

馮夢龍：況太守路斷死孩兒

## The Case of the Dead Infant

By Feng Meng-lung, ed. (1574-1646)

Translated by C. T. Hsia and Susan Arnold Zonana

*Spring flowers and the autumn moon  
invite romance,  
But how very soon rosy cheeks are  
crowned with white hair!  
Let us compare frail humanity to the  
pine and cypress:  
How many of us can thus withstand the  
winter's cold?*

THIS QUATRAIN speaks generally of how spring flowers and the autumn moon vex men's hearts so that a young scholar would compose poems to lament the autumn and a beautiful maiden would sing songs to commiserate the spring. Frequently these poetic puzzles of theirs imply regret that they haven't met earlier, and the talk of their eyes conveys love. So in a rendezvous beneath the moon, a tryst among the flowers, they would only seek the romantic fulfillment of the moment, reckless of their lifelong reputations. In such cases, the couple shares a mutual love, each repaying a debt contracted in a previous existence, and so we need not be concerned with them.

There are also the situations in which the young man feels desire but the girl does not love him or the girl loves him but the young man does not desire her. Although theirs is not a case of mutual love, still one side is absolutely sincere. If the one in love prays to the plastered gods in a deserted temple and burns incense morning and evening, then he cannot help moving the other side to some degree. If their union is destined to be brief, then they will eventually drift apart. But if their union is destined to be long-lasting, then they will quickly become intimate. This also happens in the world

of love, and we need not say more about it.

In addition, there are the cases in which a man remains unperturbed by beauty and a woman unmoved by love. Their virtue is like pure gold, and their hearts are like solid stone. Then, without cause, someone will set a snare to humiliate them, and in a weak moment they will lose their self-control and fall into the snare, to their undying regret. For example, the Buddhist abbot Yu-t'ung of Sung times had been an ascetic for fifty years. But because he offended Prefect Liu Hsuan-chiao, Liu schemed against him and ordered the prostitute Hung-lien to disguise herself as a widow and ask for a night's lodgings. She enticed him in a hundred ways and destroyed his asceticism.<sup>1</sup>

This type of encounter, and the resultant dalliance, is due to the victim's momentary failure to withstand temptation. Now I will tell a story about enticing a widow to lose her chastity; it could

<sup>1</sup>A famous story of a Buddhist abbot's fall from grace through violation of the sex taboo, one version of which appeared in the Ming collection of stories, *Ch'ing-p'ing-shan-t'ang hua-pen* (清平山堂話本). In this version, "The Story of Monk Five-Taboos' Adultery with Red Lily", Hung-lien (Red Lily) is not a prostitute but a foundling in the monastery who grows up to become a beautiful maid.

stand as a companion piece to the story of Yu-t'ung. Verily,

*While tarrying on the mountain of love,  
do not ask for the Way;  
If yet sunk in the sea of desire, do not  
sit in meditation.*

IT IS SAID that during the reign period of Hsuan-te,<sup>2</sup> in I-chen *hsien*, a district of Yangchow (a prefecture of the Southern Metropolitan Area),<sup>3</sup> there lived a commoner named Ch'iu Yuan-chi, whose family was quite well off. He married a girl of the Shao family (Shao-shih), an outstanding beauty distinguished for virtue as well. Husband and wife loved each other very much. When they had lived together for six years without any issue, unexpectedly Yuan-chi fell sick and died. Shao-shih, who was just then twenty-three years old, was filled with grief and vowed to remain a chaste widow, never to marry again. Before you know it, the three years of mourning had passed. Because she was so young and had so many days ahead of her, her parents urged her to remarry. Her husband's uncle, Ch'iu Ta-sheng, also repeatedly sent his wife over to reason with her and ask her to change her mind. But Shao-shih had a heart of stone and could not be moved. She vowed, "Now that my late husband rests below the Nine Springs, if I were to serve another family and take a second husband, I would either perish under a knife or die by the rope." When everyone saw how determined she was, who would dare to come to pressure her further! But the saying goes, "If you can swallow three gallons of vinegar at one sitting, you can live on as a lone widow." Widowhood is not easily maintained. The best long-term course for Shao-shih would have been to take another husband in the open. Although then she would not have rated in the top category of women, still she would not have missed being counted in the middle group, and would not have come into disgrace in the end. Verily,

*To accomplish anything, one must stand  
on firm ground  
And pay no heed to hollow reputation.*

<sup>2</sup>In Ming dynasty, adopted upon the accession in 1426 of Emperor Hsuan Tsung, and ended in 1436.

<sup>3</sup>Nan Chih-li (南直隸), so called for being under the direct jurisdiction of Nanking.

After Shao-shih had made her boast, people, according to their lights, either loudly praised her or remained skeptical, watching what she would do next. Shao-shih, however, was determined to be chaste. She withdrew still further into the privacy of her own rooms and kept as her only companion the maidservant Hsiu-ku, with whom she sewed for a living. There was also one ten-year-old serving boy, Te-kuei, who guarded the middle door leading to her inner apartment. It was also his responsibility to fetch firewood and water and make all necessary purchases. All the other serving boys, who had reached manhood, were now dismissed. Thus there were no idlers in the courtyard, and inside and outside of her inner apartment a strict quiet and rectitude prevailed. After several years of this, everyone was somewhat awe-struck and believed her. Who did not praise Shao-shih for her steadfastness in spite of her relative youth and her maintenance of order and discipline in her own household?

