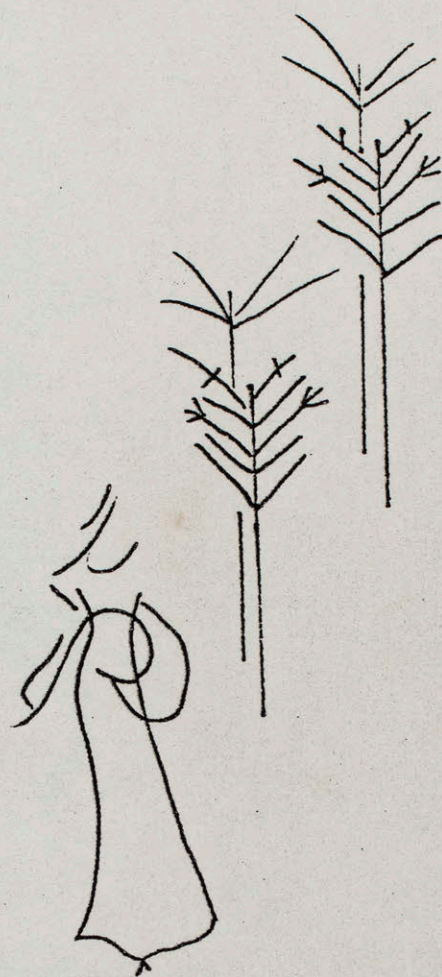


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WANDERING IN THE GARDEN, WALKING FROM THE
DREAM

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Wandering in the Garden,
Waking from the Dream
by
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Translated by Patia Isaku and the Author



When Madame Ch'ien arrived at the
Tou villa in the elegant Taipei suburb of
T'ien Mu, the road near the house was already
packed on both sides with parked cars, most of them
black government sedans. As her taxicab drove up
to the gate, Madame Ch'ien ordered the driver
to stop. The villa's iron gates were wide open,
the lamps burning high above. On either side
of the gate stood a guard; a man in an
orderly's uniform was busy attending to the
guests' chauffeurs. As soon as Madame Ch'ien
got out of the cab, the orderly hurried over.
He was ^{he was} ~~graying~~ at the temples, outfitted in a

Tibetan-blue serge Sun Yatsen tunic. Madame Ch'ien took a calling card from her purse and handed it to him. He bowed deeply as ~~she~~ he took it, his face all smiles, and greeted her with his Northern Kiangsu accent.

"Madame Ch'ien, I'm Liu, the orderly.

Madame probably doesn't remember me any more."

"Is that you, Liu?" Madame Ch'ien glanced at him, a little startled. "Of course. I must have met you then, at your Mansion in Nanking. How are you, Liu?"

"I'm fine, thanks to Madame's blessings."

Again he bowed, at once showed her in, ~~hurried~~
~~ahead of her~~, leading the way with a flashlight to a concrete driveway, towards the main building.

"Madame has been well, I presume?" He turned to her and smiled.

"Quite well, thank you. And how are your General and his lady? It's been so many years since I saw them last."

"Our lady has been well; our General has been kept rather busy lately with official matters."

The garden of the Tou villa was deep and wide. Madame Ch'ien looked around; the whole garden was full of swaying shadows: everywhere trees, flowers, plants, ^{All} ~~All~~ around the walls ^{was} ~~was~~ a thick lining of coconut palms. Above the tops of the tall, imposing trees, a slice of clear late-autumn moon had already risen. Madame Ch'ien followed Liu the orderly through a few coir palms, and suddenly, before her,

the two-storey Tou mansion appeared; the entire house, upstairs and down, was ablaze with lights, as if ~~it were~~ on fire. A wide flight of stone steps led up to a huge curved terrace. Along the stone balustrade stood a row of neatly-arranged pots of cassia, ^{more than} ~~over~~ ten of them, all chest-high. No sooner had Madame Ch'ien stepped onto the terrace when a wave of strong fragrance ^{assailed} ~~attacked~~ her. The main doors were wide open; servants ~~were~~ moving to and fro inside, like a weaver's shuttle. Liu the orderly stopped at the door, with a small bow and a respectful gesture.

"This way, please, Madame."

As Madame Ch'ien came into the antechamber, Liu summoned one of the maids. "Go, quickly, report to Madame: General Ch'ien's lady has

just arrived."

The only display in the antechamber was of a set of exquisitely-made redwood furniture.

On the low table stood a group of cloisonné vases; one, shaped like a fishbasket, held a few sprays of evergreen; to the right, set in the wall over the table, was a large dressing-glass. Madame Ch'ien went up to the mirror, removing her black autumn evening coat; a maid hurried forward to take it from her. Madame Ch'ien stole a glance in the mirror, ^{and} quickly smoothed a stray lock of hair at her right temple. ^{and} six o'clock this very evening she had gone to the Red Rose on Westgate Square to have her hair ^{dressed} done, only for it to be ruffled by the wind as she ^{had} walked

through the garden, ~~just now~~. Madame Ch'ien took
a step closer to the mirror; she even felt
the color of her emerald-green Hangchow silk
Manchu gown was not quite right. She remembered
this kind of silk, when the light shone on it,
would shimmer like a piece of seagreen jade.
Perhaps the antechamber was not light enough;
the material looked rather dull. Could it really
have ~~aged~~^{faded}? After all, she had brought this length
of Hangchow silk from Nanking. All these years
she hadn't been able to bring herself to wear it;
for this party she'd fished it up from the bottom
of her clothespress and had it cut. ~~If she'd~~^{Had she}
known before, she would have gotten a new length
at Flying Swan Silks. But somehow she always ~~felt~~^{thought}

Taiwan materials ~~were~~ coarse, flashy; they hurt your eyes, especially the silks; how could they compare with goods from the Mainland, so fine, so soft?

"Fifth Sister, you've come after all." The sound of footsteps: Madame Tou appeared; she took Madame Ch'ien's hands in hers, smiling.

"Third Sister," Madame Ch'ien smiled, too, "I'm late. I must have kept you waiting."

"Not at all. You're right on time. The banquet's just about to start."

