, a huge burning pain was nevertheless inflicted upon me as my vagina was being filled to the point of bursting, a suffering far more intense than I had felt before.

“Stop moving!” I screeched.

“With spittle I can poke without difficulty,” said Huimin. “Why do you want me to stop?”

“Too painful to bear,” I said.

“Then you shouldn’t have urged me to do so in the first place,” he grumbled.

“Well, you were sticking too hard,” I said. “You should thrust instead.”

“What do you mean by ‘thrust’?” asked Huimin.

“To ‘thrust,’” I explained, “is to withdraw your object and then push it in, keeping each repeated motion well inside there.”

Huimin then ‘thrust,’ practicing this art for a long while. But the pain seemed even more unbearable.

“Go slower,” I groaned.

At my request, Huimin did slow down slightly. But that was not of much help in alleviating my affliction. What was worse, I began to feel suffocated as if I were being choked by food in the throat. I found the experience far from an enjoyment.

“Elder Sister,” said Huimin, “you urged me to thrust, and now that object of mine is getting very itchy.”

I was skeptical.

“How comes it that he is titillated whereas I am not?” I mused. “Is it that the young

woman deceived me?”

“Leave me alone for a moment,” I said. “I am not quite comfortable with you stirring in there so violently.”

“But that makes me feel good,” said Huimin. “I beg you to allow me to continue.”

The pain in my vagina was incessant and I was so distressed that I wished I could bring him to a stop immediately. Huimin, however, rammed against me even harder than before.

“Oh, what a pleasure!” he exclaimed. “I am feeling so good!”

His member was only two inches long, about the size of my index finger, yet with an inch inside me it could have been so excruciating! This further convinced me that for all its smallness, a man’s endowment could be rather difficult to admit at the beginning.

Before long, my sister turned and woke up. Hastily I pushed Huimin off of me. He lay down quickly, making the pretence of being still asleep. After some while he rose to pee, and when it was over, I saw his object shrunk like a dead silkworm, no longer having the lively vigorous appearance.

Tittering, I said, “My sister is awake. Don’t you feel ashamed should you be seen by her?”

“Elder Sister,” said Huimin, “you have enlightened me on the affairs that I have previously unheard of and have tutored me with patience. Now I have been aroused! I wish I could carry on with you forever!”

“No more for you tonight, silly boy!” I said. “You may come again tomorrow evening.”

I bolstered his head with my arm, sleeping. Huimin’s long hair, which had reached his brows already, felt quite thick and thorny to the touch of my arm and bosom.

The next day Huimin spoke to his fellow-students in the private school he attended. “Last night I slept with my elder sister and she compelled me to stick her with my piss. I did it as she requested and entered her, and then retracted and entered her again, repeating the action like a royally drunk monk staggering in and out of the gate of a temple.”

“Your sister enticed you because she wanted you to go into her,” remarked his fellow students. “If you had kept sticking her for a longer time, she would have become wet inside and you would have been able to push yourself up all the way to the hilt.”

That evening, when my sister and I were ready for sleep, Huimin came into our chamber again. “Huimin,” said my sister, “last night your sharing bed with us was so disturbing that I was kept awake for the great part of the night! Tonight I must drive you back to your own room to sleep.”

“You were disturbed,” I put in, “simply because he could not sleep well and tried to adjust himself to the new bed. Surely he will not toss and turn tonight as he did last night, I believe.”

“Elder Sister,” said Huimin, “I had no apprehensions with you sleeping beside me. If you are sympathetic as you were yesterday and continue to let me spend the night here, I would be grateful!”

“But I can’t sleep comfortably with him sticking to us,” my sister disgruntled.

“Yes you can,” said Huimin.

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Finally the three of us ended up sleeping together. My sister, who was unwilling to squeeze against us head to head, moved her pillow to the other end of the bed. Huimin had no sooner crawled into the quilt than he, with his hand, started his attack on my crotch. I prevented him from invading for fear that my sister, who had not closed her eyes yet, might discover our intimacy. Huimin then toyed with his organ manually until it achieved erection.

“Now lie on your back, please!” he begged me. “I can’t bear it any longer.”

“But you gave me no tinctures of pleasure yesterday,” I said. “Why should I indulge you again?”

Huimin’s impatience was great.

“You lured me into sleeping with you,” he muttered. “Should I engage you from behind, you might have an even greater discomfiture!”

There seemed to be no alternative for me but to draw him upon me once again. Before thrusting forward,

Huimin spat some spittle on his penis. This time my passage was moist and his entry seemed much easier, making me scarcely feel the slightest pain. But as he grew more and more violent, hitting the portion that had been intact, I was once more seized by tormenting throes, which, without a momentary pause of his agitation out of sympathy for me, became so intolerable that I had to take hold of his instrument to stop his penetration. In an agony of desire, however, Huimin disregarded my attempt to obstruct him and jabbed at me even harder than before till he buried his object entirely inside me, leaving not a trace behind. Being terribly hurt, I could not help cursing, “What are you being so rash for, you wretch?”

“You know,” he said, “a general in the field is not bound by orders from his sovereign.”

I had nobody but myself to blame.

“What displeasure!” I said to myself. “Why should I have asked for it and then repeated it?”

Huimin began to thrust.

“Mind you,” I warned him, “go forward only half an inch at a time and don’t rush!”

He thrust, and would every time push all the way to the root regardless of some abrasive resistance. It was really a torture to me! Fortunately the size of his member was neither bulky nor lengthy, and in spite of a desolate and unpleasant feeling, I had gradually got accustomed to it after some time.

Huimin then expedited his movement.

“Dare you assault me so fiercely with no permission?” I said.

Yet he kept doing it unceasingly. After more than two hundred thrusts, his penis suddenly became hot and irritated, and he felt as if he was unable to contain the discharge of his “urine”. Although I resented him for his rapid motion, as his object was growing swollen, filling the entirety of the middle portion of my vagina, my pain seemed to be dying away.

“Take it out,” I said. “You are torturing me!”

He took no notice and thrust into me even more energetically. Being unable to endure the suffering, I was on the verge of crying.

“Oh, it is so painful as though you were ripping me,” I groaned. “I can’t bear it any longer!”

Huimin, ignoring my entreaties, continued to bear and batter in vehement ways. For fear that my sister might discover what was taking place between us, I could not but suppress my anguish. I bit my quilt bitterly, feeling awfully chagrined.

Suddenly, Huimin burst out, "How strange! How strange! I am being struck by a fit of sore and tingling quiver, and it is now racing from the root there up to my whole frame. I am afraid that something is about to discharge from inside me."

I was curious, and soon did feel that I was inundated by some liquid. A delightful sensation, neither lasting long nor completely prevailing over the pang that had been afflicting me, ran throughout my body. In the meantime, moans and groans came forth from Huimin's mouth, and then, all of sudden, his entire torso plunked upon me. Yet in my painful wretchedness I did not dare to move an inch, and could only embrace him tightly.

After a while I asked him, "What has happened to you?"

"I don't know," he said. "Even now I am still feeling too limp to lift my body, as though it were weighing a thousand pounds. What a pleasure!"

I broke into a grin.

"Lucky for you to have enjoyed such a great pleasure!" I said. "But I myself felt no delight at all. With pain afflicting me ceaselessly, how could I expect pleasures?"

I let down Huimin onto the bed carefully. With him having moved out of me now, the unpleasantness in my vagina still remained unsubdued, as if something internal had been lost permanently. Moreover, this unpleasantness seemed accompanied by a sense of scorching heat, reminding me that I had not yet been satisfied.

But Huimin's member was no longer powerful and vigorous. I rubbed it clean with my handkerchief and then wiped my own privates dry. With our legs intertwined, we embraced each other to sleep.

We had deeply fallen in love.

"Although I enjoyed no pleasure," I said, "it was not your fault."

After having tasted the sexual delight, Huimin would adhere to me from morning to night. One night, the moon shone brightly; I dragged Huimin out for a walk. I held his arm while ambling, and he took liberties stealing his hand into my crotch. Since we had been so intimate, I could do nothing but to allow him to fondle as he liked.

Later that night, upon his insistence, we made love again. I suffered no more pain and began to enjoy it. After some time, my fluid oozed out and I felt a glowing of tickling heat in my hole. It was a very strange pleasure that I had never before experienced.

"Oh, what an amusement!" I exclaimed. "This is probably the titillation the young woman told me about."