Time sped by like an arrow, and soon it was time to observe the tenth anniversary of her husband's death. Shao-shih, cherishing his memory, wanted to have a Buddhist memorial service conducted. She told Te-kuei to invite her uncle Ch'iu Ta-sheng over to consult him about engaging seven monks to recite the sutras for three days and nights. "Uncle," Shao-shih entreated him, "as a widow, I rely entirely upon you to make suitable arrangements for the ceremonies." Ta-sheng agreed.

Our story forks at this point. There was a man named Chih Chu who had recently moved to the neighborhood. A ne'er-do-well, he had always been something of a troublemaker and did not stick to a regular line of business. He just idled in the streets and made a living by meddling in other people's affairs. He heard people say that Shao-shih was a young widow so very fair and chaste that one could hardly find her equal in the world. Chih Chu did not believe this, and so morning and evening he was always hanging around by the front gate of the Ch'iu house. There would be no other idlers around, of course; only the boy servant Te-kuei could be seen going in and out of the gate on his errands. So Chih Chu made his acquaintance, and came to be on familiar terms with him. One day, as they were chatting, he asked Te-kuei, "I have heard that your mistress is very beautiful; is it true or not?"

*This story is No. 35 of the Ching-shih t'ung-yen (警世通言), one of three anthologies of stories edited by Feng Meng-lung collectively referred to as the San-yen (三言). The title 況太守斷死孩兒 is given in the table of contents of the earliest Ming edition as 況太守路斷死孩兒. It could be translated as "While travelling, Prefect K'uang judges the case of a dead infant". According to Patrick Hanan, in The Chinese Short Story (Harvard, 1973), it is among the newer of the 120 San-yen stories, dating from the late-Ming period. Its authorship is uncertain, either by Feng himself or one of his scholarly associates, and it is adapted from an earlier tale about another famous judge.*

*In an Appendix on the short story in his book The Classic Chinese Novel, Prof. C. T. Hsia referred to the Elizabethan drama The Changeling in discussing this tragic tale of "man's bewilderment over his humiliating surrender to lust". The widow Shao-shih's final horror upon discovering Chih Chu's diabolic design is "not unlike the horror of Beatrice. . . upon finding herself under the sinister spell of (the servant) De Flores," Prof. Hsia wrote. "In ably dramatizing the contrast between presumed honor and actual helplessness before temptation, the story has registered a moral truth of universal application."*

As one serving since childhood in a family of strict propriety, Te-kuei was honest to the point of simple-mindedness. So he answered, "Beautiful indeed she is."

"Does your lady ever come to the front gate to watch the street?" asked Chih Chu further.

Te-kuei waved his hand and said, "She has never gone past the middle door, let alone come out to watch the street—what a thought!"

Another day, as Te-kuei was shopping for vegetarian food, Chih Chu ran into him and asked, "Why is your household stocking so much vegetarian food?"

"It's needed for the Buddhist ceremonies observing the tenth anniversary of our master's death," replied Te-kuei.

"When?" asked Chih Chu.

"Starting tomorrow for three days and nights," said Te-kuei. "It's really a lot of work."

Hearing this, Chih Chu thought to himself, "Since she is commemorating her husband, she must come out to the central hall to offer incense. I'll just sneak in to see what sort of face she has, and if she really looks as chaste as a young widow should be."

On the following day, the seven monks, all ascetics, came at the invitation of Ch'iu Ta-sheng and set up an image of Buddha in the hall. With great solemnity they struck the cymbals and beat the drums, intoned the scriptures and performed

the ritual of penitance. Ch'iu Ta-sheng earnestly prayed to Buddha. Shao-shih came out to offer incense, but only once during the day and once at night. As soon as she had finished, she withdrew inside.

Taking advantage of all the ceremonial activity in the hall, Chih Chu got in several times to look, but not once did he see Shao-shih come out. Again by asking Te-kuei, he learned that she only came out once during the day at lunchtime. So on the third day just about lunchtime, Chih Chu again sneaked in, hiding behind the screen door. He saw the monks in their cassocks playing their musical instruments in front of the holy image and calling on the name of Buddha. On the ceremonial platform the monk in charge of the incense kept his hands and feet busy adding incense and changing candles. Of the members of the household there was only Te-kuei, who was coming and going, doing his best to respond to calls. When would he find time to check into what was going on elsewhere in the hall? Even Ch'iu Ta-sheng and several relatives were intently watching the monks pipe and drum; who would bother to look if there was a stranger in their midst?

In a short while Shao-shih came out to offer incense, and Chih Chu was able to watch her closely. A common jingle goes, "A widow in white/Ravishes one's sight." Dressed in plain white, Shao-shih appeared doubly striking in her unassuming

beauty. Clearly she was

*The goddess of Kuang-han Palace suffused  
with moonlight,  
Or the fairy of Mt. Ku-yeh, white as driven  
snow.*<sup>4</sup>

Chih Chu saw her and his whole body turned numb. Returning home, he could not stop thinking of her. The ceremonies completed that night, the monks departed at daybreak and, as before, Shao-shih would not now venture as far as the central hall. Chih Chu could devise no stratagem that would work. Then he thought, "The boy servant Te-kuei is gullible. I'll just have to cast my hook carefully in his direction."

IT WAS THE fifth day of the fifth month,<sup>5</sup> and Chih Chu insisted on Te-kuei coming home with him to drink some orpiment wine. "I don't drink," protested Te-kuei, "If my face gets red, I am afraid my mistress will scold me." "Even if you don't drink, have some glutinous rice dumplings anyway," urged Chih Chu. So Te-kuei accompanied him home, and Chih Chu asked his wife to unwrap a plateful of dumplings, prepare a saucer of sugar, a bowl of pork, a bowl of fresh fish, two pairs of chopsticks, and two wine cups, and set them on the table. Chih Chu took the wine pot and was about to pour.