As she spoke, she walked Madame Ch'ien arm in arm towards the main drawing-room. In the corridor Madame Ch'ien cast a few glances at Madame Tou out of the corners of her eyes; she couldn't help observing: So, Cassia Fragrance

really hasn't aged after all. The year they were to leave Nanking, she'd given her a party at her own villa in Plum Garden, hadn't she, for Cassia Fragrance's thirtieth birthday. Almost all her sworn sisters from the Moon-Catching Terrace had come -- including Cassia Fragrance's own sister, Heavenly Pepper, Thirteenth Sister, who was later married as a concubine to Governor Jen Tzuchiu; and her own sister, Monthly Rose, Seventeenth Sister -- the whole group had chipped in, Western-style, ordered a big two-layer birthday cake, thirty inches across; in it they'd stuck thirty red candles, no less! She must be well past forty by now, surely? Madame Ch'ien stole another glance at her. She was clothed in a silvery-gray silk chiffon Manchu gown

dusted with vermillion spangles; shining silver heels;
the ring finger of her right hand bore a diamond as big as
a lotus seed; a platinum bracelet studded with small
diamonds twisted around her left wrist. A crescent-
shaped coral pin held her hair; a pair of inch-long purple
jade earrings hung below, making her full, pale face
all the more dignified and noble. In those Nanking days,
she recalled, Cassia Fragrance had never had this sort of
special air about her. Then Cassia Fragrance was still
a concubine, her husband Tou Juisheng a mere Deputy
Minister. He's big in the government now, of course.
Cassia Fragrance rose to be a wife, too; to her credit,
she endured all those years;

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now at last she could hold her head high.

"Juisheng's gone down South to attend a conference. He heard you were coming tonight, Fifth Sister, and he asked me specially to give you his warmest regards." Madame Tou turned to Madame Ch'ien with a smile.

"Ah," said Madame Ch'ien, "That's so thoughtful of Brother Tou." As they neared the drawing-room, a ^{swell}~~pool~~ of laughter and chatter flowed from inside. Madame Tou stopped at the entrance, again took Madame Ch'ien's hands in hers.

"Fifth Sister, you should have moved to Taipei long ago. It's been weighing on my mind all this time. It must be so very quiet for you now, living in a place like that, down South,

all by yourself. You simply had to come to my party tonight, no matter what -- Thirteen's come, too."

"She's here, too?"

"Well, you know, as soon as Jen Tzuchiu died, she moved out of his house." ~~As she moved~~ She leaned close to Madame Ch'ien's ear. "He was fairly well off, and Thirteen's all by herself -- you could say she's living comfortably. She was the one who clamored for ^{tonight's party; it's} ~~tonight's party~~ the first time since we came to Taiwan. She's moved a few friends from the Heavenly Fragrance Opera Club here: gongs, drums, pipes, flutes, everything. And they all look forward eagerly to your getting up there and letting your light shine."

"Come on, now, really, I can't do that

sort of thing any more!" Madame Ch'ien,
hurriedly freed herself from Madame Tou,^② waving
her hands^① laughing,

"Don't be so modest, Fifth Sister," Madame
Tou laughed. "If you, 'Bluefield Jade,' say you
can't do it, who else would dare to utter a note?"
Giving Madame Ch'ien no chance to argue, she led
her into the drawing-room.

The main drawing-room was already filled;
guests in dazzling costumes sat scattered here
and there ~~as they were~~^{like} clusters of flowers
embroidered on silk. The room was enormous, a
rectangle broken by a small alcove, a blend
of the Chinese and the Western. On the left-hand
side was a set of soft-cushioned sofas and arm-
chairs; on the right, red sandalwood tables

and chairs; in between lay a huge ~~two inch~~ thick
 rug ^{depicting} ~~showing~~ two dragons fighting for a pearl.

The two long sofas and four armchairs faced

each other in a circle, drunken-red begonia

leaves strewn over their black velvet background;

inside the circle on a low rectangular table

stood a two-foot-high skyblue porcelain gall-bladder

vase. From the vase sprang forth a bunch of Gold

Bone and Red Flesh Dragon-Beard chrysanthemums.

On the right was an Eight-Immortals table with

an inlaid marble top and eight red sandalwood

chairs; on the table, all sorts of ^{bombon-} ~~sandy~~ trays

and tea-things. In the alcove, ~~six redwood chairs~~

~~formed a semicircle, broken in the center by a~~

a towering screen with an ebony frame, inlaid with

was flanked by six redwood chairs in a semi-circle.

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mica bats and drifting clouds. Madame Ch'ien

noticed cymbals and stringed instruments arranged on the chairs. In front of them were two stands; one held a small drum; flutes and pipes hung from the other in a neat row. The lights were resplendent. Two floor lamps shone at an angle on a large gong, making it glitter with a golden radiance.

Madame Tou ushered Madame Ch'ien to a sofa on the left side of the drawing-room, where sat a woman in a pearl-gray Manchu gown, in her fifties, hung all about with jade ornaments.

"Madame Lai, this is Madame Ch'ien; you must have met before."

Madame Ch'ien recognized her; she was Lai

Hsiangyün's wife. They'd met several times in Nanking, at social occasions. At that time, Lai Hsiangyün was an Army Commander, probably. Since coming to Taiwan, of course, his name appeared quite often in the newspapers.

"This must be His Excellency General Ch'ien's lady." Madame Lai was in the middle of a conversation with a gentleman. She turned and looked Madame Ch'ien up and down for a moment, rose slowly with a smile. She shook hands with her; touching her forehead with her other hand, she added, "I say, your face does look familiar!"

She turned to the guest beside her, a stout, baldheaded man with a swarthy red face, attired in a royal-blue silk gown.

"I've just been chatting with Presidential Staff Advisor Yü; I just couldn't remember which opera Mei Lanfang did the third time he came down to Shanghai to perform at Cinnamon Terrace Theater One. See what a memory I have!"

Advisor Yü was already on his feet; smiling broadly, he bowed to Madame Ch'ien.

"It's been so long since I've had the pleasure, Madame. That year in Nanking at the Aspiration Advancement Society Hall, I had the great good fortune to admire your grace during the Amateur Presentation. As I recall, Madame did 'Wandering in the Garden, Waking from the Dream.'"

"Oh, yes!" Madame Lai put in. "I've heard so much about Madame Ch'ien's grand reputation. Tonight, at long last, I'll be lucky enough to listen and be edified."

Madame Ch'ien hastened to reply modestly to Advisor Yü's compliments. She remembered he had been once to her villa in Nanking, but she also seemed to recall that he'd gotten involved in some major political scandal, been relieved of his duties and retired. Presently, Madame Tou took her around and, one by one, introduced her to the guests. She didn't know any of the other ladies. They seemed rather young; ^{most likely} ~~probably~~ they'd arrived only after they came to Taiwan.

"Let's go to the other side; Thirteen and her Opera-Club friends are all over there."

Madame Tou showed Madame Ch'ien to the right side of the drawing-room. No sooner were they there when a lady in red came mincing up to them; she slipped her arm through Madame Ch'ien's,

shaking with laughter.

"Fifth Sister, Third Sister told me you
were coming, too, a little while ago: I was so
~~thrilled~~ I cheered, 'All right!! Tonight we've
really got ourselves the Star!'"