In the next ten days or so we coupled over and over and I could receive him without feeling painful at all. Every day, before evening descended, I would think of sex, and would spur Huimin to do it to me when we were in bed at night.

Once, out of curiosity, I looked at my vulva, only to find that it did not look like a

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bursting bud any more. It was, instead, loose enough to contain a finger now!

One day I woke up in the dead of night. Huimin, feeling amorous, engaged me in intercourse. We were just in the midst of action when my sister suddenly rose to pee, and the creaking of the bed gave rise to her suspicion. Sliding her hand into my quilt, she found that Huimin and I were cuddled closely against each other, our thighs being entwined.

“Why sleeping in such manner?” she asked, smiling.

I motioned Huimin to groan, and then said to my sister, “He is having a stomachache. It was not enough to rub his belly with my hands or wrap him up with my quilt, for he has caught cold. That is why I had to warm him by joining our breasts. He is getting much better now.”

“A fine doctor you are!” said my sister.

Presently my sister drowsed off again. I was itchy and nudged Huimin to continue. Emboldened by my encouragement, Huimin started his pumping fervently, so much so that the bed shook and the hooks of the bed curtains rattled. The noise awakened my sister.

“Why so bothersome, giving me no peace for sleep?” she grumped.

I was frightened and had to stop our intercourse.

The next day, my sister lodged a complaint against us before Mother because of our disturbance during the night.

“Huimin shared the bed with us,” she reported, “and with three persons snuggling together, I couldn’t sleep well.”

Mother was startled.

“Who allowed him to share the bed with you?” she asked.

“Elder Sister,” said my younger sister. “For Huimin begged her over and over and she felt it hard to reject him.”

Mother spoke to Father in private: “Huimin is growing up and it is very likely that he has some indecent thoughts. Besides, Enuo is as old as he and has already attained the age of puberty. So I suggest that he is transferred outside to sleep.”

“Agreed,” said my father.

Before long Huimin’s bedclothes were removed from our bed. I deplored his dismissal, knowing that it must have been my sister who had betrayed us. In spite of my vexation with her, I, on the surface, was still as friendly to her as before.

Now that Huimin was no longer sleeping with us, I could see him only during the day. But some sly maids, who had probably been influenced by my sister’s words, kept watching me from time to time, making it nearly impossible for me to approach Huimin. Filled with bitter resentment, I copied a poem on a scroll in regular style, intending to give it to him. The poem ran:

For Huimin

My square pillow is so pretty!

*And so is my embroidered bed!
But alas, without my sweetie,
I can't sleep till the sun is red.*¹

Putting the scroll inside my sleeve, I went looking for Huimin. But he had already gone back to his parents' home. Every time I yearned for him at night I could hardly sleep a wink, my pillowcase soaked with my tears, and my underwear, with my secretions.

By the age of fourteen or fifteen, I had grown into a stunning beauty; my sister had also become more lovely and prettier than ever. We often competed with each other, decking ourselves with the new dresses we got.

"I am Feiyan," I said, "and you are Hede."²

"Then, whom are you missing more, Bird Killer or Red Phoenix?"³ my sister taunted me.

I covered her mouth with my hand, saying, "Later on, when you present aphrodisiacs in the Brocade Tent Seven, make sure you don't feel guilty because of your rashness!"⁴

My sister and I continued to live together for another three years until I reached the age of seventeen or eighteen. Still I could not forget my experience of sleeping with Huimin and the great tickling delight he had given me.

An old slave of our family had a son, whose name was Jun. Jun was seventeen or eighteen years of age, and being handsome and good at singing, enjoyed the great favor of my father as his catamite.

"Perhaps," I thought, "this young man can provide me with what I wish to get from my cousin."

Once I saw Jun passing by the window of my bedroom. I beckoned him and teased him in a provocative manner. Jun was wily. He first tickled my palm with his hand several times, and then popped out his tongue.

"What are you doing this for?" I asked.

"Just take it in your mouth," he told me.

I took it in my mouth. Jun then asked me to pop out my tongue the same way he did. As I stuck out my tongue, he sucked it loudly, which made me suddenly realize that this was what people called "kiss". However, before we could do more amorous pranks, someone was coming up, and Jun escaped immediately. I embroidered a fragrant purse for him, and in

¹ This is the third stanza of the poem "Gesheng" in the section of Tang of *The Book of Poetry*.

² The allusion is to the tale "Feiyan Waizhuan" (An Unofficial Biography of Zhao Feiyan). The tale recounts how Feiyan and his younger sister Hede were chosen by Emperor Cheng of the Han dynasty as his concubines and how Feiyan later became his Empress and Hede was in his good graces.

³ Before entering the palace, Feiyan had a lover called "Sheniao" (Bird Killer); after she became Empress, she kept a secret liaison with a slave of the palace by the nickname of "Chifeng" (Red Phoenix). For details, see "An Unofficial Biography of Zhao Feiyan".

⁴ According to "An Unofficial Biography of Zhao Feiyan", it is in "the Brocade Tent Nine" instead of "the Brocade Tent Seven" that Hede, royally drunk one night, fed Emperor Cheng, an already very sick person, with seven Shenxu pills (a kind of aphrodisiacs), which made him expire after having ejaculated excessive semen.

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return Jun gave me some cosmetic powder.

I began to lust after him. When Jun wished to date me, I told him to meet me at dusk at the winding veranda, where I could avoid my sister who was with me almost all the time.

By the appointed hour Jun had been there. Thinking that he might titillate me like Huimin, I leaned against a pillar and removed my drawers. Yet I had hardly got myself ready when Jun launched his assault, so rash that I was hurt.

“You can’t go at me like this!” I said, terrified.

Jun, bestial and inconsiderate, continued his fierce thrusts regardless of my protest. I could not endure the pain.

“Be gentler!” I exclaimed. “How could you make love in such rudeness?”

“Madam,” said Jun, “you have granted me this opportunity and yet you want to renege now!”

Having so said, he started another vehement attack, inflicting upon me such a sharp pain that I could not help whining. Jun was cruel though; he kept butting me hard.

“Please let me off!” I entreated.

He paid no heed, and lifting one of my legs, dragged it with impudence.

“Jun,” I screamed, “stop being so rude to me!”

Yet I had hardly finished speaking when I heard voices coming from afar. Quickly I slipped into my drawers and made off. Jun failed to catch me.

I had been badly hurt.

“It was such a horrible experience to dally with a tiger’s whiskers!” I said to myself. “I swear I will never go out again seeking pleasures!”

That year I married into the household of Luan,¹ the scion of a high-ranking official in the State of Jin.² The patriarch of the Luan household was named Rao, who had three sons. The eldest one was called Keshe, who was a student of the National Academy. The second one, my husband, was called Keyong, who was a licentiate tutoring students at home. The youngest one was called Ketao, who was studying martial arts at a military academy.

Since I had had sex before, first with Huimin, and then with Jun, I had a guilty conscience, fearing that my husband might be suspicious of me. The first time he rode on me, he seemed to have little difficulty in entering me, though I felt a slight pain. I feigned groaning then, as if I were being terribly hurt, and tossed and twisted in an affected manner. My husband took it for granted that I was a virgin.

“What a beautiful and virtuous wife I have obtained!” he praised me. “An ideal woman both for me and for my family!”³

¹ “Luan” (surname) and “luan” (cock or prick) are homophonous.

² The State of Jin was one of states in Warring States periods; its location was largely in the present-day Shanxi province.

³ In the original Chinese text, Keyong’s words consist of two lines from two poems in *The Book of Poetry*. There are several other places in which the authoress uses a phrase or a line from *the Book of Poetry*, but since they do not contain allusions, I have made no notes for them.

Hearing his compliment, I blushed red deeply. I did my best to attend to my Mother-in-law, and did not dare at any time slack off in my services of her. Adulations were then heaped upon me from all members of the family.

My husband, after living with me for a year or so, went to another prefecture to pursue his studies. Since I was left alone at home with no one keeping me company, I was arranged to eat meals with Sha, my sister-in-law. It was, however, joyless and uncomfortable being with her.

Sha's husband Keshe had a slave called Yinglang, who was twenty-one or twenty-two years old, light-skinned and beautiful, like Feng Zidu¹ of the Qin Palace reincarnated. As he served his master with his rear courtyard,² he wore no cap, though his hair had been made into the shape of a topknot. I often ogled him with my eyes.