"I said I don't drink; don't pour me any," cautioned Te-kuei.

"It's fitting on this festival day to drink a cup of orpiment wine. This wine of mine is so weak it won't affect you," said Chih Chu. Unable to resist the pressure, Te-kuei could not help but drink. Chih Chu coaxed further, "A young fellow should never drink just one cup; you must have another to complete the pair." Te-kuei was unable to refuse and so drank another cup.

Chih Chu kept drinking himself, relayed the idle gossip of the streets, and then again poured a cup

<sup>4</sup>Kuang-han (廣寒), the palace in the moon, where dwells the fairy Goddess Ch'ang-o (嫦娥). Ku-yeh (姑射), a mountain in present-day Shansi Province, also known as an abode of fairies.

<sup>5</sup>Tuan-wu (端午), sometimes known as the "Dragon Boat Festival", when the traditional food is a pyramid-shaped pudding made of glutinous rice and a medicinal wine containing flowers of sulphur is drunk to ward off evil spirits.

for Te-kuei. "I'm so drunk my face has turned all red. Now I really won't drink any more," said Te-kuei.

"Your face has turned red anyway. If you sit here a little while longer before you go home, it won't matter. Just drink this one cup; I won't force any more on you," said Chih Chu.

Altogether Te-kuei drank three cups of wine. He had lived in the Ch'iu house since he was very little, and had been under the strict control of his mistress. When could he ever have tried the taste of wine! Today with three cups in his stomach, he was feeling woozy. Taking advantage of his inebriation, Chih Chu softly said, "Brother Te-kuei, I have a small matter to ask you about."

"Just tell me what it is," replied Te-kuei.

"Your mistress has been widowed for so long her desires must surely be stirring. If she could find a man to sleep with, wouldn't she be happy! Widows have always been anxious to have a man; it's just hard for them to meet one. You lead me there to give me a chance to tempt her, how about that? If it's a success, I'll reward you handsomely."

"What are you saying!" replied Te-kuei. "How can you be so wicked! My mistress is most proper and guards her place with vigilance. During the day no man is allowed to go through the middle door. At night, before she goes to bed, she and her maid carry a lamp and inspect everywhere to make sure that each door is locked. Even if I wanted to lead you in, where would you hide? Her maid never leaves her side. My mistress wouldn't permit one word of idle gossip, and yet you talk so impudently."

"If it's like this, do they come to inspect your room?" asked Chih Chu.

"Why wouldn't they?" said Te-kuei.

"Brother Te-kuei," said Chih Chu, "how old are you now?"

"Seventeen," he replied.

"A man is sexually ready when he reaches sixteen," said Chih Chu. "You are already seventeen. Do you mean to say you haven't thought of taking a woman?"

"Even if I had thought about it, it wouldn't do me any good," said Te-kuei.

"With such a beauty around the house for you to look at morning and evening, how can you not get stirred up!" said Chih Chu.

"You shouldn't talk like that!" he replied. "She

is my mistress and at the least mistake she can hit me or scold me. Whenever I see her, I get so scared! How could you make fun of me like this!"

"Since you are not willing to take me there," said Chih Chu, "I'll teach you a way so that you yourself may get your hands on her, how about it?"

Te-kuei shook his head and said, "This can't be done, can't be done! Besides, I don't have that kind of nerve!"

"Don't worry about whether or not it can be done," said Chih Chu. "I'll tell you a plan just to test her once. If you get her, don't forget my kindness today."

In the first place Te-kuei was under the influence of the wine. In the second place he was just at the right age. Chih Chu's words made him itch inside. So he asked, "Tell me how to go about testing her."

Chih Chu said, "At night when you are ready to go to sleep, don't close your door, but let it remain open. Since it is now the fifth month and the weather is very warm, you can very well lie stark naked on your back and get that thing up nice and hard and wait till she comes to check your door. Then you pretend to be asleep. If she sees you, she must be aroused. After one or two times, she certainly won't be able to withstand her desire, and she will come to you."

"And if she doesn't, then what?" asked Te-kuei.

"Even if this doesn't work," said Chih Chu, "she still couldn't very well scold you. So you have everything to gain and nothing to lose."

"If I do as you say, Elder Brother, and it works, I won't dare forget to repay you," said Te-kuei. In a little while when he had sobered up, he said good-bye. That night he acted according to the plan. Verily:

*Under lamplight a heinous plot is hatched,  
To turn around a woman's unturnable  
heart.*

IN ALL FAIRNESS, Shao-shih's household rules were extremely strict. Te-kuei, at the compromising age of seventeen, should have been sent away and another boy hired to serve her. Wouldn't that have been best! But because Te-kuei had waited on her in his clumsy and honest fashion ever since he was a child and because Shao-shih herself, guileless and

pure, had never thought of any embarrassing contingencies that might involve her in his company, she had let matters drift. That night, accompanied by her maid Hsiu-ku, Shao-shih lit the lamp and proceeded to check all the doors. When she saw Te-kuei lying naked on his back, she scolded, "This dog of a slave! His door isn't even closed, and he sleeps there stark naked! What impudence!" She then told Hsiu-ku to pull shut the door to his room.

Had Shao-shih acted decisively, called Te-kuei to her the next morning, told him of his lazy and outrageous behavior of the previous evening, and given him a sound scolding and beating, then Te-kuei would not have dared more. But she had lived alone for so long that it seemed to her the experience of seeing that rare thing would lengthen her life by a dozen years, and so she kept absolutely mum.