When Madame Ch'ien first learned from
Madame Tou that Heavenly Pepper, Chiang Piyüeh,
^{present} was ~~here~~ as well, she began to wonder whether
or not, after being married so many years,
Heavenly Pepper had toned down a bit. In
Nanking, when the whole ^{group} ~~band~~ gave
recitals at the Moon-Catching Terrace in the
Confucius Temple District, Heavenly Pepper
would always thrust herself into the limelight,
~~first, she would coax~~ ^{coaxing} their Master into ^{allowing her to} ~~letting~~
~~to~~ sing all the show-stoppers. Once on stage,

defying ~~all~~ the rules, she would look straight at the patrons, her eyes stretching like a pair of hooks all the way down into the audience.

They were born of the same mother, yet how different their characters were! For savoir-faire and generosity, Cassia Fragrance was second to none. Heavenly Pepper made the ~~best~~ ^{best} she could for herself out of her sister's opportunities. ~~arranging~~ Jen Tzuchiu had already presented Cassia Fragrance with the betrothal gifts when Heavenly Pepper had the nerve to snatch him bodily away from her. Surprising ^{that} Cassia Fragrance ~~would~~ ^{had} have such forbearance. She ^{had} waited ever so many years until finally, not without a certain sense of grievance, she ^{had} agreed to become Tou Juisheng's second concubine.

No wonder Cassia Fragrance sighed constantly:

It's always your ~~one~~ younger sister who'll

walk all over you and you alone! Madame Ch'ien

looked again
~~to look at~~ at Heavenly Pepper, Chiang

Piyüeh; she was all flames in a red silk Manchu

gown; tinkling and jangling on her wrists she

wore eight gold bangles. Her make-up was in the

height of fashion -- her eyelids painted with

eyeshadow, the corners of her eyes heavily

pencilled, her hair pouffed in a beehive; at

her temples, seductive kisscurls ^{*poised*} ~~coiled~~ like

crescent hooks. ^{*When*} ~~As soon as~~ Jen Tzuchiu died,

this Heavenly Pepper, contrary to expectation,

grew more vital than ever, even more flamboyant.

~~Of all these turbulent years~~ You couldn't ^{*see*} ~~see~~

the faintest trace on ^{*the*} ~~the~~ woman, of all these turbulent
years.

"Look! this is really going to open your eyes: Madame Ch'ien is the real female Mei Lanfang!"

Chiang Piyüeh conducted Madame Ch'ien to her friends the men and women of the Opera Club and introduced her. The men all stood at once, bowing to Madame Ch'ien.

"Piyüeh, don't talk nonsense. You'll make a laughingstock of me before these connoisseurs."

Madame Ch'ien returned their bows, mildly reproaching Chiang Piyüeh.

"Piyüeh is right, actually," Madame Tou interposed. "Your K'un Aria definitely stems from the true Mei School."

"Third Sister . . ." Madame Ch'ien protested vaguely. But when it came to K'un Aria, even Ch'ien P'engchih had said,

"Fifth, my dear, I've heard the finest singers north and south; I must say your K'un Arias are good."

Ch'ien P'engchih told her that after he went back to Shanghai he thought of her by day and longed for her by night; she simply wouldn't slip from his mind; he returned and married her, all because he had heard her at the Moon-Catching Terrace in Nanking, "Wandering in the Garden, Waking from the Dream." He often told her if he could enjoy her by his side singing a few lines from an aria in the years that remained to him, he would have nothing more to ask. She had just risen to stardom then at the Moon-Catching Terrace. From the first phrase of her K'un Aria with one voice

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the audience would fill the house with applause.

The Master of the Moon-Catching Terrace said,

"Of all the singers in the Confucius Temple

District, Bluefield Jade is the one who must be

regarded as the most classic artist."

"That's just what I meant, Fifth Sister.

Come along and meet somebody; Mrs. Hsü here is

a Queen of K'un Aria, too." Chiang Piyüeh led

Madame Ch'ien to a quietly refined young lady

in a black Manchu gown and turned to Madame Tou.

"Third Sister, in a little while we'll have

Mrs. Hsü sing 'Wandering in the Garden' and

Fifth Sister sing 'Waking from the Dream.'

Do let's carry out the Venerable Ancestor

of all K'un Aria; let these two great stars

compete and our ears be filled with bliss."

Mrs. Hsü rose at once, saying she hardly dared. Madame Ch'ien quickly made some appropriate remark as well, but in her heart she was annoyed at Heavenly Pepper's lack of tact. Among all these people tonight, probably there wasn't one who didn't ^{know} ~~know~~ opera; like as not the Mrs. Hsü standing right beside her was herself a fine singer; later, if they actually picked ^{her} ~~her~~ up and put her on stage, she'd better not take herself for granted. When it came to conveying every nuance of the melody she had nothing to fear from these people; but she'd been in the South so long; in all this time she hadn't really practised; she wasn't sure of her voice any more. Besides, the tailor had turned out to be right after all. In Taipei,

long Manchu gowns have gone out of fashion, really. Everyone sitting here, including that Madame Lai, so old her face was wrinkled like chickenskin, had the hemline on her gown shrunk almost to her knees, exposing a good half her calves. In the Nanking days, what lady's gown wasn't so long it almost touched her feet? She was sorry she hadn't listened to the tailor; she wondered whether she'd still be able to make an impression when she was standing up there later in this long gown. To get onstage and create a presence at once was essential. In those Nanking days, when she gave dinner parties with opera at Plum Garden, every time she went up to sing, her presence hushed the audience before she

uttered a note.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Ch'eng, I'm turning Madame Ch'ien over to you now. If you don't take the very best care of her, I'll fine you: you'll have to treat us tomorrow."

Smiling, Madame Tou escorted Madame Ch'ien to an officer in his late thirties. She turned; "Fifth Sister," she said in a low voice, "you stay here and chat; Colonel Ch'eng is an opera connoisseur. I must go look after the banquet."

"Madame Ch'ien, it's a great honor."

Standing, Colonel Ch'eng faced Madame Ch'ien and bowed smartly, military fashion. He was in dress uniform: of beige gabardine; a pair of shining golden Lieutenant-Colonel's plum-blossom insignia pinned on the collar of his jacket,

two on each lapel; his jump-boots together, raven-glossy, watersmooth. Madame Ch'ien noted that when he smiled he showed his straight, white teeth. He boasted a fine-chiselled face; a smooth-shaven gleaming blue chin; long slender eyes, slanting upwards, with a pair of loftily-raised eyebrows thrusting up into his temples; inkblack hair smoothly brushed; a nose straight and slender as a scallion, the tip slightly hooked. Built tall and slim, in uniform he looked extraordinarily dashing, yet Madame Ch'ien felt a touch of gentleness in the way he greeted her, without a trace of military coarseness.

"Do sit down, Madame."

Colonel Ch'eng gave her his chair, straightening the soft cushions. . . . He went quickly to the Eight-Immortals table,

returned with a cup of jasmine tea and a bonbonnière with four kinds of candied fruits and seeds.