"He may be the right person to provide me with the pleasures I want," I mused.

Once I saw Yinglang and there happened to be nobody around. I called out to him, but being shy, Yinglang was reluctant to come to me. I then bade my maid Pink Peach to invite him.

"The Second Junior Mistress asked me to give you her regards," the maid said to him. "Just now the Junior Mistress made eyes at you and called you, but you did not even respond. The Junior Mistress was angry. You should go to apologize to her."

"It is fortunate of me to be in the graces of the Junior Mistress," said Yinglang. "But I am afraid that the boudoir is not a place outsiders are permitted to enter, and I won't dare to be the first person to make troubles for myself by violating the rule."

"The Junior Mistress pities you in view of your underprivileged situation as an orphan and wishes to feed you and clothe you," said Pink Peach. "You should not be so stubborn as to reject her kindness."

"The Mistress summons me," said Yinglang, "so she is to blame for whatever inappropriate. If I refuse to go when summoned, then I shall be held responsible for the consequences."

He, at length, decided to come.

I had just got up from my afternoon siesta and was putting on make-up before my mirror, drowsy and languish with the warm spring weather and the fragrance of flowers, when Yinglang arrived. I was shy at first, but soon reached out to hold his hand.

"What a coward you are!" I said. "I have invited you twice and yet you were still very reluctant to pay me a visit!"

"Madam," said Yinglang, "you are a rare flower in the garden and how can I be an insect to harm it? I had never dared to imagine that being an insignificant slave, I could get so close to a lady of majesty without risking my life. Now that you summoned me, you have left me with no option but to comply with you."

I led him, arm in arm, into my bed. Yinglang's body, after I had undressed him, revealed

¹ Feng Zidu personified male beauty.

² A euphemism for anus.

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to me its snowy whiteness. I embraced him and sucked his tongue until I felt my passion was aroused. I then parted my thighs to let him take a look, and Yinglang's penis erected instantly. He inserted it into me, giving me so tingling a pleasure that I involuntarily raised my body to meet him, my hands and legs all going limp. Yinglang leapt upon me, and then moved in and out, quite energetic. It was only that he was not very strong physically, nor did he have sexual stamina. I had been in the state of enforced celibacy for so long and really wished to take advantage of this opportunity to enjoy myself. Yet before I was sated, he had spent. Though rather discontented, I could do no more than take pity on him.

"This is our first time and it is not too bad," I said, placating. "My boudoir is empty and I feel lonely. When days drag on and on with little change, how can I beguile my tedious hours without your company?"

I bade him come every night, and we carried on in this fashion for several months, indulging ourselves in all kinds of erotic pleasure. My body seemed to exist only for Yinglang, and Yinglang, too, seemed ready to die for me if necessary.

One day the maids were away. Strolling along in the garden by myself and plucking flowers to decorate my hairpin, I accidentally encountered Yinglang underneath the flowers. He desired to engage me in coitus then and there. I refused.

"No, people might come," I said.

"So what?" he said. "I don't care!"

For fear that I might offend him in contravention of his wish, I had to remove my pants, and standing there, let him copulate with me. Yinglang thrust into me forcefully, and kept thrusting over a hundred times till his sperm, like a fountain, gushed forth. He then plopped upon me, incapable of uttering a word for a long while.

After some moments, he exclaimed, "Oh, what a pleasure! I felt I was almost dying!"

Having been on my feet for long, I found my two legs sore and limp and my loins weak and fatigued. We then sat down, cuddled against each other. Suddenly, another slave named Datu emerged. Since I had not treated him friendly, I failed to find an excuse to cope with the situation. To make the things worse, Datu had caught sight of my pants and drawers that spread on the ground. Datu was a boorish sort of a fellow. He was shocked to see us being together.

"How dare you do such a thing here!" he shouted. "Yinglang, are you courting death? If I conceal what I have seen today, how do you think I can make clear of myself before our master?"

I felt shameful and was filled with regret.

"Please don't make it public," I implored.

"Since it has happened already," said Yinglang, "I could only appeal to your generosity and hope that you will forgive me. I would be willing to let you share the favors of the Junior Mistress if this is what I could please you with."

Datu guffawed.

“Is this your way of keeping my mouth closed?” he asked. “Fine, my mouth will be tightly closed then!”

He propositioned me at once, which, no doubt, I could not refuse, since it was I who had brought this trouble upon myself. I asked Yinglang to carry me onto his lap, and Yinglang, skilled at anal sex, secretly applied some spittle onto his penis and worked his way into my rear courtyard. In the meantime, Datu was engaged in his frontal assault, wild and outrageous. True, his endowment was much stronger and bigger than that of Yinglang, yet deficient of Yinglang’s affection and sentimentality, his copulation with me was forced and inharmonious, and I hardly felt any delight. I only felt that my inside was ravished by him badly.

Datu then held my cheeks in his hands, giggling.

“Had I not caught you in adultery,” he quipped, “how could it have been possible that you would have allowed me for such familiarities?”

“What are all your taunts about,” I retorted, “while you are savoring the charms of my body?”

Datu, having tried all his limited erogenous skills, wanted to kiss me on the lips. I could not bear his garlicky and alcoholic bad breath and covered my mouth with my sleeve. But he dragged it away. I then whirled my face toward Yinglang. With both his hands he wrenched it back at once. He seemed determined to kiss my mouth. When I turned my head to the left, he turned left, and when I turned it to the right, he turned right. After quite some while, a cough from afar finally liberated me from his snatch. As he released his hands, I swiftly donned my clothes and took flight.

In my flurry of escaping, I, holding my pants without time yet to tie its string, unfortunately bumped into my brother-in-law in the central section of the Winding Veranda. This brother-in-law was none other than Keshe, and he was greatly taken aback as he saw me in so awkward a panic.

“Why is Sister-in-law in such a hurry?” he inquired.

I was too shameful to answer. Suddenly, by accident, my pants slid off my hands and fell to the ground. Elder Brother-in-law burst out laughing.

“Aha,” he said, “Sister-in-law was having a tryst?”

I made no reply, wishing only to rid him as quickly as possible.

Elder Brother-in-law came up and seized my pants.

“Be nice to me,” he said. “If you don’t let me, I shall tell my brother!”

“If you tell my husband, I shall tell your wife!” I said.

Elder Brother-in-law guffawed.

“What can you tell my wife about?” he asked

“I shall tell her that you attempted to rape me,” I said.

“But I have done nothing yet,” he said. “If I do have an affair with you, then you can tell her whatever you like.”

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I laughed, and Elder Brother-in-law laughed, too. As I stood up, Elder Brother-in-law came up to me from behind quickly and lifted my dress, and then, laying hold of my hips with his hands, butted me from behind. I bent over a little to receive him as he started to thrust between my thighs, where there still remained some of Yinglang's and Datu's semen.

Suddenly, looking at his palms, Elder Brother-in-law blurted, "Whose spittle has soiled my hands?"

He wiped his hands on my pants.

"Don't smear them!" I shouted at him.

"What is the point of being so fussy about your pants," he said, "when you have already had your body defiled?"

"Elder Brother-in-law, how could you be so inhuman as to ridicule me while having an affair with me?" I said.

I gave him a hard push that knocked him over. As I was about to take flight, I noticed that the string of my pants was being pressed by him.

Getting up, Elder Brother-in-law apologized to me.

"Please forgive me for my inappropriate words," he said, kneeling on the ground.

I had no intention to compromise. Elder Brother-in-law, pretending to be mad, severed my string. "So you won't comply?" he asked.

"No, I won't," I said.

He then took his leave, holding the string in his hand.

"Well, this is the evidence," he threatened. "I shall tell everyone about your scandal!"

"Come back!" I called, motioning him with my hand.

Hearing me call him, Elder Brother-in-law returned immediately, quite jubilant. As I was coerced into intercourse with him, I found that his endowment, instead of being the size of Yinglang's as I had imagined, was even larger than that of Datu! Of course, I could not take it comfortably.

"Could you kindly not go deeper?" I said hastily, trying to stop him.

In the height of his passion, however, Elder Brother-in-law kept ramming his penis against me furiously regardless of my imploring. Suddenly, I felt a delightful pleasure in spite of its mixture with a fit of pain. I realized then that pain was perhaps inevitable for a greater enjoyment and therefore let him thrust as hard as he could until he shot his sperm. Elder Brother-in-law then released me, his object shrunk like a cotton floss, incapable of any more of that business.