Te-kuei was emboldened. When evening came he repeated the act. Accompanied by her maid, Shao-shih again inspected the doors with a lamp. When she saw him, she again scolded, "This cur is getting even more impudent! Doesn't even cover himself with a quilt." She told Hsiu-ku to pull a sheet over the boy without awaking him. This time she was somewhat aroused, but since Hsiu-ku was around she could not very well do anything.

On the third day Te-kuei went out and ran into Chih Chu, who asked him whether he had used the plan or not. Honest in his simple-minded way, Te-kuei detailed all the events of the two nights. Chih Chu said, "Since she told her maid to cover you and not to wake you, she must be feeling some love for you. I am sure you will be favored tonight."

That night, as before, Te-kuei opened the door, pretended to be asleep, and waited. Now that her mind was set, Shao-shih did not ask Hsiu-ku to accompany her on her tour of inspection. She took the lamp herself and went straight to Te-kuei's bedside. Looking at his supine body in all its nakedness and especially at that thing as hard and firm as a spearhead, she could not but feel her heart pounding wildly and her whole body afire with lust. She took off her undergarment and climbed up the bed. Afraid that she might startle Te-kuei, she noiselessly sat astride his body and guided his entry. Then suddenly Te-kuei clasped her, rolled over until he was on top, and played with her the game of cloud and rain:

*She has been long denied the pleasures of  
the bed,  
He is experimenting for the first time the  
joys of love.  
She, reclaiming an old plaything, enjoys  
it with abandon,  
He, delighting in the new taste of sweets,  
craves for more.  
She, too hungry to choose her fare, does-  
n't mind the serving boy with all his  
uncouthness,  
He, pampered and assured of favor, fears  
not his mistress's authority.  
It's obvious he is but a noxious creeper,  
Yet it intertwines on the trellis with a  
prized flower.  
It's a pity that the ice and snow of her  
pure heart  
Should melt like spring waters and flow  
eastward:  
Her ten-year record of spotless chastity is  
rendered void—  
She can never wash away her shame after  
a night's defilement.*

After they had finished, Shao-shih told Te-kuei, "I have endured widowhood for ten years. That I should now lose myself to you must be repayment for some wrong I did you in a previous existence. You must keep your mouth shut and not leak this out to anyone. You can expect special favors from me."

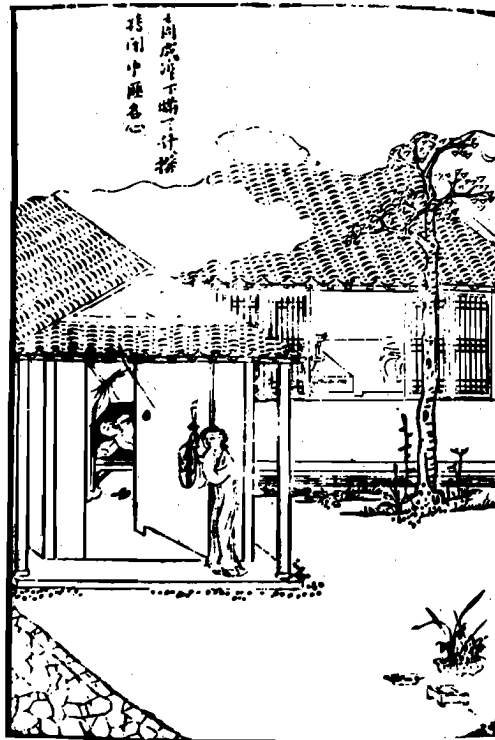
"How dare I not obey your command?" replied Te-kuei.

From that night on, every evening Shao-shih would use the inspection tour as an excuse to take her pleasure with Te-kuei and then go back to her own room. But she was afraid that Hsiu-ku might find out, and so she connived to make it possible for Te-kuei to seduce the maid. Shao-shih then made a show of upbraiding Hsiu-ku so as to make her confess her crime with Te-kuei and thus seal her mouth. After that, the three of them were all as close as water flowing in the same stream, and did not hide anything from each other.

Grateful for the guidance of Chih Chu, Te-kuei would often beg for this and that from Shao-shih and take it as a present to him. Chih Chu, on his part, was daily expecting Te-kuei to introduce him to his mistress. Te-kuei, however, was afraid that

she might rebuke him, and did not dare broach the matter. Repeatedly Chih Chu asked for news, and each time Te-kuei just made excuses without denying him hope.

Shao-shih and Te-kuei lived like man and wife for three or five months, but even then it would seem that they were fated for exposure and ruin. Shao-shih, who had been barren during the six years of her married life, now felt after only these few months the imperceptible swelling of her breasts and belly, for she had become pregnant. Fearing that it would not do for people to find out, she took some silver and gave it to Te-kuei, instructing him to go secretly to get some medicine for abortion, so that she could miscarry the illegitimate child and avoid future disgrace. But, in the first place, Te-kuei was ignorant and did not know what medicine was good for abortion. Secondly, ever since he received Chih Chu's guidance, he had regarded him as his benefactor, hiding



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To turn around a woman's unturnable heart.*

nothing from him. So this time, too, he went to discuss this confidential matter with him.

CHIH CHU WAS nothing but a villain. He had been highly resentful because Te-kuei was unwilling to bring him to his mistress. Now he welcomed this opportunity to work his will. Formulating a plan in his mind, he deceived Te-kuei by saying, "A certain pharmacy that I know has the most effective medicine of this kind. I'll buy some for you." So he went to a pharmacy, got four doses of medicine to strengthen the womb, and gave them to Te-kuei to take home.