Madame Ch'ien reached for the pomegranate-red porcelain cup when Colonel Ch'eng said in a gentle voice, "Be careful not to scald your hand, Madame."

He opened the black lacquer gold-painted bonbonnière; bending, he presented it with both hands to Madame Ch'ien, beaming, watching her intently, waiting for her to choose one. Madame Ch'ien took a few pine nuts; Colonel Ch'eng hastened to dissuade her.

"Madame, these are really bad for the voice. May I suggest you try a honeyed date; they're good for your throat."

He fixed a honeyed date on a toothpick and handed it to Madame Ch'ien. She thanked him,

tasted a penetrating honey-sweetness, a delightful fragrance. Colonel Ch'eng brought another chair and sat on Madame Ch'ien's right.

"Madame, have you been to the Opera recently?"

When he spoke, he leaned towards her a trifle, as if with total concentration; Madame Ch'ien saw his white teeth again, shining like jade in the light.

"I haven't been for quite a while," she answered. She lowered her head and took a dainty sip of jasmine tea. "I live in the South; it's hard to see good opera there."

"Love Cloud's been performing the 'Goddess of the Lo River' at the National Brilliance Theater these last few days, Madame."

"Really?" Madame Ch'ien's head was still

lowered; she sipped her tea, sunk in thought for a long moment. "When I was still in Shanghai, I saw her perform it at the Heavenly Toad Theater _____ that was a long time ago."

"Her acting's still up to the mark; she fully deserves her title "The Leading Lady;" she played the love affair of Princess Mi and Ts'ao Tzuchien so subtly, to perfection."

Madame Ch'ien raised her head and met Colonel Ch'eng's eyes; immediately she averted her face. Those long slender eyes of his caught you like a net.

"Who 'played it so subtly, to perfection'?" Heavenly Pepper, Chiang Piyüeh, stuck in. Colonel Ch'eng stood up quickly and yielded his seat. Chiang Piyüeh snapped up a handful of sunflower

seeds; she sat, legs crossed, splitting, ~~splitting~~
the seeds open, smiling. "Colonel, everybody says
you understand Theater; Madame Ch'ien is the
All-Knowing Abbess of Opera; I think you'd better
stop 'waving your axe around at the champion
carpenter's gate,' the sooner the better."

"Madame Ch'ien and I have just been dis-
cussing Love Cloud's 'Goddess of the Lo River;"
I was asking Madame Ch'ien's advice," Colonel
Ch'eng replied, glancing sideways at Madame
Ch'ien.

"Oh, were you talking about Love Cloud?"
Chiang Piyüeh sneered. "It's all very well
when she does a bit of teaching around Taiwan,
but does she have to go and perform 'The Goddess
of the Lo River,' of all things! Why, even in

even in full costume, she couldn't look at all like Princess Mi! Only last Saturday I went to the National Brilliance; I ended up in the back row; all I saw were her lips moving; I couldn't hear a thing; barely halfway through the opera her voice failed —— well, well, now here comes Third Sister to invite us to the banquet."

A servant opened the sliding doors, mahogany, with carved openwork swastikas, leading from the drawing-room to the banquet hall. Madame Tou emerged. The entire banquet hall was decorated in pale silver, luminous as a snow cave. On the two banquet tables were fine scarlet linen tablecloths; the plates, bowls, spoons, chopsticks were all of silver. There was much standing on ceremony after the guests came in; no one ventured

to take the place of honor at the head of the table.

"I'd better take the lead. If we go on waiting for each other like this, we'll never get down to dinner. We're abusing our hostess' hospitality!" Madame Lai went to the head of the first table and sat down; she beckoned to Advisor Yü.

"Advisor, why don't you come sit next to me.

We haven't reached any conclusion about Mei Lanfang's operas yet."

"Yes, Ma'am!" Grinning broadly, Advisor Yü folded his hands in a salute. The guests burst out laughing and took their seats. When they reached the second table, again everybody started standing on ceremony. Laughing, Madame Lai called from the other table, "Madame Ch'ien, I think you'd

better follow my example."

Madame Tou came over and escorted Madame Ch'ien to the head of the second table, "Fifth Sister, please do sit down," she whispered.

"If you don't take the lead, the others will have trouble getting seated."

Madame Ch'ien looked around. Guests were standing by the second table watching her, smiling. She made a vague attempt to decline the honor, but at last she sat down; for a moment her heart fluttered; even her face flushed a little. It certainly wasn't as if she'd never been through this sort of pageantry; for a long time she'd been away from society; somehow she'd become rather unused to it.

In the past, when Ch'ien P'engchih was there,

nine times out of ten she would be first to take the seat of honor at banquets. Naturally Madame Ch'ien P'engchih would be at the head of the table; she'd never had to yield pride of place. Among all the ladies in that Nanking haut monde, not many could be numbered among her superiors. Of course those officials' concubines couldn't compare with her; she was Ch'ien P'engchih's legitimate wife; he, a widower, had welcomed her with all due ceremony. Poor Cassia Fragrance ^{hadn't even been} ~~wasn't even~~ allowed to act as hostess at her own parties; hadn't she been the one who'd held the party for Cassia Fragrance's birthday? Only since arriving in Taiwan would Cassia Fragrance dare to come out and stage such a grand spectacle and yet she herself, when

she was a singing-girl barely turned twenty,
was transformed overnight into a general's lady.

A singsong girl marrying into even a lower-class
family would give rise to ever so much comment;

imagine the talk when she married into a noble

house! Even her own sister, Seventeen, ^{Red-Favorite} ~~Seventeen~~

Rose, had let fall a cutting remark.

"Sister, it's about time you cut off your
braid; when you go out for a walk with General
Ch'ien, people could mistake you for his grand-
daughter!" The year Ch'ien P'engchih married her
he was almost sixty; she didn't care what they
said, she was his true and honorable lawful wedded
wife. She understood her position, and she
cherished it. Those ten or so years she attended Ch'ien
P'engchih, didn't she always handle a banquet

as if she were walking on eggs, smoothly, perfectly,
no matter how great the occasion? When she walked
by, she, too, carried herself with such elegance
and grace that who would dare to say she was the
'Bluefield Jade' of the Moon-Catching Terrace
by the Ch'in Huai River?

"It must have been hard on you, Fifth,"
Ch'ien P'engchih often said, caressing her cheek.
Whenever she heard this, she always felt a tinge
of heartache. There was no way she could break
her discontents to him. After all, how could she
possibly lay the blame on him? She herself had
been entirely willing. When he married her,
he'd been frank with her, told her clearly that
only after he'd heard her "Wandering in the Garden,
Waking from the Dream" had it occurred to him

to take her home as the companion of his old age.

