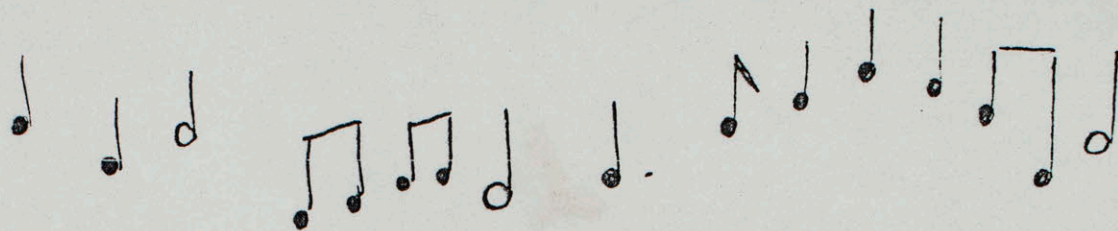


6/7

A LONE AMOROUS FLOWER

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A LONE AMOROUS FLOWER

(*'KU LIEN HUA'*)

Story Pai Hsien-yung

Translation Patia Isaku and the Author

Love's Lone Flower



Don't quite like this name,
but can't think of anything
appropriate for the time being.

In the past, ^{Each} every night when Peach Bud and I ^{Knocked off} ~~got done~~
^{work} at the Mayflower, the two of us would go home together.
Peach Blossom

Sometimes, on summer nights, we'd hail a pedicab and take
a slow ride back to our little apartment on ^{Kinhwa} Chin-hua Street.
It's different now, ^{often} now I usually go back first, by myself,
prepare a midnight snack and wait up for Peach Bud.

Sometimes I wait until dawn.

^{had} I spent my whole life's savings to buy this little
^{Kinhwa} Chin-hua Street apartment. Back in ^{the} Shanghai ^{days}, when I was

with the Myriad Springs Pavilion, I did manage to save
a few dollars, ^{this line of work} I'd been in the life much longer than
^{in fact,} Precious Fifth and the rest of them. I was the one who
took care of Precious Fifth, showed her all the ropes,

^{and} got her to stand up for herself. But by the time I fled
to Taiwan I had lost ^{most} everything except for a pair
of emerald jade bracelets I'd been wearing all the time.
That pair of bracelets was left to me by Precious Fifth;
no matter what hardships and dangers I went through,
I could never bear to part with them.

Juan-juan? Maybe, for a change, transliteration
is called for, but not in the W-G Chuan-chuan.

This is how
Taipei P.O.
spells it.

I didn't really want to ^{go} be with the Mayflower.

When I first got to Taiwan I used to hang out with racketeers like Yu the Hunk and run hot goods for the

black market. Who could have known we'd be raided, ^{not once but} ~~several~~ ^{many} times ^{on} in a row at the Keelung docks! ^{side, with the result} Not only

~~did~~ the Hunk lose ^{it} his own stash but my jewelry went as well.

Finally the Hunk had the nerve to try to rip those bracelets off my arms! I grabbed a pair of long scissors, aimed them at him and shouted, "You ^{you} just try and lay a finger on these!"

He spat right in my face and ^{cussed} ~~slashed~~ back, "You cheap whore!"

^{I've been in this business,} For all my life ^{but} in that business, that's ~~the~~ one word

I can't stand, especially out of a man's mouth. ^{It} stinks.

It's not an easy life in ^{one of these Taipei winehouses} a wine parlor, let me tell you.

The boss at the Mayflower was impressed with me. I'd had

^{plenty} ~~lots~~ of experience, I knew how to handle people, ^{and} I knew

a little Peking opera, too. ^{so} he'd send me specially to

take care of those honorable gents from the Mainland and

sing a few arias to keep them happy. Occasionally I'd

run into some of my old Shanghai clients, ^{and} they'd still

^{by my old professional name,} call me "Fragrant Cloud Number Six." Once I happened

(name of Lu Ken-jung.)

to meet Ninth Master Lu. The minute he saw me, he stamped his foot

and sighed. *as if to say what a pity.*

"Number Six,

"Sixth, luv, how the devil did you *come to* land back in a

hole like this?"

I smiled at him. "Well, Ninth Master, I guess that's just my fate, *isn't it."*

You really should give me credit *lay away* a Mainlander like me, thrown in with those little Taiwanese chicks at the Mayflower and *I was* still able to *put by* some dough *over* the years.