Shao-shih took the medicine four times, but felt no movement inside her womb. She told Te-kuei to go to a different place to get some better medicine. Again Te-kuei came to Chih Chu and asked, "How come the medicine you gave me last time didn't work?" "You can only abort once," said Chih Chu. "If the first attempt is not a success, you cannot try again. Especially since this medicine, which is of the highest quality and can only be obtained at that one place, did not induce an abortion, then the pregnancy is firm. If she now takes some harsher medicine to abort, I'm afraid it would harm her health." Te-kuei relayed these words to Shao-shih, who accepted them as true.

When Shao-shih was completing her last month of pregnancy, Chih Chu knew for sure her time was due. He sought out Te-kuei and said, "I want to concoct some medicine to strengthen me, and I must use a newborn baby. Your mistress is about to come to term. When she gives birth to the child, she certainly won't raise it. Whether it's a boy or a girl, you can bring it to me. You owe me a lot; if you give me the child, you will be repaying my kindness without any expenditure on your part. Just keep it from your mistress, that's all." Te-kuei agreed.

A few days later, Shao-shih did give birth to a male child. After drowning it, she put it in a rush-bag and told Te-kuei to bury it in a secret place. Te-kuei acknowledged the order, but instead of burying the child, he took it secretly to Chih Chu. After stowing away the dead infant, Chih Chu clutched Te-kuei and shouted, "Your mistress was the wife of Ch'iu Yuan-chi, and he has been dead for many years. With a widow in charge of the house, where did the child come from? I am going to report this to the authorities!"

Te-kuei hurriedly covered Chih Chu's mouth, saying, "I took you to be my benefactor and talked over everything with you. How can you turn against me like that?"

Putting on a stern face, Chih Chu said, "You did a fine thing! You raped your mistress. Your crime deserves the punishment of being sliced to death. Do you mean to say that I should let you go just because you called me benefactor? Since you know that kindness should be repaid with kindness, what have you done for me? Now if you want me to keep my mouth shut, tell your mistress to give me one hundred taels of silver; then I will conceal her evil ways and extol her virtues. But if there is no money, then I definitely won't bring the matter to a close. With this newborn baby as evidence, see if you can acquit yourself at court. Even your mistress will not have the face to live on in this world. I will await your answer at home; go now and come back right away."

On his way home, Te-kuei was reduced to tears in his state of fright. Realizing he could not conceal anything, he had no choice but to give the message to Shao-shih. She blamed him, saying, "What sort of thing is that to give somebody as a present! You have ruined me." As she finished speaking, she couldn't help the tears flowing.

"If it has been anybody else," said Te-kuei, "I wouldn't have given it to him. But because he was my benefactor, I couldn't very well refuse him."

"What sort of benefactor was he to you?" asked Shao-shih.

"It was he who taught me to lie naked on my back to arouse you," replied Te-kuei. "If it had not been for him, how could we have achieved our present love for each other? He said he wanted the child for medicine. Could I not offer it to him? How could I know he did not harbor good intentions?"

"What you have done," said Shao-shih, "was not very clever. At first it was my momentary weakness that made me fall for the trap of that villain; now it is too late to repent my folly. If I don't give the silver to ransom the child, he will certainly bring the matter to court. Then it would be too late to do anything." She had no choice but to take out forty taels of silver and instruct Te-kuei to take it to that villain in exchange for the child and then secretly bury it to remove the source of all danger.



Simple-minded, Te-kuei delivered the forty taels of silver to Chih Chu with both hands, saying, "There is just this much. Now give the child back to me."

Upon receiving the silver, Chih Chu was far from satisfied. He thought, "This woman is beautiful, and her pockets are well-lined. If I take advantage of this opportunity, it will be possible for me to move in and have her. Further more, I'll be in charge of her affairs. Won't that be lovely?" So he told Te-kuei, "I was only fooling when I said I wanted silver. But since you've brought it here, I can only accept. The newborn baby I have buried already. Why not commend me before your mistress and propose that she and I live together? If she agrees, I will manage the house for her so that no one would dare to take advantage of her. Won't that be lovely on both counts? Otherwise, I will dig up the child and inform on you still. Give me a reply within five days." Te-kuei had no choice but to return home and relate all this to Shao-shih. She declared in rage, "Listen to that no-good ruffian! Don't pay any attention to him!" Te-kuei consequently didn't dare bring up the matter again.

Meanwhile Chih Chu preserved the infant in lime, put it again in the rush-bag, and hid it. He waited five days without receiving Te-kuei's reply. He put it off another five days, making ten days in all. He reckoned that the woman would have recovered her strength by then. So he proceeded to the front gate of the Ch'iu house and waited for Te-kuei to come out. Then he asked him, "Is my proposal agreed to or not?"

"Can't be done, can't be done!" replied Te-kuei, shaking his head.

Chih Chu didn't pause to ask another question, but heading toward the gate, he burst right in. Te-kuei did not dare stop him, but walked some distance from the house to the street corner to wait around and see what was to happen.

When Shao-shih saw someone walking into the central hall, she lashed out, "There are rules to observe in this house. Who are you, barging in like that?"

"My name is Chih Chu; I am Brother Te-kuei's benefactor," replied Chih Chu.

Knowing who he was, Shao-shih said, "If you are looking for Te-kuei, go outside. This is no place to rest your feet."