Well, hadn't her sister ^{Red Favorite} ~~Komshy~~ said it:

Ch'ien P'engchih might as well be her granddaddy!!

what else could she expect? It had come true

for sure, that ironclad prophecy of their

Schoolmother, the Moon-Catching Terrace Master's

blind wife:

Fifth, my girl, the best thing people like
you can do is get married to an older man who'll
cherish you like a daughter. As for young ones
. . . can you trust them? But then the blind
woman, the Schoolmother, had to go and take hold
of her wrist, blinking her sightless eyes and
sighing: Worldly Glories, Wealth and Honor
are assured; you shall enjoy them all, Bluefield
Jade, only it's a pity, you've got one bone

grown wrong; it's all your retribution from a previous life!

If it wasn't retribution, what else was it?

Except for the moon, which he could not pluck from the sky, Ch'ien P'engchih had tried bringing her all the gold, silver, treasures of the world, in both hands, hadn't he, just to please her.

She understood his thoughtfulness. He was afraid her humble origins would weigh on her mind and she'd be diffident, intimidated by the highranking officials and members of the aristocracy; he tried in every way to encourage her to display her pomp, to show off her airs. Certainly.

the way Madame Ch'ien of Plum Garden gave parties was the talk ^{of} ~~all over~~ Nanking; it was practically a sin, the amount of large silver dollars she

threw away at the Ch'ien villa on banquets alone.

Take that day she gave the birthday party at

Plum Garden for Cassia Fragrance; they laid ten

tables at once; flutist —— she invited the

top flutist, Wu Shenghao of the Divine Rainbow

Club; chef —— she spent ten silver dollars

especially to hire the chef from Greenwillow

Lodge on Peachleaf Wharf.

"Madame Tou, where did you get your chef?"

said Madame Lai. "It's the first time I've had

such superb sharksfin since I came to Taiwan."

"He used to be chief cook at Huang Ch'ing-

chih's," Madame Tou replied; "Minister Huang's

home in Shanghai; he came to us only after we

came to Taiwan."

"Small wonder!" Advisor Yü added. "His Excellency Huang is a wellknown gourmet."

"If I could borrow your chef to make sharksfin one of these days, it would give my party so much glamour," said Madame Lai.

"What could be simpler?" rejoined Madame Tou. "I'd be more than happy to go out for a free meal!" The guests started to laugh.

"Madame Ch'ien, do have a bowl of sharksfin." Colonel Ch'eng ladled Madame Ch'ien a bowl of braised sharksfin, adding a spoonful of Chengchiang vinegar, and set it before her.

"This is our cook's most famous dish."

Madame Ch'ien had hardly tasted the sharksfin when Madame Tou came over from the other table and proposed a toast to the guests; she made

a point of telling Colonel Ch'eng to refill her cup and went to Madame Ch'ien; putting her hand on her shoulder, she said warmly, "Fifth Sister, it's been so long since the two of us toasted each other."

She clinked her cup with Madame Ch'ien's and drank it in one gulp; daintily Madame Ch'ien drank hers. As Madame Tou was leaving, she turned to Colonel Ch'eng. "Colonel, be sure you give everyone another round for me. Your General's not here; you'd better play the host at this table."

Colonel Ch'eng rose, holding a silver wine pitcher; bending, all smiles, he started to pour into Madame Ch'ien's cup; she stopped him at once.

"Colonel, why don't you serve the others;
my tolerance is quite limited."

Colonel Ch'eng didn't move; continuing to
smile, he gazed at Madame Ch'ien.

"Madame, this Flower Carving Shaohsing
is not at all like other wines; it fades away
easily; I know you're singing in a little while, but
this wine's been heated; it won't hurt your
voice to drink just a little."

"Madame Ch'ien's tolerance is unlimited.
Don't spare her!" Chiang Piyüeh, who had been
sitting opposite Madame Ch'ien, came around;
rippling with laughter, without waiting to be
served, she poured herself a full cup and
raised it to Madame Ch'ien. "Fifth Sister,
I haven't drunk a cup with you in a long time
either."

"Piyüeh," coughing slightly, Madame Ch'ien fended off Chiang Piyüeh's hand, "we'll get drunk."

"So you won't do your little sister the honor. All right! I'll drink double. If we get drunk later, at worst we'll let them pick us up and carry us home."

Chiang Piyüeh threw back her head and drained the cup; quickly Colonel Ch'eng promptly presented her with another; she took that and swallowed it, turned the silver winecup upside down, brandishing it before Madame Ch'ien's face.

The guests applauded. "Jolly good show, Miss Chiang!"

Madame Ch'ien had no choice but to raise her cup; she finished her Flower Carving unhurriedly. The wine certainly was well-heated;

once down your throat it flowed like a warm current throughout your body. Still in all, the Taiwan Flower Carving was not nearly as good as the Mainland's, not that smooth, not that mellow; it rather scratched your throat on the way down. Though they say Flower Carving fades away easily, does it ever kick you later if you drink it fast. She'd never even dreamed the aged Flower Carving she'd ordered brought directly from Shaohsing could have hurt so much. That night finally she fell into their trap. The whole group insists:
How could you possibly lose your voice with
a few cups of Flower Carving? It's such a
rare occasion; it's Cassia Fragrance's special
day; we sisters don't know when if ever we'll

all get together again; if you, our hostess,

won't drink up, how can we, the guests, let

ourselves go? Even ^{Red Favorite}~~Martha Rose~~, Seventeen,

sides with them, chimes in: Sister, let's us

two kinfolk drink bottoms up, be real pals

for a while. ^{Red Favorite}~~Martha Rose~~ is arrayed in

a flashing red and gold satin Manchu gown,

gorgeous as a parrot; her eyes, darting about

like a cuckoo's, are misty pools. Sister,

you won't do me the honor, she says. So you

won't do your little sister the honor, she says.

She's practically stolen the whole show; lapped

up all the cream, and here she's handing me

these fine speeches. No wonder Cassia Fragrance

sighed: It's your own younger sister who'll

walk all over you and you alone. ^{Red Favorite}~~Martha Rose~~

-- granted she was young and didn't know any better, but he, Cheng Yench'ing, he should never have gone along with that silly game. He, too, holds a brimming cup, says, white teeth flashing, Madame, may I also drink a pledge to you. His cheeks glowing red with drinking, his eyes smoldering like two balls of dark fire, his spurred riding boots clicking together, he salutes her gently, bowing: Madame . . .

"It must be my turn, Madame," Colonel Ch'eng rose, holding up his cup in both hands, grinning.

"Really, Colonel Ch'eng, I can't any more," Madame Ch'ien murmured, her head lowered somewhat.

"I'll drink three cups first as a sign of my respect; please drink as little as you like, Madame."