Quite an accomplishment, I'd say. *In time* *later* I sweettalked the boss into making me one of the managers to look after the

girls. Among *all* the managers at the Mayflower *Blossom* *Flower* Hu and I are the only women; the rest of them *are just* a bunch of hoods.

It doesn't bother me really. I've been *clawing my way up* *among* *of* men all my life, *and* *been* doing just fine, *thank you.* *I'm quite used*

to tackling them, to tell you the truth. The guests

have given me the title "Commander-in-Chief", they say

I've got all the top brass under my command. Princess *10/1* *and whatnot -* *I was riding hard on* Beauty, Heart Plum, *the lot,* just like *in* the Army, the

- Navy and the Air Force. As a manager all I get is my

— and ^{hear} salary, ~~besides~~, I couldn't ~~stand to~~ squeeze too much of that flesh-peddling money from those little chicks, so I became a lot more hard up than before. In the end I had to ^{call in} ~~get back~~ all the money I'd loaned out; I counted it over ^{and tried figuring this way and that, still}, and over ^{at last} I was forced to part with those two emerald jade bracelets so I could raise enough money to buy the little apartment on ^{Kinhwa} ~~Chin-hua~~ Street. I did it all for Peach Bud's sake.

Peach Bud used to be one of Mousie's girls ⁸ ~~she~~ was new at the Mayflower; ^{so} I'd run into her several times all right, but I'd never paid much attention to her. To tell the truth, when those Mayflower girls are all dolled up, ^{with} ~~they are all so buried under~~ powder and rouge you can't tell one from another. Then, one winter night, over a year ago, I went up to Room 313 on the third floor on my rounds. ^{when} ~~As~~ I pushed the door open, ^{I saw} ~~there~~ ^{standing there,} ~~stood~~ Peach Bud; ~~she was~~ singing a Taiwanese ballad. Half the table was occupied by Japanese johns; they were really whooping it up with Princess Beauty and Heart Plum and ~~those~~ other hot numbers, some clutching them around

This plays
term, and
the alliter-
ation,
bothers
me!

扭扭 ch'i-p'ao or cheongsam?
The word appears in these stories so often
that I'm beginning to wonder. There are
arguments on both sides — one of the problems
that have to be thrashed out. "KLH" P/I 5

their waists and some feeling up their boobs. The whole
room stank of cigarette smoke, wine, and men; no one was

really listening to Peach Bud sing. She stood in a
corner, in a black satin ch'i-p'ao cheongsam with a small white

capelet, her hair hung down to her shoulders, her waist was
pulled in so tight you could span it with one hand. Behind
her grouped three musicians, ^{Third-Son} Lin San-lang in the lead.

Blinking his ulcerated, nearly blind eyes, he accompanied

Peach Bud on his old, beat-up, utterly worn-out accordion, ^{that}
^{gave out a} with its plaintive, wheezing tone. She was singing "A ^{something called "Love's} Lone
Amorous Flower." Her head to one side, her face tilted

upward, eyes closed, eyebrows knit together, her long hair
fallen over one shoulder, she sang in a thin, ^a quivering
voice, not really knowing for whom she sang:

The moon is sinking in the west,

the moon is sinking

With all my heart of you I'm thinking —

and you ^{not} ~~don't~~ know ^{ing.}

A tender bush; who cares to tend it?

From my fallen leaves

the pains of love ^{be} ~~will~~ grow ^{ing.} ...
are

Third Son -

This ballad was composed by Lin Sanlang himself.

During the ^{time of} Japanese ^{rule} ~~occupation~~ he was a ^{fairly} famous musician, and

he wrote his own songs, too. They say he fell in love with

a wine ^{house} ~~parlor~~ girl, "White Jade ^{by the name of /} ~~Pavilion~~, " ^{who worked /} at the ~~P'eng-lai~~ ^{Fairyland} ~~Palace~~.