At that point I went back into my bedroom.

"It is getting late now and I haven't finished my story yet," Shangguan says to Qiongke. "Could you allow me to continue tomorrow?"

"Certainly," says Qiongke.

Shangguan then takes her leave.

Part II

The next day Shangguan comes back again.

“Sir,” she says, “yesterday I was only half way through, and I would like to relate to you the rest of my story today.”

Even now recalling how I was first raped by Datu and then forced into sex with Keshe, I am still filled with resentment. My husband, who was then going and returning as before, spent more time outside than at home. Keshe, being engaged in business for his father, was also away most of the time.

Keshe’s wife, Sha, was a charming lady, whom I watched in private and found that she did not carry on with anyone on the sly. But when Keshe was away, she would sometimes in the flowery mornings or on the moonlit evenings sigh and groan, and would reduce her diet or forget to go to sleep. This was simply because Father-in-law, Master Luan, whose wife was in poor condition of health, attempted at establishing a liaison with her.

One day, in the morning, Sha was washing her face and applying makeup when Father-in-law sidled up to her on tiptoe from behind. He grabbed hold of her hands, taking her by great surprise. Sha was about to scream when she found that it was Father-in-law, feeling too ashamed to yell. Father in-law then anxiously fondled her breasts with his hands.

“Why doing this to me?” Sha squealed, getting water from her basin and splashing it onto his face.

Father-in-law responded at once by reciting a couplet Empress Wu had improvised for Emperor Gaozong:

*Even before our meeting within the brocade bed curtains
I’m favored by sprinkles of dew from your golden basin.*¹

(Madam Hibiscus’s comments: Splashing his face with water indicates that she has been interested already. So why strike a pose of innocence?!)²

Exerting all his strength, Father-in-law carried Sha onto the bed. Although she struggled to get rid of him, Sha was not successful without the help of her maid who happened to be not around at the time.

Irritated, she gave a thrilling shriek.

“Father! Why are you doing this to me?”

Before she could finish speaking, however, Father-in-law had already dropped on his

¹ These two lines are from a poem in “The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction”.

² In the edition published in Qing dynasty, upon which my translation is based, there are many interlinear comments. The reason that I have omitted them and translated this one only is simply because it indicates that it was made by the author herself. This comment is important to the understanding of authorship of the story.

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knees. "Save my life!" he exclaimed, and in the meantime ran his hand up her garb to feel her private parts.

"I shall tell Mother-in-law," said Sha.

"It is I who permitted you to marry into my family," said Father-in-law, "and I have the right to enjoy your favors! Even if you do tell your Mother-in-law, what can she do about it?"

Father-in-law raised her feet and placed them around his waist, and then brushed his beard against her cheeks and neck. After some while, Sha grew silent, letting him make free with her.

It so happened that at that time I had something personal to ask Sister-in-law. I went into her quarters, inquiring of her maid where she was.

"In the bedroom," the maid answered.

The bed curtains were down as I entered. Seeing her bed shaking with creaks and the bed curtains fluttering and the hooks swinging with rattling sound, I tittered.

"Sister-in-law," I called, "are you in dream? Are you dreaming that your husband is coming back home?"

As I pushed the bed curtains aside, I saw Father-in-law was on top of Sha and both of them were naked. I broke into laughter. Father-in-law reached out at once and caught hold of my blouse before I could retreat.

"Rope her in so that she can't betray us!" said Sha.

"That is absurd!" I protested. "Sister-in-law, you are not only doing something vile but also attempting to implicate me. But mind you, Sister-in-law, I am not you!"

Father-in-law jumped down from the bed hastily. He took me into his arms and butted at me with his penis. Recollecting what people had said about incest committed by a father-in-law, I chuckled, covering my face with my sleeve. I knew then that such thing could indeed occur in reality.

I refused to submit and was in the midst of resisting when Sister-in-law came to his aid. Reaching out her hands from the bed, she grabbed hold of my arms and dragged me up strenuously. In the end Father-in-law succeeded in lifting my legs and I ended lying in bed.

"Father," I screeched, "you are raping me and Sister-in-law is helping you in raping me! Both of your behaviors are inhuman!"

Yet I could utter no more words as Father-in-law pressed his beard into my lips.

"Father-in-law is our closest kin," said Sha, "Today we are serving him with our own bodies, and this should be considered as a filial demeanor."

I could not help laughing.

"I have never heard that a grotto penetrated by a son can also be penetrated by his father," I said. "What if she gets pregnant after intercourse with them? Will the child be a son or a grandson?"

Father-in-law laughed gaily.

“You are both my beautiful wives,” he said. “So pray do not be too concerned about your dying Mother-in-law and your profligate husbands.”

Seeing Sha care no more of her chastity, I was no longer able to hold myself back. I took Father-in-law’s tongue into my mouth, and being flat and large rather than lean and pointed, it filled up my mouth to such an extent that I felt I was hardly able to suck it. But Father-in-law’s endowment, in comparison with those of Datu and Yinglang, was only medium, about the size of my husband’s.

Father-in-law copulated with me first and then with Sha. Since for both of us this was the first time to lie down with him, Father-in-law was careful not to linger too long on either of us so as to make the other one anxious to rise, and would seize Sha while coupling with me, and me while copulating with Sha. Suddenly, I felt a surge of arousal and wanted Father-in-law to thrust into me right away to give me some titillation, and was rather discontented that Father-in-law was reluctant to return to me. When Father-in-law finally came back to me, I saw him already on the very height of ecstasy. I held him tight and did not let go, in spite of his feeble attempt to spend in Sha’s cavity. Without losing my grip, however, I succeeded in compelling him to discharge inside me, the reception of his fluid giving me an immense satisfaction. Father-in-law was, after all, a middle-aged man; after ejaculation he was no longer able to make love with Sha.

When Father-in-law was making love with Sha, she spread her legs apart and encircled his neck with her arms; and when Father-in-law was having sex with me, I wriggled my hips and stuck out my tongue. With all those lewd and wanton manners of both of us being on display, we could not but refrain ourselves from mocking at each other. What left me unsatisfied was that Father-in-law’s vigor and vitality were on the wane, and his member, though capable of achieving full erection, was not sufficiently stiff, lacking the strength of toppling the mountains and overturning the seas.

“I am a human being,” I said to Sha. “Since my husband is away from home and I have been living by myself for years, I really need a lover to amuse myself with. To form an intimate relationship with our slaves is not unlikely, yet they are so cunning and their bodies are so dirty and stinky. To take strangers from the outside is another option, but they may make our liaisons public. I have heard that Mother-in-law is on medication and is no longer able to make Father-in-law indulge in erotic pleasures. Being young and pretty, we may both of us take turns to serve him, and in this way nobody from outside the compound of our household will know the scandal. Isn’t this nice?”

“I only worry that you might be jealous of me,” said Sha.

“No, I won’t,” I said.

“You claimed you won’t,” she said, “but just now when Father-in-law was thrusting hard enough to give us titillation and satisfaction, you held him tight, unwilling to release him. Such things might happen again, and I might only be able to get my lips wet but not be able to have a real taste.”

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I was shamefully embarrassed.

“Just now I was so aroused that I could not help holding on to him,” I explained. “Later on when Father-in-law achieves erection, I promise I will give way to you. We may divide days in odd and even numbers, and each of us can sleep with him only on designated dates.”

One day I was in the midst of bathing when Father-in-law knocked on my door, disheveled and barefooted. My maid was at the time taking a bath somewhere else and the door was left unlocked. Father-in-law pushed the door open and saw me emerging from water.

“Ha, a lotus flower appearing on the pond!” he remarked.

I dried myself hastily and leapt into the bed. Father-in-law came upon me. The copulation made me extremely satisfied.

“Dad,” I said, “I am glad that you came to me. What do you think of me if you compare me with Sha?”

“Sha is already thirty years old and her vagina is broad like a river,” he replied. “How can she compare with you? Moreover, she is like a warrior holding a sharp spear as her waves of desire are surging high. I am afraid I am no match for her. Besides, you are much cleaner than she.”

I was aware that my vagina lacked neither the “spear” nor the “surging waves” that Father-in-law had described. It was only because he loved me that he had said those words.