One after the other, Colonel Ch'eng drank the three cups; a mild glow from the wine spread over his face. His forehead began to glisten; beads of sweat appeared on the tip of his nose. Madame Ch'ien took up her winecup; barely touched it to her lips. Colonel Ch'eng served Madame Ch'ien a wing from the Imperial Favorite chicken and helped himself to the chickenhead as a relish with the wine.

"My, my!" Chiang Piyüeh trilled from across the table, "what ever are you toasting me with?" She stood up, leaned over to sniff Advisor Yü's wine. He was holding a rare gold "bird-waterer" cup in his hands.

"Why, Milady, this is 'Night Carouse Wine.'"

Advisor Yü laughed roguishly; already his swarthy red face had turned the color of pork liver.

"Fie, fie, be off!

Who is here will carouse the night
with you?!"

With a grand wafture of her hand Chiang Piyüeh
declaimed operatically from "The Imperial Favorite
Drunk with Wine."

"Miss Chiang," Madame Lai called from the
other table, "the banquet at the Hundred Flower
Pavilion isn't laid yet, and here you're already
'Drunk with Wine.' " The guests burst into a
roar of laughter. Madame Tou stood up, too.

"We'd better get ready for the show," she
announced. "Will everyone move to the living
room, please."

The guests rose, Madame Lai taking the
lead; like fish they followed one another

into the living room, sat down here and there.

Several men from the Opera Club went over to take their places at the redwood chairs in front of the screen and began tuning their instruments.

There were six of them, including the Tartar violin; one played second violin; one played moon guitar; one kept time with the small drum and wooden clappers; the other two played standing, one holding a pair of cymbals, one a large brass gong.

"Madame, that Mr. Yang is a fantastic violinist." Sitting beside her on a leather tambour, Colonel Ch'eng pointed to the man who played the Tartar violin, whispering in Madame Ch'ien's ear. "As for flutists, you won't find another one like him on Taiwan."

You'll know the moment you hear him play."

Half reclining in the soft armchair, savoring the fresh cup of jasmine tea Colonel Ch'eng had made her, Madame Ch'ien followed the direction of his hand, watched Mr. Yang. He was fifty years old, more or less, clad in a softened-silk gown the color of ancient bronze with round designs impressed on it; his features were very lean, strikingly refined; he had long, slender hands with pure white fingers like ten panpipes of white jade.

He pulled a Tartar violin from its cotton bag, laid a pad of blue cloth over his knee and placed the violin on top of it, adjusted the bow and casually warmed up a little, his head a bit forward; his arm swept out; suddenly

the violin sound leaped into the air like a rope tossed. The way he played the intermezzo "Night Deepening" was so clear, so crisp, plangent, radiant. The moment he finished, Advisor Yü was first to spring to his feet applauding, "Wonderful violinist!" and the guests clapped. Immediately the gong and drum struck up the overture "The General's Command." Madame Tou went round the living room inviting each guest to make an appearance on the stage. While the guests were still politely pushing each other forward, Advisor Yü, his arm around her, had already walked Chiang Piyüeh over to the violinist.

"O Sublimest One!" he announced, as Kao the Eunuch-Clown, "this is the Hundred Flower Pavilion."

Her hands before her mouth, Chiang Piyüeh trembled with laughter, the gold bangles on her wrists tinkling and jangling. The guests applauded; the Tartar violin played the 'Cardinal-Balance Air' from "The Imperial Favorite Drunk with Wine." Without even turning away, she began to sing, face to face with the audience. When she came to the interlude, Advisor Yü ran off and re-entered holding aloft the gold bird-waterer cup on a vermilion tray. With one hand he lifted the hem of his robe. ~~As~~ Kao the Eunuch, he half-kneeled before Chiang Piyüeh. "O Sublimest One!" he piped, "your slave presents the wine."

Chiang Piyüeh, on cue, assumed a drunken air, swayed from side to side, striking one operatic attitude after another; she glided forward

in a single "Reposing Fish," lifted the cup with her teeth, tossed it to the floor with a clang and began to sing:

As like a spring dream
is our life this world
So will I for mine own ease drink
my measure full!

Already the guests were one rolling ball of laughter. Hoarse, gasping for breath, Madame Tou called to Madame Lai, "I think our Piyüeh is really getting high tonight!"

"Miss Chiang!" Madame Lai called loudly, laughing so hard she kept wiping away her tears with her handkerchief, "there's nothing wrong with getting high, just be careful you don't follow Yang Yü'uan the Imperial Favorite and drink yourself greeneyed."

Though the guests cheered Chiang Piyüeh on, she swaggered off and, practically lifting Mrs. Hsü onto the stage, declared, "The Queen of K'un Aria will now sing 'Wandering in the Garden' for us; then we'll request Madame Ch'ien, the Goddess of K'un Aria, to follow with 'Waking from the Dream.'"

Madame Ch'ien looked up; she laid the cup in her hand down on the teapoy to her left; she saw that Mrs. Hsü was already poised before the screen, her body half turned away, one hand resting on the **ebony** woodwind stand. Manchu-gowned in pure black velvet, her Imperial Favorite chignon loosely knotted at the nape, her profile faced outward a little, her jadewhite earlobe, a pearl of an ear-pendant showing through her hair.

From the living room, the trumpet-shaped floor lights shone like stage lamps, sent her straight and slender shadow undulating softly onto the mica screen.

"Fifth Sister." Chiang Piyüeh came over and sat right down next to Colonel Ch'eng. "You listen very carefully; see if Mrs. Hsü's 'Wandering in the Garden' can top yours," she whispered, leaning over, one hand tapping Madame Ch'ien's shoulder.

"Madame," Colonel Ch'eng also turned his head, "Tonight at last Fate has decided in my favor; I'm to be inspired by your K'un Aria."

Madame Ch'ien looked intently at the bright gold bangles darting and flashing on Chiang Piyüeh's wrists; suddenly she felt dizzy; a wave of tipsiness

rose to her head; it seemed the few cups of Flower Carving she'd swallowed earlier were taking over; her eyes felt feverish, her vision hazy. Chiang Piyüeh's red Manchu gown flared up like a globe of flame, in a flash, glowing, caught Colonel Ch'eng's body, the golden plum blossoms on his lapels started to leap like sparks. Chiang Piyüeh's eyes were dancing like two balls of dark quicksilver on her drunken-red face, Colonel Ch'eng's long, slender eyes narrowed, shooting out threatening rays, the two faces confronting her at once, showing their straight white teeth, smiling towards her, the two faces so red they shone slowly closing in on each other, merged, showing their white teeth, smiling towards her. The high and low flutes began to sound together,

the high flute's note like flowing water, lifting
the low flute's trailing fall, carrying it into
'Black Silk Robe' from "Wandering in the Garden"

The glorious purple
the enchanting red
once open everywhere
Alas that these must yield
to broken wells
to crumbling walls
This joyous time
this fairest scene
yet Heaven grants me not
Then in whose gardens do hearts
by happiness delighted
still rejoice

You could say these lines, sung by Lady
Beauty, are the most challenging in K'un Aria.
Even the great flutist Wu Shenghao had said,
"Madame Ch'ien, your 'Black Silk Robe'

Mei Lanfang himself couldn't do better."