^(and in one of her seizures) She was an epileptic, she fell into the Tamsui River

and drowned. ^{It was} In memory of her, ^{the girl that} he wrote "A ^{Love's} Lone ~~Amorous~~

Flower." Embracing that accordion of his, its keys ~~turned~~

^{greasy} ~~oily~~ and yellow, blinking those ulcer ^{ous} ~~reddening~~ eyes, he

kept ^{playing} ~~pulling out~~ that same song day in and day out. I've

heard ^{it} ~~that song~~ sung by God knows how many girls in the

Mayflower, but not one of them sang with as much bitter

sorrow as Peach Bud, note by note as if she was pleading ^{all the} ~~wrongs she'd suffered.~~

^{her} ~~griefs~~. I don't know why, but the way she looked ~~all~~ ^{for}

^{a moment} ~~at once~~, reminded me of Precious Fifth. Peach Bud and

Precious Fifth didn't really resemble each other that

much; Precious Fifth had finer features, yet when Precious

Fifth sang opera, she had that same ~~bitter~~ sorrowful

look. In those days, when we were called out to banquet

performances, we ^{used to} ~~would always~~ like to sing "Reincarnate"

^{"Lovers} ~~Lovers~~ together; I was the heroine, ^{The beautiful Lady Meng,} "Princess Beauty,"

(Confusing - May flower has wine girl by same name!)

juxtaposition
of colors
seem ob-
trusive in
English)

and Precious Fifth played the lady's maid, Bright Snow. ^{su.}

^{also had this way of} Precious Fifth ^{ting} liked to ^{where} knit her brows; ^{there was} too; one passage in the tragic Erh-huang mode ^{the} and she seemed to pour out

all her grievances straight from ^{girls} her heart. Both ^{of them}

had pinched, triangular faces, pointed chins, high cheek-

bones, ^{and} sunken eyes; both of them had that look of ^{a castaway} being

^{ing} ~~destined to drift downward~~ to a ^{no-good end,} tragic fate.

The instant Peach Bud finished singing, ^{bald and} a stubby,

bald Japanese john snatched her around the waist and

sat her down on his lap; he forced a cup of wine down her

throat first thing, when she finished he poured her another

and pushed her on to the next guest for a drinking bout.

Peach Bud didn't put up ^{any} a fight at all; ^{she} she lifted her

cup and gulped the wine ^{down/long} in one breath. She swallowed it,

^{Then she} wiped away the drops in the corner of her mouth with the

back of her hand, looked at the guest and gave him a smile.

I saw that shadow of a smile float across her small, pale,

triangular face; it was sadder than weeping. I'd never

seen a wine ^{house} parlor girl ^{allow} let herself ^{get} ^{to be} pushed around

This is too much like editorializing or giving your story away.

so easily by those johns. Now my girls Princess Beauty and Heart Plum, for instance, it would take a helluva lot of doing before a john could force anything down their throats. But Peach Bud just let those Japanese S.O.B.s shuttle her around and pour wine down her throat, she didn't resist, she didn't even protest; after a cup she'd smack her lips and smile helplessly. ^{when} ~~As~~ her round drew to a close she'd already downed seven or eight cups of Shaohsing, ^{and} her face ^{had} even turned greenish. Before she left, she stood up and excused herself, nodding to the ^{guests} johns who'd ganged up on her. That sad, stiff smile floated across her face again.

That evening, after I'd taken care of business and was ready to leave, I went to the bathroom on the third floor; ^{when} I opened the door, I was stunned; ^{on} there on the floor, ^{flat} on her back, ^{was} lay Peach Bud, dead drunk, her face ashen, her black satin ^{ch'i-p'ao} cheongsam spattered all over with vomit. The faucet hadn't been turned off and the water was spilling over onto the floor; Peach Bud's hair was drenched, dripping

wet. I rushed over to prop her up, took my coat off and wrapped it around her. That night I took Peach Bud back to my apartment; at the time I was still living by myself on Ningpo West Street.

I washed Peach Bud up, changed her clothes and put her to bed in my bed; she was out cold the whole time, still shivering as though she had a chill. I got out a heavy quilt, covered her up and tucked ^{her} in ^{under the} around her chin. Suddenly I realized how many years it was since I'd done that. Back when Precious Fifth and I slept together in the same room, I often used to get up in the middle of the night and put her covers back on. She could only handle two cups of wine; when she was called out to drink with gents, she'd come home totally pie-eyed. In her sleep, whenever the aftereffect of the wine got to her and made her hot and restless, she'd kick off all her covers. I'd always get a blanket out and wrap her up real snug. Sometimes she got beat up and hurt by that old reptile of a pimp, Hua the Third, and she couldn't sleep well and I had to get up several times during the night, whenever

I tried to give her some advice she'd thrust her arm out
from under the covers up at my face ^{and said} with a scornful ^{laugh:} ~~smile~~.

"This is my lot, Sister."