I carried on with Father-in-law for quite a few years. When my husband returned home, Father-in-law dallied with Sha, and when Keshe came back, Father-in-law slept with me. Our affairs, in spite of being disrupted from time to time, never really ceased. It was until much later when Father-in-law had become old and infirm and was less interested in erotic amusements that I began to feel discontented. I then resumed my sexual relationship with Yinglang.

Mother-in-law was at a time seriously ill. I intended to divine on her behalf. Yinglang said to me, “The Temple of Vacuity located at the west end of the town is well-known and its deities are especially powerful. I suggest that you go there to get an oracle.”

There I went the next day, heavily made-up, with slaves of our household serving me as sedan-carriers, and Yinglang, my escort. After having finished my prayer, I asked a monk of the temple whether it boded ill or well for my mother-in-law’s disease, and he made no reply. This monk, whose name was Ruhai, had rear-courtyard relationship with Yinglang. He was delighted after catching a glimpse of my beautiful appearance, and begged Yinglang to arrange an assignation for him.

“That is not difficult,” said Yinglang. “To have your wish fulfilled, you just need to invite her to have lunch with you.”

Ruhai was rapturous. He came out and said to me, “The prayer bodes very well. In ten days or so she will be fully recovered from her illness.”

Delighted, I was ready to go home.

Ruhai stopped me.

“Madam, pray stay for the vegetarian lunch,” he said.

“I am sorry that the money I have paid may not be sufficient for that,” I said. “What a shame for me!”

Yinglang broke in. “It was a long way to come and all the carriers are hungry. Now that the elder has invited you to lunch, why not just accept his kindness? You may pay him afterwards if you wish.”

“Fine,” I agreed, and was then led into the abbot’s room.

“Junior Mistress,” said Yinglang, “please allow me to eat with the carriers in the kitchen while you are dining here.”

He took off without even having received my permission. Ruhai closed the door behind him. Upon taking a close look at him, I found the monk quite handsome. Though I was delighted, I was nevertheless much on guard against Yinglang for fear that he might burst in, completely unaware that he had betrayed me already.

Overjoyed, Ruhai encircled my neck at once, anxious to make love with me. I felt aroused. “You have wanted to feed me,” I said, smiling, “but, in fact, it is I who is feeding you now!”

Ruhai unbuttoned my dress.

“You’d better remove my lower garments only,” I said.

Ruhai undid the belt of my skirt and we crawled onto the meditation bed together. But who would have thought that being an old hand in sodomizing boy monks yet having no iota of idea that women are entirely different, Ruhai should have driven his penis into my rear courtyard! I knew then that anal work was indeed gay men’s favorite. Since I had done it with Yinglang before and this was my second time, I did not raise objection and let him thrust into it as he liked, only chuckling covertly. Ruhai first applied some spittle into that aperture of mine and then shoved his object in. But he had no sooner buried his glans in there than I felt that all the surrounding muscle was being split. It hurt me so much that I could not help crying.

“Be quiet,” said Ruhai. “The abbot is in the next room and might come over should he hear a woman’s voice.”

I was in such an agony that as Ruhai attempted at further penetration, I, out of fear of another fit of pang, became desperate and turned so quickly as to dislodge his penis out of my anus. I then covered the hole with my hands, and when he pulled them away, swiftly covered it with my dress.

Ruhai grew impatient.

“Are you a virgin?” he asked. “Why is this hurting you so much?”

I burst out laughing in spite of my distress.

“I am not a virgin, moron,” I said. “But you are a Buddhist monk who knows nothing of

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the Taoist way!”¹

Ruahi was stunned.

“Is the woman’s way different?”

“Get up and I show you,” I said.

Full of suspicion, however, Ruhai was rather reluctant to rise, thinking that it might be my trick for escape. It was until I guided his hand into my vagina that he knew that he had been mistaken indeed. He then bent over to gaze at it, and feeling extremely excited, kissed it with his mouth several times.

“Wow, what a marvelous treasure!” he exclaimed. “I have never seen such a thing before!”

“This is the ‘little Dharma gate’,”² I told him. “It is specially designed for a ‘little monk’ to enter and exit.”³

Upon hearing this, Ruhai lifted my feet instantly, and after having set them over his shoulders, pushed his ‘little monk’ straight into me. Since this was his first time to have intercourse with a woman, Ruhai was too excited to contain himself. It took him only a few thrusts before he emitted his fluid.

“My sperm has run out,” he murmured. “But I have not yet been satisfied. What should I do?”

“Nothing I can do for such a thing,” I said, laughing. “Indeed, yours is a ‘little monk’ prone to intoxication before even entering the gate.”

Ruahi was reluctant to part with me, and approached my vulva once more in the hope that he might be able to re-enter it if he was able to get his penis stiff. His attempt, however, failed, and upon my insistence, he had to let me off. I wiped my privates dry with a towel while Ruhai cleaned his genitals.

I was about to depart when, suddenly, Ruhai’s master jumped out from behind the bed and seized me, begging me to sex with him. I had no alternative but to let him have his way. By that time I had been very anxious to go home. I reluctantly carried on to completion, without even finding time to inquire of his name-in-religion.

When I hastened out of the room, I saw no sign of Yinglang. I looked everywhere for him, and inside the rear hall, found him playing with some boy monks. I did not blame him.

The youngest son of the Laun, Ketao, had, by then, been quite familiar in the matters of sex. He had reached the age of twenty and was not married yet. He seemed to have got some wind of my dubious relations with Yinglang, and would pry into my private affairs by taking advantage of every possible opportunity. Tactful as I was in dealing with him, Ketao was craftier.

¹ Buddhism and Taoism, the two different religions in China, here stand for two different genders: male and female. The real meaning of this sentence is: “You are a man who knows nothing of female sexual organs”.

² A Buddhist metaphor for vagina.

³ A Buddhist metaphor for penis.

“Father works hard,” he said to me one day. “With a counter in hand, he buries himself in calculation, comparing prices over and over and reckoning how much interests he can make out of the capitals he has invested. His industry enables us three sons to live a comfortable life. However, Mother has been bedridden, and there are no beautiful maids around. I really don’t know how he can find someone to enjoy himself with?”

Thinking that he must have discovered our secret liaisons, I sprang to my defense. “I did it with Sha’s co-operation,” I said, with a smile. “Why is Younger Brother-in-law mocking at me only?”

Ketao had actually not been quite sure of my illicit connection with Father-in-law. When he understood what I had meant, he laughed.

“Since you could do it to Father-in-law in the presence of someone else,” he said, “you can certainly do it to your Younger Brother-in-law while there is no one around!”

I felt such a shame that a pinkish glow suffused my cheeks.

“At that time your Elder Brother was not at home,” I said. “But he is at home now, so you’d better give up such a vain hope!”

“Today he is away,” said Ketao. “Let me do it quickly, or I shall tell him not only of your illicit relationship with Father-in-law, but of your flirtations with Yinglang.”

I dissolved into giggles.

“Honestly,” I said, “you caught my attention long ago. But I have contained myself simply because I thought you might not be able to satisfy me. Why should I have wasted my time doing something futile without getting any benefit? Now that you have come to me yourself, I certainly have no reason to be finicky.”

We got into the bed together. I had imagined that Younger Brother-in-law’s endowment, if not so large as Datu’s, could at least be the size of Father-in-law’s. Who would have thought that it turned out to be even smaller than that of Yinglang. I could not but burst out laughing.

Ketao claimed to be sexually capable, scarcely aware that I looked down upon him. He nestled against my belly, thrusting to the left and to the right without cease. But being a tiny grain of millet, he was far from able to make an enormous wave in my huge granary.

Suddenly he said, “Let me take a break.”

I said nothing, only sniffing at him in my mind. As a paramour lacking enough staying prowess yet having more than sufficient affection, he was to me just a man to scoff at, not really capable of arousing my strong sexual desire. Yet Ketao, not knowing whose company I enjoyed most, felt quite content.

Before long, I was pregnant.

“Whose child is this?” I wondered. “Yinglang’s? Datu’s? Elder Brother-in-law’s? Younger Brother-in-law’s? Father-in-law’s? My husband’s? Or one of those two monks?” When the child was born, even I myself could not tell from his complexion who his father was, because he did not particularly resemble any of them.

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“Anyway,” I thought, “one of them must be his father!”