"I have admired you for a long time, as though

I were hungry and thirsty," returned Chih Chu. "Although I am not worthy, I figure I'm not below Brother Te-kuei; so why do you so loftily repulse me?"

When Shao-shih heard these disagreeable words, she turned to walk away. Overtaking her, Chih Chu clasped her in his arms and said, "Your dead child is now at my place. If you do not obey me, I'll just report you to the authorities."

Shao-shih's fury knew no bounds, but unable to extricate herself, she could only use sweet words to beguile him, saying, "In the daytime I am afraid people will know. When night comes, I'll send Te-kuei around for you."

"You have made me a promise in your own words. You'd better not break it!" warned Chih Chu. He loosened his grip, took a few steps, then turned his head and said, "I have a feeling you won't break your promise!" Then he walked straight out.

SHAO-SHIH WAS so humiliated that she could not speak for some time as tears continued to stream down her face. Pushing open the door to her room, she sat down alone on a stool. Various thoughts ran through her mind, and she could not but admit that it had been all her own fault. In the beginning she had been unwilling to remarry, wanting to be a person of exemplary virtue. Now that she was threatened with exposure, how could she have the face to look upon her relatives? She thought further, "Previously I took an oath before them all, 'If I were to serve another family and take a second husband, I would either perish under a knife or die by the rope.' Now if I sacrifice my life to show my gratitude to my late husband below the Nine Springs, won't that be a good way out?"

Hsiu-ku saw her mistress sobbing, but did not dare go forward to calm her. She stood guard by the middle door, waiting for Te-kuei to return. Te-kuei, on his part, did not return from the street until he had seen Chih Chu leave. Seeing Hsiu-ku, he asked, "Where is the mistress?" "In there," replied Hsiu-ku, pointing. Te-kuei pushed open the door to look for his mistress.

Taking a dagger from one end of her bed, Shao-shih had wanted to cut her throat with it, but was unable to lift her hand to perform the task. She sobbed awhile and put the dagger on the table. Then she loosened the eight-foot sash from her



waist, made it into a noose, and hung it from a beam. She was about to slip her neck into the noose, but suddenly beside herself with anguish, she could not help sobbing violently.

All at once she saw Te-kuei push open the door and come in. A thought suddenly struck her, "Everything happened because this cur laid a trap to trick me into losing my honor and good name." No sooner had this thought occurred to her than she rose, her eyes glaring at her enemy. She lifted the dagger and struck a blow directly against his head. Because she was redoubled in strength in her state of fury, the dagger came down swift as the wind and split his skull in two. Te-kuei died instantly, his blood all over the floor. Frightened, Shao-shih led her neck into the noose. As her feet stepped from the stool, her body swayed as if she were on a swing:

*Two aggrieved ghosts find shelter underground;*

*A beautiful widow is lost to this human world.*

As the saying goes, "Gambling is akin to robbery; lust is akin to murder." Today, two lives perished solely on account of the word "lust."

TO RESUME our story: Hsiu-ku was accustomed from previous experience to withdraw a distance whenever Te-kuei went into the lady's room, for he might have a special purpose in mind. But this time, when she didn't hear a sound for a long time, she began to be suspicious. As she went in to look, she saw the one hanging above, the other stretched out below. She was for a while paralyzed by terror; then, gathering her courage, she shut the door to the room, and hurriedly ran to the house of Shao-shih's uncle, Ch'iu Ta-sheng, to report the news. Greatly alarmed, Ch'iu Ta-sheng in turn reported to Shao-shih's father and mother, and together they all went to the Ch'iu house.

When the gate had been shut, they began to interrogate Hsiu-ku about the cause of the deaths. Hsiu-ku had known nothing of Chih Chu. Even his extortion of forty taels of silver as blackmail for the dead infant had been concealed from her. Because of this Hsiu-ku just gave a description of the illicit relationship between Shao-shih and Te-kuei, maintaining that she did not know why the two met their deaths today. Though she was

questioned over and over again, this was all she said.

When Mr. and Mrs. Shao heard of the adultery, they felt so ashamed that they went straight home, washing their hands of the matter. Ch'iu Ta-sheng could do nothing but take Hsiu-ku to the district *yamen* to report the case. The magistrate made due examination of the two corpses: that of Te-kuei with a gash on the head; that of Shao-shih bearing evidence of death by hanging. He also heard Hsiu-ku's testimony. Then the magistrate declared: "It is quite obvious that Shao-shih and Te-kuei were adulterous lovers who had abolished the distinctions between mistress and servant. Te-kuei must have used affronting language; Shao-shih, enraged, momentarily lost self-control and unintentionally took his life. Frightened, she then hanged herself. There are no other facts in the case." He charged Ch'iu Ta-sheng with providing for the funerals. Since Hsiu-ku had known of the adultery, she was sentenced to the cane and thereafter to be sold at public auction.

Meanwhile Chih Chu, foiled in his attempt to



*Two aggrieved ghosts find shelter underground;  
A beautiful widow is lost to this human world.*

seduce Shao-shih, returned home and had every intention of seeing her that night. Hearing the news of the two deaths, he jumped in terror. For a long time he didn't dare venture out his door. Then early one morning, it occurred to him to pick up the rush-bag containing the lime-preserved infant and throw it in the river. An acquaintance named Pao Chiu, the foreman on the I-chen Lock of the Canal,<sup>6</sup> however, caught him in the act of throwing and asked, "Brother Chih, what is it you have just thrown away?"

"Some pieces of salted beef, all wrapped up well to provide for a journey," said Chih Chu. "But unfortunately they have spoiled. Brother Chiu, if you are not too busy today or tomorrow, come over to my house for a few drinks."