But why does Wu Shenghao play his flute so high-

pitched (Master Wu, they've made me drink too

much tonight; I'm not sure of my voice any more;

a bit lower, please). Wu Shenghao has said

The first thing a singer should stay away from

is wine, yet ^{Red Favorite} ~~Wu Shenghao~~, Seventeen, comes over

with that cup of Flower Carving in her hands,

says, Sister, let's us two kinfolk drink bottoms

up, she's arrayed in flashing red and gold, still

there she is, saying Sister, you won't do me the

honor. Don't talk like that, Sis, it's not that

Sister won't do you the honor, it's that really

he's the retribution in your Sister's fate.

Hadn't the blind woman, the Schoolmother, said

Worldly Glories, Wealth, Honor ——— Bluefield

Jade, only it's a pity you've got one bone grown
wrong. Oh, my retribution. Isn't he the retri-
bution your Sister's fate brought? Understand?
Sis, it's retribution. And yet he, too, comes
over with a winecup in his hands and salutes:
Madame. A Sam Browne belt, bright gold insignia
pinned on his lapels, his waist belted tight,
erect, his long riding boots with white copper
spurs, raven-glossy, watersmooth, click together,
his eyelids turn peachpink with wine, he salutes:
Madame. Is there anyone who doesn't know Madame
 Ch'ien of Plum Garden in Nanking? Ah yes,
 His Excellency General Ch'ien's lady, Ch'ien
 P'engchih's lady. Ch'ien P'engchih's aide-de-
 camp. General Ch'ien's lady. General Ch'ien's
 aide. General Ch'ien. It must have been

hard on you, Fifth, Ch'ien P'engchih said.

Poor thing, you're still so young. As for
young ones, how could they have kind hearts?

The blind woman, the Schoolmother, said Ah,

people like you only the old ones know how

to cherish. Worldly Glories, Wealth, Honor

—— only it's a pity, one bone grown wrong.

Understand? Sis, he is the retribution your

Sister's fate has brought. General Ch'ien's

lady. General Ch'ien's aide-de-camp. General's

lady. Aide-de-camp. Retribution, I say.

Retribution, I say. (Master Wu, a bit lower,

please, my voice is failing. Oh dear, this

'Sheep on the Mountain Slope') —————

Spring fever

that did me by stealth surprise

I cannot send away

Unspoken discontent

too suddenly

wells all within my heart

All for that I was born
a fair maid
and have been so ever
To be conjoin'd with one worthy our house
match'd to perfection
the celestial pair
Then why, sweet Fortune,
must my green spring be tossed
so far
and who is here
to see
my sleep's affection. _____

Fiercely the ball of red flame shot up again,
burned till those loftily-raised eyebrows glistened
darkgreen with sweat. The two drunken-red faces
were once more closing in on each other, showing
their white teeth, smiling. Those fingers like
jade panpipes flew up and down the flute.

That slender shadow shimmered among the lights
on the snowgreen mica screen. The flutes sank
even lower, grew plaintive, hoarse, as if they
voiced all Lady Beauty's wistful longing.

Lady Beauty was about to enter her dream;

Liu the Dream Love was to appear onstage.

But Wu Shenghao has said the secret meeting in

"Waking from the Dream" is the most suggestive

passage. (Master Wu, a bit lower, please, I've

drunk too much tonight.) And yet he has to come

over with a winecup in his hands, saluting:

Madame. His riding boots, raven-glossy, water-

smooth, click together, the white copper spurs

sting your eyes. His eyelids turn peachpink

with wine, still he salutes: Madame.

Allow me to help you on your horse, Madame,

he said; in his tightfitting breeches his long slender legs looked muscular, trim, like a pair of fire-irons clasping the horse. His horse was white, the road was white, the tree trunks were white, and his white horse shone in the blazing sun. They say All along the wayside the road to the Sun Yatsen Mausoleum is full of white birch trees. His white horse galloped through the birch groves like a hare darting about among sheaves of wheat. The sun came down on the horses' backs sending up strands of steaming white smoke. One white. One black.

The two horses were sweating. His body was stained with the odor of horse sweat that

assailed your nose. His eyebrows turned dark green,
his eyes smoldered like two balls of dark fire,
beads of sweat came running down his forehead
to his flushed cheeks. The sun, I cried, the sun
has struck my eyes. Those tree trunks, so white
and pure, so smooth, shedding their skin, layer
after layer, unveiled their tender naked flesh.
They say All along the wayside the road is
full of white birch trees. The sun, I cried, the
sun's shot straight into my eyes. And then he
whispered in a gentle voice: Madame. General
Ch'ien's lady. General Ch'ien's aide-de-camp.
General Ch'ien's _____ Fifth, Ch'ien P'engchih
called, his voice choked. Fifth, my dear,
he called, his voice dying, you'll have to

take care of yourself. His hair tangled like
a patch of withered white straw, his eyes sunk
into two dark holes, he stretched out his black,
boney hand from under the white sheet: You'll
have to take care of yourself, Fifth. His hands
shaking, he opened that gold-inlaid jewel case,
These are emeralds; he pulled out the first drawer.
These are cat's-eyes. These, jade leaves.
You'll have to take care, Fifth my dear, his
blackened lips quivering, Poor thing, you're still
so young. Worldly Glories, Wealth, Honor ———
only it's a pity, you've got one bone grown wrong.
Retribution, Sis, he is the retribution your
Sister's fate has brought. Do listen to me, Sis,
it's my retribution. Worldly Glories, Wealth,
Honor ———but I only lived so once.

Understand? Sis, he is my retribution. Worldly

Glories, Wealth, Honor _____ it was only once.

Worldly Glories, Wealth, Honor _____ I only

lived once. Understand? Sis, do listen to me,

Sis. Sister won't do me the honor, yet Monthly

Rose comes over with that cup of wine in her

hands, her eyes gleam like misty pools. So

you won't do your little sister the honor,

she's all red and gold, flashing, like a ball of

fire, she lands right beside him. (Master Wu,

I've drunk too much Flower Carving) _____

Languishing

where may I tell

my unquiet heart

Seething

how shall I redress this life

so ill-fulfilled

except I sue to Heaven _____

Right at that moment, this life so ill-

fulfilled — she lands right beside him

right at that moment, all red and gold, at that

moment, the two drunken-red faces slowly closing

in on each other, right at that moment, I see

their eyes: her eyes, his eyes. It's over,

I know, right at that moment, except I sue to

Heaven — (Master Wu, my voice.) It's over,

my throat, feel my throat, is it quivering?