My younger sister, Xianjuan, had married into a Fei family. My brother-in-law, Fei, was also a licentiate, making a living on tutoring students. He had been in good with my husband, and since they often gathered together discussing the meanings of literary works, they soon became best friends. As his sister-in-law, I often saw him. Fei was tall and sturdy, and his nose was big like a bottle.

“A big-nosed man must have a big penis,” I mused.

I wished to make his acquaintance and sent Yinglang to convey to him my intention. Fei was beside himself with joy as he learned of my yearnings, for he had always been very interested in me.

It so happened that one day my husband invited him for a drink. After gulping down several cups, my husband fell into a drunken stupor. He bade Fei to take a rest in his study, and he himself went into the bedroom to sleep.

Soon my husband was in sound slumber, snoring thunderously. Quietly I sneaked out of our room to see Fei, and he was happily astonished. Not saying a word, he took me onto his lap and made me sit with my face toward him. I found, as he thrust into me, that his member was only of medium size, not so large as I had expected. I felt I had been fooled: a man with a big nose does not necessarily have a big phallus as some people claim! Despite its size, Fei’s erection was very hard, and was also hot like fire, which gave me a great pleasure. Sitting upright, he heaved me up and down by holding my waist with his hands, himself making no movement at all. While being heaved up and down, I following his tempo began to rock on my own, and felt then a much stronger stimulation.

“Brother-in-law,” I said, “what a marvelous method this is! I feel as if my soul were about to fly away.”

Fei smiled only but made no reply. He turned me around, making me now sit on his lap with my back toward him. After entering me from behind, he once again heaved me up and down as he had done before, and I wriggled along with his motion, feeling extremely good.

“Oh, this tryst is really worthwhile!” I said.

Fei, however, was unable to hold for long, and soon his sperm spilled. I felt I had not had enough and was unwilling to rise. Fei then lifted me up and down once more until I was atingle, feeling as though my skin was stung by a mosquito and my ear was brushed by a broom. I was totally sated.

“I have now obtained one more lover!” I thought.

Yinglang broke in upon my thoughts.

“Mistress,” he called, “please wake up.”

I said to Fei, “I will let you off when you spend again.”

Fei asked me to get up to a standing posture and stoop a little toward the chair in front, so that he could rise to his feet and thrust at me from behind without lifting me up and down.

This time he was violent like a warrior with a weapon in hand and armors buckled on. I bent down to look how he was coupling with me, my lust being incandescent. Before long, my vagina was filled with his fluid again. With his cannon mounted against my pelvis, you can imagine how far its shells could go. In spite of having spent twice, Fei remained as virile and vigorous as ever. It was only his inserter, which was still lodged inside my orifice, that began to lose its previous heat and hardness.

“You must have been exhausted,” I said.

I rose, and then went on to say with a smile, “You have gotten a wife already, and now you have reached your hand to your wife’s elder sister! Your desire seems hard to fulfill. As for me, after having taken a great joy on your lap and received much titillation while leaning over the chair, I have been satisfied. I must be going now.”

Fei did not dare to detain me.

When I was about to go back into my bedroom, Yinglang called me lightly from behind, “Mistress, could you allow me to enjoy your lower body as well? Just now I watched you for so long that I can’t hold myself back any more.”

“As you wish,” I said. “I ought to thank you for your serving me as my go-between.”

Standing there we united in congress. Yinglang shot out his emission before I could even feel his strokes. It was, however, only very occasional that I could make love with him. For most of the times there was no guarantee at all in seeking him for the gratification I desired.

Father-in-law’s birthday was in early autumn. Prior to that day he came to me, not to Sha, for amorous amusement.

“Happy birthday to you!” I said.

On his birthday, the three sons held a dinner party for him. There were four tables of guests, and actors were engaged to put on a play in the courtyard. The cast included male-type characters, an official, a soothsayer, clowns, and female-type characters. The play performed was a Yuan drama, and I watched it from behind a screen. Among the actors playing the roles of female characters, there was one called Xiangchan, who, I noticed, was extremely graceful, elegant, and charming. He was a favorite of rich people. I gazed closely at him. His costume was thin and light; his brows and eyes resembled those in pictures. His beauty was comparable to that of a lady fair, and his clear and melodious singing, lingering in the air and enticing even clouds to stop to listen, was as beautiful as orchestral music. Loving him dearly, I dispatched secretly a female slave to present a cup of tea to him.

“The Second Junior Mistress bestows upon you a cup of jadelike juice,” the slave girl said.

Xiangchan imbibed it, and was delighted to discover that what made the tea so aromatic was not fruits in it as he had thought, but two gold rings, nine pearls, and an amber eardrop. Xiangchan well understood my intention. He drank up the tea and put away the fragrant gifts. Yet he did not dare to come to me immediately, fearing that he might be seen by people around.

My husband, in the middle of the banquet, got a friend visiting him and had to take his

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leave of the party, and for reasons unknown to me, had not returned when the play drew to the end. I once again dispatched the slave girl to Xiangchan secretly.

“The Second Junior Mistress invites you over so that she can ask you how to write some characters,” she said to him.

Xiangchan declined.

“I can’t write, so how can I teach her?”

“The Mistress orders you to come,” the slave girl insisted. “Please don’t reject her.”

“Since this is an order from the Mistress,” said Xiangchan, “I should certainly go without delay. But the pathway leading to her quarters is long and winding and there are people everywhere, so it is very likely that I shall be spotted by someone while moving through the crowds. Moreover, should I depart so suddenly, my colleagues may become suspicious of me.”

“Don’t worry about the winding ways and the throngs,” said my maid. “I will be your guide and will protect you from the inquisitive eyes. And with me accompanying you, those of your peers who might have suspicion of you would surely not be interrogating you.”

Xiangchan removed his female costume and donned his own clothes. What a beautiful young man he was! What an ideal husband for girls of the age for marriage! My slave girl was clever, who finally ushered him into my chamber.

I was not ashamed, since it was I who had invited him. I was seated under a lamp, my face wearing heavy make-up. I bade the slave to close the door and then took Xiangchan into my arms.

“What a handsome youth you are!” I said. “Are you Wang Zijin?¹ Are you Pan Anren?”²

“No, I am neither of them,” he said. “I am just a passerby who happened into this great house. This is a heaven-made match; what else can I say? Tomorrow, when I recollect what was happening today, I might think it was a dream.”

“If you don’t reject me,” I said, “how could I reject you like rejecting some vestiges?” I lay back on the chair, with my legs lifted up. Xiangchan drove up into my central channel. Like those of ordinary men, his male organ was by no means extraordinary, but much larger than that of Ketao, to be sure. Having made its way inside, it hung in the middle the way a vibrating cymbal hangs in a bell. No doubt, it could not give me much pleasure.

I gazed at him under the light. His countenance appeared crystal, very fascinating. I was infatuated, looking him full in the face for a long while.

“Your beauty is a feast to my eyes,” I said, “and I feel I am too ugly to be your match. The reason I insisted that we make love was simply out of the consideration that it would make us not forget each other afterwards. I don’t know when we can meet again. I shall pine for you. Too bad! Too bad!”

¹ Wang Zijin, or Wang Ziqiao, a legendary fairylike person in Chinese mythology, personified male beauty.

² Pan Anren, the style of Pan Yue (247-300), was a famous poet in Jin dynasty. He was also a male beauty.

“Madam,” said Xiangchan, “I feel guilty that I hardly have a thing that can provide you with pleasure. You insisted that I visit you and I have made a fool of myself to show you my incompetence. You didn’t blame me, though. How can I forget your loving affection?”

“If you love me and will not forget me, I shall have no regrets,” I said.

I gave him an emerald hairpin as a souvenir.

Time went by fast and soon quite a few years had passed. But I had not met one single interesting man during this period. Only the two or three old partners took turns to sleep with me, as they had done it before.

The son I had given birth to years ago, whose name was Shengwu, had reached school age. I considered sending him to a private school in the countryside but was afraid that there might be too many children there and that he might spend too much time playing with them. Finally I decided to engage a scholar from Zhaoge county,¹ whose surname was Gu and whose personal name was Deyin. He was thirty years old, masculine and in good shape. He supervised my son’s study in earnest and with carefulness.

I cooked meals for him every day, with an attempt to show that I was very well disposed toward him. My ultimate goal was to have a tryst with him. But for fear of his possible indiscretion, I was hesitated to go to him directly.