"Today we're very busy," replied Pao Chiu. "Lord K'uang Chung,<sup>7</sup> Prefect of Soochow, is on his official journey to resume his post. His boat will be arriving any time now, and we're mobilizing our men to ensure a speedy passage for him."

"If that's the case, we'll get together another day," said Chih Chu. Then he left.

K'UANG CHUNG had been a *yamen* clerk by origin, and it was the Minister of Rites, Hu Ying, who nominated him to be the prefect of Soochow. During the first year of his term the people called him Bluer Sky K'uang for his impartial administration of justice. Then he returned to his native place to observe a period of filial mourning, but an Imperial decree, superseding his personal feelings, soon recalled him and provided him with expeditious means of travel at government expense for his journey back to his old post.

Lord K'uang was in the cabin reading when his ship reached the mouth of the I-chen Lock. Suddenly he heard the crying of a baby coming up from the river, and he thought there must be an infant drowning. The servant he ordered to take a look, returned with the report, "There's nothing

<sup>6</sup>In Ming times, the district of I-chen was situated about ten kilometres from where the Grand Canal met the River (Yangtze); the I-chen Lock probably referred to a lock that controlled the level of water in one of the canals in the area.

<sup>7</sup>K'uang Chung (況鍾 1383-1443), is a historical figure whose career and fame as an upright official was largely as outlined here, except that he owed his appointment to the Prefecture of Soochow to someone other than Hu Ying (胡澧).

there." This happened twice. Lord K'uang again heard the crying, but when he asked the others they all said they heard nothing, causing him to exclaim "How strange!" Pushing open the window to see for himself, he noticed a small rush-bag floating on the water. Lord K'uang called the sailors to pull it up. When they opened it to look, they reported, "It's a small child."

"Dead or alive?" asked Lord K'uang.

"It's been preserved in lime. It seems to have been dead for some time," answered the sailors.

"If it is dead, how could it cry?" mused Lord K'uang. "Moreover, if one were to toss away a dead child, that would be that; why should it have been preserved in lime in the first place? There must be a reason."

He told the sailors to place the dead child and the rush-bag on the prow of the ship, saying, "If anyone knows the story and secretly reports to me, I am offering a big reward." Upon receiving the instructions, the sailors took the child and the rush-bag and placed them on the prow. It happened that the foreman Pao Chiu noticed the small rush-bag and recognized it as the one which Chih Chu had thrown away. "He said it was spoiled beef; how come it's really a dead child?" he mused. So he entered the cabin and reported to Lord K'uang, saying: "I don't know the story about this child; however, I know the man who threw it into the river; his name is Chih Chu." "If we have the man, we'll have the story," said Lord K'uang. On the one hand, he ordered his men to quietly apprehend Chih Chu; on the other, he sent a messenger to invite the magistrate of I-chen to go to the district office of surveillance for a joint inquiry into the case.

Lord K'uang brought with him the dead infant and presided at court in the office of surveillance. By the time the local magistrate had arrived, Chih Chu had been brought in. Lord K'uang occupied the seat of honor; the magistrate sat on his left. Because I-chen was not a district under his jurisdiction, Lord K'uang was unwilling to act on his own authority, and urged the magistrate to conduct the investigation. The magistrate knew that Lord K'uang had recently been favored with an imperial order and was, moreover, a man of somewhat unpredictable nature; how could he dare overstep him? After the two had yielded to each other for some time, Lord K'uang finally had to

start the questioning. He called out, "Chih Chu, this lime-preserved infant of yours, where did it come from?"

Chih Chu was about to deny any knowledge when he saw Pao Chiu on one side telling what he knew. So he changed his line and said, "I noticed this dirty thing lying beside the road and thought it was quite unsanitary. So I picked it up and threw it in the river; really I don't know where it came from."

Lord K'uang asked Pao Chiu, "Did you see him pick it up by the roadside?"

"I first saw him as he was throwing it in the river," replied Pao Chiu. "When I asked him what it was, he said it was some spoiled beef."

Lord K'uang said in great anger, "Since he lied in saying it was spoiled beef, he must have been trying to hide something." He then shouted an order to his men to choose a heavy rod and give the suspect twenty strokes before resuming questioning. This rod of Lord K'uang's was merciless: its twenty strokes were the equivalent of more than forth strokes of another rod. Chih Chu was beaten until the skin split, the flesh ripped, and blood flowed. But he did not confess.

Lord K'uang shouted an order to apply the ankle-squeezers. His ankle-squeezers were also merciless. Chih Chu could bear it the first time, but not the second time. So he confessed, "This dead infant was the widow Shao's. The widow and her boy servant Te-kuei were having an affair, and she gave birth to this child. Te-kuei begged me to bury it for him, but a dog dug it up. So I threw it in the river."

Lord K'uang, seeing that his testimony was suspect, asked further, "Since you were willing to bury it for him, you must have been in collusion with the family."

"I was not," replied Chih Chu. "I was just on good terms with Te-kuei."

"If they had buried it, they would have wanted it to rot fast. Why has it been preserved in lime?" demanded Lord K'uang.

Chih Chu had no coherent answer to this; so he kowtowed and said, "Your Honor, I was the one who applied the lime. Knowing that the widow Shao was well off, I wanted to keep the dead infant to demand a few taels of silver. Unexpectedly, Shao-shih and Te-kuei both died. Since I couldn't follow through with my plan, I threw it in the

river."

"Did the widow and her servant in fact die?" asked Lord K'uang.