It's over, is it quivering? Heaven —

(Master Wu, I can't sing any more.) Heaven —

it's over, Worldly Glories, Wealth, Honor

— but I only lived once — Retribution,

Retribution, Retribution — Heaven —

(Master Wu, my voice.) — right at that moment,

right at that moment, it's gone — Heaven

"Fifth Sister, it's time to do your 'Waking from the Dream.'" Chiang Piyüeh rose and advanced on Madame Ch'ien, beaming, stretching out her gold-bangled arms.

"Madame ——" Colonel Ch'eng called gently; he rose, too, stood before Madame Ch'ien, bowing slightly.

"Fifth Sister, please, it's your turn now." Madame Tou came over, extending her hand in an inviting gesture.

At once the instruments struck up; they were playing the codetta 'Ten-Thousand-Year Jubilation.' The guests sprang up. Madame Ch'ien saw the living room all waving and clapping hands

encircling Mrs. Hsü. The winds blew with mounting intensity; raised high in the air the brass gong struck, radiated gold in all directions.

"I can't sing any more," Madame Ch'ien muttered, gazing at Chiang Piyüeh, slowly shaking her head.

"That just won't do!" Swiftly Chiang Piyüeh caught Madame Ch'ien's hands. "Fifth Sister, you, the Star, will not run away tonight, no matter what!"

"My voice is gone," Madame Ch'ien sputtered, suddenly she tore herself away from Chiang Piyüeh's hands; she felt all the blood in her body rush to her head; her cheeks burned; her throat smart as if it were slashed by a razor; she could hear Madame Tou intervene:

"Fifth Sister doesn't want to sing, let her be ——— Advisor Yü, I think you, a famous 'Thunder Warrior,' had better do the finale tonight."

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" Madame Lai chorused from the other side. "It's a long time since I've had a whiff of Advisor Yü's 'Eight Great Blows.'"

Madame Lai propelled Advisor Yü toward the gong and drums. Once onstage, Advisor Yü raised his clasped hands: "My Humble Performance!" he announced to the audience. The guests burst out laughing. He began to sing the passage 'Touching Up ~~the~~ Red Lips' for the Chin Tartar General Wu Chu's first entrance; as he sang he swept up the hem of his robe, "mounted his horse," trotted around in the middle of the room "on horseback,"

his broad, fleshy face purple-red with drink,
his eyes rounded, staring; his bushy eyebrows
standing straight up in the air, he drowned the
Tartar violin with a few battle-cries. Madame
Lai bent double with laughter; she ran up behind
Advisor Yü, clapping; Chiang Piyüeh immediately
got on their line, she kept shrilling "Bravo,
Thunder Warrior! Bravo." Several other ladies
went up as well, forming a circle, cheering;
the laughter rose higher in the living room,
wave on wave. Some maids in white jackets and
black trousers entered with bowls of red-date
dragon's-eye soup for the guests' throats,
as soon as Advisor Yü finished singing.

Madame Tou accompanied the guests outside to the terrace. The air was full of a dewy chill. The guests had put on their overcoats; Madame Tou had tossed a large white silk shawl around her shoulders and walked down the terrace steps. Standing by the stone balustrade, Madame Ch'ien looked up; she saw the autumn moon had just reached the center of the sky; it coated the trees, the garden paths, the steps with a layer of white frost. The potted cassia on the terrace sent forth a wave of fragrance even more powerful; like wet fog abruptly it broke over her face.

"Madame General Lai's car has arrived."

Liu the orderly stood at the foot of the stairs announcing the guests' cars. First to draw up was

Madame Lai's brand new black Lincoln Continental;
a uniformed chauffeur jumped out of the car,
opened the door with a respectful bow and waited.
Madame Lai came down the steps and took her leave of
Madame Tou, taking Advisor Yü along; after she
got into the car she stuck her head out. "Madame
Tou," she laughed, "this opera party at your home
tonight, why, even the Mei Lanfang and Chin Shaoshan
of the old days couldn't have done better."

"Definitely!" Madame Tou replied, half-
joking. "Advisor Yü's Thunder Warrior certainly
outshone Chin (the Tyrant)."

The guests on the terrace laughed and
waved goodbye to Madame Lai. The second car to
drive up was Madame Tou's own sedan; it carried off

the Opera-Club people. The moment Colonel Ch'eng pulled up in his military jeep Chiang Piyüeh strutted right down; scooping up her Manchu gown, she tried to climb on the jeep. Colonel Ch'eng hurried round to help her in next to the driver's seat; she giggled, half swinging herself out, "Why, this jeep hasn't even got a door! I could get tossed out on the road any minute."

"You'd better drive carefully, Colonel Ch'eng," said Madame Tou. She waved him over, said something in his ear; he smiled, nodded.

"Not to worry, Madame."

He turned to Madame Ch'ien, clicked his heels and bowed deeply; he looked up at her with a smile.

"Madame Ch'ien, allow me to take my leave." Swiftly he leaped into the jeep and started off.

"Goodbye, Third Sister! Goodbye, Fifth Sister!" Chiang Pi-yüeh thrust out her hand, waving. Madame Ch'ien saw the gold bangles on her arm cutting gold circles in the air.

"Madame Ch'ien's car?" Almost all the guests were gone; at the foot of the staircase, Madame Tou spoke to Liu the orderly.

"Milady," Liu clicked his heels. "General Ch'ien's lady had arrived by taxi."

"Third Sister _____" Madame Ch'ien called softly from the terrace; she had wanted to ask Madame Tou to get her a taxi, but there were too many guests around, and she simply couldn't say it.

"Then as soon as my car comes back, call it in for Madame Ch'ien," Madame Tou added quickly.

"Yes, Milady." Liu retired.

Madame Tou turned and walked up to the terrace; Madame Ch'ien saw her white shawl in the moonlight like a flower of clouds embracing her. A breeze brushed past; all around the coconut palms began rustling; Madame Tou's large shawl floated out gently; Madame Ch'ien hurriedly pulled her collar closed, her cheeks, still burning, tingled, stung by the wind; she shivered.

"Let's go inside, Fifth Sister." Madame Tou, her arm around Madame Ch'ien's shoulders, walked with her to the house. "I'll have them make a pot of tea; now the two of us can have a good heart-to-heart talk — it's been so long since you've been here. Do you find Taipei at all changed?"

Madame Ch'ien hesitated for a moment;
she turned her head: "Oh, it has changed
a great deal." As they walked to the gate
she added softly. "It's changed so, I hardly
know it any more ——— they've put up so many
tall buildings and great mansions."