That year, my husband went away to another place. I had, by then, been well over thirty, and my beauty was beginning to fade. But wearing makeup, I could still compare favorably with girls in their teens. Being a woman in her thirties, my lust was growing stronger than ever. It was agonizing for me to sleep alone at night.

Before long, Ketao married, and I moved to the West House. Gu teaching my son lodged in the East House. The windows of the two buildings were far apart facing each other, and when I was applying makeup in the morning, I often noticed that Gu was peering at me. In summer time, it was not infrequent that he saw me bare my bosom or remove my underwear. When he tutored my son, he usually sat by the window, and would fix his eye upon me if I was embroidering in front of my window at the time.

“This sly teacher is trying to inveigle me,” I thought. “How should I deal with him?”

The only person I could then order around for errand was a boy named Lingcui. He was young and dull, and had never refused me to do anything I asked him to. I dispatched him to convey my greetings to the teacher.

Gu said to the boy, “Tell Junior Mistress that I have known her intention and very much appreciate it. But in view of her maids being more or less the type of shrew, I wouldn’t dare to go over to disturb her sleep.”

Lingcui returned and reported to me what he had said.

“Why,” I said to myself, “this man is very discreet! Why not send a slave girl to test him first? My eldest maid called Green Lotus is quite voluptuous, and I may as well use her as my

¹ Zhaoge county is in the northern part of present-day Henan province.

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bait.”

I called Green Lotus.

“Go to the East House and tell my son to come back for dinner,” I said.

And there went Green Lotus. Gu seemed clever enough to understand my intention and seized the maid ferociously for intercourse. Though at the beginning Green Lotus defied his brutal force, she soon submitted and received him merrily. Gu tried his best to tantalize her, and Green Lotus felt quite satisfied.

“I would like to sleep with your Junior Mistress,” said Gu.

“Well, you must be patient,” said the maid. “I will help you when I get a chance.”

Upon returning, Green Lotus said to me in an alluring and suggestive way, “Mr. Gu is really a *manly* scholar!”

“Huh,” I said, laughing, “you must have had sex with him, haven’t you? Maybe we can share the fun together!”

Green Lotus was excited.

“You know, Madam, this is also what he wishes,” she confided to me. “Why not set a time with him?”

“How is his member?” I asked.

“Oh, extraordinarily large and strong, like a donkey’s,” she said.

“Great,” I said. “Tell him to come tonight.”

When the moon was rising, Gu slid into the West House. After ascending the stairs, he bowed to me and said, “I deserve the death penalty for intruding into the women’s quarters and offending the dignity of your Ladyship.”

“Breeze is so gentle and the moon is so bright,” I said, “how could I spend the night alone in bed without company? That is the reason why I have invited you so that we can chat and enjoy this beautiful evening together. You need not be so polite.”

We sat down side by side. Feeling a surge of arousal, I was no longer able to constrain myself.

“You may go to sleep now,” Green Lotus suggested.

We then undressed, and putting out the light, went into the bed.

“You are very nice to me and your benediction is boundless,” said Gu. “Although I am just an inferior horse, I would, nevertheless, try my best to provide my rider with as much pleasure as I could.”

He thrust into me; his endowment, quite unlike those I had had sex with before, was larger than what I could receive comfortably. As it went into me, it crammed my whole passage full and gave me a tremendous titillation. Its complete insertion in my vagina left no room inside unfilled, and everywhere, on all sides, was fully and solidly occupied.

“Sir, how extraordinary your object is!” I exclaimed. “Had it not been for Green Lotus’s

introduction, I wouldn't have experienced such a great pleasure! I imagine that even Lu Buwei¹ and Lao Du's² endowments couldn't have been so big."

Gu's penis was both large and lengthy. It could penetrate deep enough as to tantalize me, making my backside soaked with sweat. It could also stretch out and draw back without the motion of his body, throbbing and jerking as though he were throwing a spear inside me. With such a rapturous delight, you can certainly imagine how abundantly my flowing torrent of desire spurted forth. The mouth on the tip of his erection could open and close, and when it seized the bud in my cervix, all my bones seemed to melt. Once I fainted in orgasmic climax. Gu kept thrusting me and did not pause to take a breath till he had done so for about a hundred times.

"I am dying in your hand," I moaned.

"If you did," he said, "I would take my life in return for your kindness."

"I have never entered such a state of rapture before," I said. "Your withdrawing felt like sucking, and your ramming was so forceful as though you were screwing a hole in my vagina."

"Your vessel," said Gu, "is extremely hard to come by like the chance of teaching for you. The hole is not deep but is capable of receiving, not shallow but can be met. It is not tight to be sure, but when I shove into it, it makes me sensible of its clip."

"You love me dearly indeed," I sighed.

That night, Gu and I indulged ourselves in erotic luxury without sleeping a wink. Although I was worn out, I felt happy.

Happy and satisfied, I paid no more delicate attention to my other lovers. I completely devoted myself to Gu. Gu's family was poor, and the clothes he wore were made of coarse fabric. I then made clothes for him. The materials I used for both exterior and interior sides were bright beautiful brocade.

Gu kept me company at night. Sometimes he was too exhausted to be up to my sexual demands. I pitied him, and decocted the herbal medicine for him that could replenish his marrow and strengthen his virility. I also gave him some aphrodisiacs, telling him to take a pill every morning and evening. Before he ate his breakfast, I would feed him with *longan* or *ginseng* juice. Shortly afterwards, I asked Ketao to send to his home a bolt of green brocade and some white-gold ingots. I even sold my hairpins and jade earrings to provide him with better meals.

Gu became arrogant. If his meal was a little late, he would angrily throw his bowl or dishes on the floor, refusing to eat no matter that he had a table of delicious food. I had no

¹ Lu Buwei (? – 235 BC) was the prime minister and the biological father to the ruler of the State of Qin, who was to become the first emperor of China fifteen years later. He kept illicit liaison with his ex-concubine even after she married to Zichu, the crown prince of the State of Qin, who was later to become its ruler and the nominal father of the First Emperor of China. Lu is also well-known as the compiler of *Lushi chunqiu* (The Annals of Lu Buwei), a rich and comprehensive compendium which records the great variety of the beliefs and customs of that time. See "Biography of Lu Wuwei", in Sima Qian's *Shiji* (Records of the Grand Historian).

² Lao Du (? – 238 BC), whose phallus was extraordinary, was a secret lover of the First Emperor's mother. After she had heard of his unusually large male organ, she had his beard removed and made him a high-ranking "eunuch" in the palace. Lao Du thereafter served her as a disguised "eunuch". See "Biography of Lu Buwei", in Sima Qian's *Shiji* (Records of the Grand Historian).

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way of soothing him but to re-cook it. Having been well fed, he was more affectionate in making love to me at night, and more energetic. I began to give way to my wanton and lecherous inclinations, no longer feeling guilty. Since Green Lotus waited upon us, Gu was obliged to spend some time with her as well. Green Lotus had acted as my go-between and I had no complaints.

With my mind entirely focused on Gu, I was estranged from Yinglang. Exasperated, Yinglang consulted with Datu.

“I must bring their affairs to light!” he swore.

Yinglang once cursed Gu at a distance, so loud that Father-in-law heard his tirade of vituperation. Father-in-law came to me immediately, but I did not make explanation to him in a nice manner. When Father-in-law forced me to perform the act of love to him, I did it only passively and perfunctorily. Father-in-law became rather suspicious of me, and disliked me ever since.

It had not been long since I slept with Ketao the previous time. But now I tried to keep a distance from him. When he came to me for bawdy dalliance, I treated him indifferently, no longer as tender as before. Ketao felt unhappy, of course, and after finding out that I was unusually intimate with Gu, resented me bitterly.

The neighbors on our street were riotous when they caught wind of my scandal. They chanted:

Shangguan Enuo

Is with a man from Zhaoge.

How very notorious she is for her fornication!

How can a whetstone erase her bad reputation?

Nevertheless, they knew nothing of the other men with whom I had engaged in illicit sex as well. I now no longer had scruples, and would have intercourse with Gu wherever possible. Once I was caught by Father-in-law and Ketao on the spot.

“How dare you be so brazen!” Father-in-law bellowed at me.

The scandal soon spread. Datu, not daring to tell my husband directly, spoke to my son instead. “Your mother is sleeping with your teacher!” he told him. “If you are not to dismiss your teacher, that would mean you are willing to indulge your mother!”