The magistrate stood up bowing and said in reply, "They did. I personally conducted the inquest."

"How did they die?" asked Lord K'uang.

"The servant had his head split open by a knife; the widow committed suicide by hanging," replied the magistrate. "I investigated the case thoroughly. The two were having an illicit affair for a long time, and the distinctions between mistress and servant had long been abolished. The servant must have used affronting language; enraged, the woman swung a knife and unintentionally killed him. Then, frightened, she hanged herself. There was nothing more to the case."

Lord K'uang pondered to himself, "Since they were lovers, how could a small verbal offence provoke her to such murderous acts! Earlier the dead infant cried out; there must be a reason." So he asked, "Was there anybody else living with Shao-shih?"

"There was also a maidservant named Hsiu-ku," replied the magistrate. "She has been sold at public auction."

"Since she has been publicly sold," said Lord K'uang, "she must be living hereabouts. May I trouble Your Honor to have her summoned for questioning. Then we will know what really happened."

A short while after the magistrate dispatched his runners, Hsiu-ku was brought in. Her testimony, however, coincided with that of the magistrate. After deliberating for a while, Lord K'uang stepped down from his seat and asked Hsiu-ku, pointing to Chih Chu, "Do you recognize this man?"

Hsiu-ku looked him over closely, then said, "I do not know his name, but recognize his face."

"I expect this," said Lord K'uang. "Since he was a close acquaintance of Te-kuei, he must have come to your house with him. You must tell the truth. If you depart from the truth ever so little, then your fingers will be put to the thumbscrew."

"In truth I didn't ever see him come in until the very last," said Hsiu-ku. "He burst into the central hall on that day and forced his attentions on my mistress, but he left upon being repulsed. Later when Te-kuei came in, the mistress was just then crying in her room. Te-kuei entered the room, and

in a short time they were both dead."

Lord K'uang shouted angry words at Chih Chu: "Villain! If you were not in collusion with Te-kuei, how could you have dared to burst into the central hall? You were the sole cause of these two deaths!" He called his men, "I want to see him put to the ankle-squeezers again."

Under the stupefying pain of the torture, Chih Chu could not but confess from start to finish the whole story of how he guided Te-kuei in seducing his mistress, tricked him to hand over the dead infant, and blackmailed him for money; how he coerced him to serve as his accomplice in lust; how he stormed into the inner apartment of Shao-shih, embraced her and begged for sexual favors; and how he was tricked into releasing her—all this he related in full detail. "The subsequent circumstances of the deaths," he added, "I truly know nothing about."

"THESE ARE THE true facts of the case." pronounced Lord K'uang. He released Chih Chu from the ankle-squeezers, and told the clerk to take down a clear account of the confession. The magistrate by his side, realizing his own inferiority in intellect and ability, was chagrined beyond description.

Lord K'uang then wielded his brush and handed down the verdict in the following terms:

I find Chih Chu to be a lecherous villain.  
First he stole a glance at the widow's beauty,  
at once giving rein to his wicked heart;  
Then he seized upon the stupidity of her  
gullible servant, artfully using words to  
entice him.

The servant opened his door and lay down  
naked—a faithful follower of his plan;  
The widow strengthened her womb and lost  
the dead child—a total victim of his  
design.

When unsuccessful at seeking adultery, he  
switched to blackmail;

Still not satisfied with the silver, he again  
sought adultery.

On account of her one moment of weakness,  
Shao-shih found herself victim in a case of  
stealing the bell while trying to cover her  
ears;<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>A metaphorical saying signifying self-deception.

By repeatedly resorting to tricks, Chih Chu  
was guilty of ransacking other people's  
trunks and of climbing over the neighbor's  
wall to boot.<sup>9</sup>

Through her hatred for Chih Chu, she came  
to hate Te-kuei—a case of love turned  
into enmity;

After slaying Te-kuei, she proceeded to hang  
herself—an instance of shame lingering  
beyond death.

Since mistress and servant are both dead, we  
will not deal with them;

Since the maid Hsiu-ku has already been  
beaten, she shall go scot-free.

Unaccounted for yet is the arch villain,  
Uncaught in the net of law.

Though Pao Chiu met him by accident;  
The infant cried out with a purpose.

Since Heaven has a hand in its detection,  
The crime cannot be tolerated by man.

It is fitting, therefore,

That Chih Chu should be punished with  
death,

And his ill-gotten silver be recovered.

After Lord K'uang read this verdict, even Chih Chu was willing to accept the punishment. Lord K'uang submitted a report of the matter to his superiors, who were unanimous in praising his great sagacity. All the people spread his fame, not unjustifiably comparing him to Pao Cheng, the Scholar of the Lung-t'u Library.<sup>10</sup> Also entitled "Prefect K'uang Judges the Case of a Dead Infant", this story is summarized in verse:

*Lovely Widow Shao, tempted at heart,  
became confused;*

*Stupid Te-kuei, his good fortune over,  
met calamity.*

*Rascal Chih was the very devil in hatching  
plots;*

*Prefect K'uang resembled a god in passing  
judgment.*

<sup>9</sup>A classical allusion about "climbing over the eastern neighbour's wall and embracing his virgin daughter", *Mencius*, VI, 1, here signifying committing a sexual crime.

<sup>10</sup>Pao Cheng (包拯), a high official during the reign of Jen Tsung (1023-1064) of the Sung dynasty, famed for his integrity and perpicacity in the administration of justice; known to posterity through a series of popular stories, "Lord Pao's Cases".

(For Chinese text see page 173)