My son had grown up. Datu’s words incited his indignation at me.

Fei, the husband of my younger sister, came to our home one day with the intention of renewing our old intimate relationship. But I bluntly rejected him.

“I am getting old, not capable of serving you any more,” I said. “It was foolish of me years ago not to confine myself to where I should have been, and certainly I can’t repeat this mistake once again.”

Full of suspicion, Fei made inquiries of me from Ketao, who disclosed to him that I had obtained a new lover.

“That beggared fellow is courting death!” Fei cursed. “But she is really too shameless!”

Needless to say, Fei, too, hated me.

It so happened that on that day my cousin Huimin came to visit me. Though nearly forty years of age, he had just recently become a licentiate, and the purpose of his visit was simply to say hello to me. There was nothing amatory to be involved. But Gu, whom Huimin ran into in the courtyard as he entered, thought that he might be one of my adulterers.

“This man will carve up my enjoyment,” he thought.

“You bastard!” he then shouted at Huimin. “How dare you in this compound claim that you are her cousin! Get out right away, or I shall let out a dog to bite your legs!”

Huimin became mad.

“This is simply a courtesy call,” he shouted back. “Why are you cursing me for no reason at all? Who are you? You damned sour prick and stinking balls!”

He retreated, and encountering Fei on his way back home, told him about the incident that had just now occurred.

“Shame for Sister-in-law!” said Fei. “She recently has gone too far indeed! The fellow who insulted you is none other than Gu, her lover.”

Fei then related to Huimin the story in detail.

“I must tell Keyong,” said Huimin.

Huimin went looking for my husband, and told him everything he knew.

My husband was aghast.

“Thank you for letting me know,” he said.

Yet in his mind he was still doubtful.

“Is the story true?” he asked my son.

“Yes,” my son answered.

My husband then asked Father-in-law, “Have you ever heard of it?”

“Quite a few times,” said Father-in-law.

“Did you see them together?” he asked Ketao then.

“Oh, on many occasions,” Ketao replied.

My husband sighed.

“My wife’s adultery has been so notorious that people on the street sang it, friends and relatives knew it, and the whole family laughed at me behind my back. I am the only person who has been kept in the dark. How stupid I am!”

He then called me, furiously.

“You bitch!” he yelled at me. “I wish I could kill both you and Gu the bastard and bring the case to court! But I am not hardhearted enough. Bring him here!”

Gu was brought in. He was pushed hard and fell on the floor.

“Spare my life!” Gu implored, crying.

My husband ordered everyone of the family to flog him. Father-in-law did it first, and then the rest took their turns, each flogging him several strokes. Gu howled like an ass braying,

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his flesh broken, his blood splashing out.

Ketao pleaded on his behalf.

“It is Sister-in-law who should take the blame,” he said. “He should not be punished too harshly.”

Gu then was dragged out.

Wrathful, my husband grabbed my hair and hit me wherever he could lay his fist on. I felt too shameful to protest.

“You are not only lewd but despicable,” he roared. “You may as well hang yourself, here and now!”

I wept, my tears coursing down my cheeks. “I am lewd indeed,” I said, “but I beg you to spare my life. I will be willing to take whatever punishments you wish me to take, and I promise you I will correct my misconduct.”

“Ha-ha,” laughed my husband grimly. “You are afraid of death and that is why you are so willing to accept corporeal punishments. How sly you are! You may drink a cup of poisonous wine if you want to make your suicide less painful.”

Father-in-law intervened.

“My second son,” he said, “it is your misfortune to have a wife so lewd and unfaithful. But I would rather prefer that you send her back to her parents’ home instead of hounding her to death. That is too cruel!”

“But such a punishment is precisely what she is seeking,” said my husband, disgruntling. “I can’t let her go so easily!”

“If you must kill my mother,” said my son, “I shall kill myself too!”

I cried, saying, “Even a mother having seven sons lived a miserable life.¹ How could I expect that I would have a better fate?”

“Daughter-in-law attended to me carefully and with diligence,” said Mother-in-law. “Now that this thing has happened, send her back home in a decent way.”

“All right,” came the reply from my husband.

The writ of divorce deprived me of the status both as Keyong’s wife and Shenwu’s mother, and I was to be sent back to my mother’s home in no time. I sighed with regret. I said farewell to my son and then took my leave, going back alone by myself. By that time, my father had passed away. My mother, who had no male heir, did not blame me much.

“You may stay with me for the time being,” she said.

That year I was thirty-nine years old.

Since I was divorced from my husband, one and all in the neighborhood knew me, and every time I went out or returned home, somebody would point his or her finger at me, saying, “This is the corrupt woman of the Luan household.”

¹ The allusion is to the poem entitled “Kaifeng” (Southern Wind) in the section of Bei of the *The Book of Poetry*.

Sad and regretful, I said to myself, “I failed in the middle stage of my life! And it served me right! When I was a maiden, I was influenced by a young woman’s words and slept with Huimin, which violated the relationship between siblings. Afterwards I seduced the slave Jun, making myself reduced to the status of a servant. Having married, I slept with Yinglang and then was forced into intercourse with Datu, lowering once more my status as a mistress. I kept incestuous liaisons with Father-in-law as well as Elder Brother-in-law. I violated the relationship between in-laws. I was intimate with Ketao, which also violated the relationship between in-laws. Copulation with Fei was another type of violation of the relationship between in-laws, and copulation with an actor and two monks was a profanation of my respectful ladyship. Keeping Gu as my lover, I had, in effect, equated myself with my employee. I had, outside my marriage, sexual relationship with twelve men altogether. My iniquity was too great to be pardoned and I deserved to be cast off by my husband and my son. Now I am suffering a lone life in celibacy. Who else is to blame but myself?”

I bit my finger till it bled.

“I will never again indulge myself in carnal pleasures!” I vowed.

At the suggestion of my mother, I began to worship the Triratna.¹ Every day I recited my rosary and kept to vegetarian diet, and confessed my sin with my head bowed down. “The sea of desire and the mountain of sex have been filled with the guilt I committed,” I repented, “and I wish I could find some cold, clear water with which to cleanse my lecherous heart!”

By that time my ex-husband and his family had broken off all the relationship with me, and so had Huimin and Fei, who had never come to call upon me once more. It was only Ruhai who, after hearing that I had been divorced and had become a devout disciple of Buddha, dispatched a monk to pay me a visit. Unaware that the monk was his messenger, I went out to welcome him.

“I am a monk from the Temple of Vacuity,” the messenger, seeing me alone, introduced himself. Yet no sooner had I heard his self-introduction than I realized that he had been sent by Ruhai. Blushing red, I rushed back into the house at once and called my boy-servant to drive him away.

I have gone through thirty years of a lone life, and now I am seventy years old. My former attachments have been all gone. I was not excited even when I heard that my son had made himself famous locally.

“Recollecting things that happened in the past,” I say to Qiongke, “I feel I was in a dream. I am old, and no longer have fear of being laughed at. That is why I could rattle on and on telling everything to you. Are you bored?”

Qiongke remarks:

The young woman’s teaching of sexual experience would have been unknown to anyone else had the old lady not disclosed it. Her story is amusing simply because it was related by

¹ Buddha

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herself. Wasn't she foolish, leaving us this account of her life as a woman of infatuation?

*Her body is on Mount Wu¹ yet her mind soars up into clouds,
Is it that she has lustful roots of previous life, one may doubt?
Leaving readers with an erotic story, Enuo feels shameful,
Yet pretty women with romances now are more than a handful.*

Critique²

Shangguan, who had illicit sexual liaisons with twelve men, ended up in divorce when her relations with Gu Deyin came to light. Her loving devotion to one man only was the reason why all others became jealous of her. Keyong knew but her affair with Gu and abandoned her, hardly aware of the rest of her amours. How dumb he was! The publication of her memoir would therefore be helpful to those who wish to discipline their boudoirs and take stricter precautions.

¹ A legendary place famous for sexual encounter.

² This part appears in the Chinese text as the ending of the story. In my judgment, however, it must have been added by someone else when the story was in private circulation in the form of manuscript, to serve as a general critique. But when the book was formally published, this critique had been integrated into the text. It was very likely that this was done by the publisher purposefully. So in my translation I have restored the part to its original form.

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