Stamped on her snow-white arm was a row of coin-
size blisters ^{from marks} Hua the Third had branded ^{on} her with his
opium pipe. When I saw she was in ^{severe} ~~terrible~~ pain, I would
lie beside her and give her a massage and keep her company
until daybreak. I felt Peach Bud's forehead; it was icy,
~~kept sending out~~ ^{from the} cold sweat; ^{she} she'd drunk herself sick for
sure. ^{she} she tossed and turned the whole night; ^{and} ~~she~~ had a
restless sleep.

The next day, Peach Bud woke at dawn. Her face looked
^{and} ~~ghastly pale~~ ^{opened wide and glassy;} her eyes were ~~flashing~~; she said she had a
splitting headache. I got up to boil a bowl of ginger soup
with brown sugar to feed her in bed. She sat up and I
wrapped a quilted jacket around her shoulders. She just
^{of the soup and said she} drank half ~~of it~~, didn't want any more. Head lowered, she
rubbed her temples vigorously, her long hair falling forward,
hiding her face. After a while, without looking up she
suddenly said, "I saw my mother in a dream again." Her

voice sounded very strange, faraway, hollow, each word fading off.

"Where is she now?" I sat down next to her.

"I don't know." She looked up, shaking her long hair.

"Maybe she's still in our Su-ao countryside — she's a madwoman."

"Ohh — " I stretched out my hand to wipe away the beads of cold sweat ^{breaking} ~~springing~~ out on her forehead. I noticed Peach Bud's eyes also looked very strange; they were dark and deep; even when she stared blankly her eyes were still full of fear, her pupils like two black tadpoles darting about.

"My father put an iron chain around her neck and locked her in the pigsty. When I was little I didn't know she was my ^a ~~momma~~. My father never told me. And he wouldn't let me go near her. When I went to feed the pigs, I often saw the neighbors' kids pick up rocks and throw them at her; when she got hit she'd raise her hands like claws and gnash her teeth and howl. The kids laughed, and I laughed with them — " Peach Bud laughed nervously, her small, pale, triangular face slightly distorted. "One day, look — "

She pulled her collar open and pointed down at her throat; there lay a red scar, as thick as your finger, like a shiny earthworm.

"One day my aunt came, ^{and} she took me to the pigsty; ^{and} she told me, through her sobs, 'That's her, that's your mother!' That evening I got together a bowl of food on the quiet, crawled into the pigsty and handed it to my ma. She took ahold of it, stared at me for a while and grinned. I moved up and stroked her face with my hand, but the minute I touched her she let out a bloodcurdling wail, ^{and} dashing the bowl to the ground, she reached out her claws and in one swoop grabbed me, ^{and} before I could make a sound her teeth were already sinking into my throat — "

Peach Bud laughed nervously again, her two tadpole pupils jumping. I hugged her ^{and} ~~around her shoulders and~~ caressed that scar on her throat; all of a sudden I felt that red earthworm-like scar turn slippery, as if it were beginning to squirm.

* * * * *

Once Precious Fifth and I made a wish: in days to come, when we'd saved up enough money, we'd buy a house, live together and make it our home, ^{even} we'd also said we were going to redeem a little virgin singsong girl and bring her up ^{as our own.} Precious Fifth had been kidnapped from the Yangchow countryside by a white-slaver. When she was sold to the Myriad Springs Pavilion she was only fourteen; ^{dressed} in a flower-print cotton jacket and pants ^{wrapped} with drawstrings pulled tight at the ankles; her hair cut in a pageboy, fastened with a copper butterfly ^{pin} ~~barette~~.

"Where's your mother, Precious Fifth?" *I'd asked her.*

"I haven't got a mother." She smiled.

"Silly," I scolded her, "You haven't got a mother? Who gave birth to you?"

"Oh, I don't remember." She waved her short hair around and tittered. I caught her to my bosom, held her cheeks and gave her a couple of kisses. From then on I grew to feel a maternal pity and tenderness for her.

"Peach Bud, this is our home now."

That's what I told her, my arm around her shoulders, when we moved into our little apartment on ^{Kinhwa}~~Chin-hua~~ Street. Precious Fifth died early, so that wish of ours never came true. I spent half my life knocking around until I met Peach Bud; only then did the idea of building a home come back to me. I just let things slide, never got used to doing the laundry and cooking and all that housekeeping business, but I thought Peach Bud was too frail for the heavy work, so I wouldn't let her do too much around the house. Every day she slept way into the afternoon, and yet I couldn't bear to wake her up. Especially when she came back from turning a trick, she looked so worn out my heart went out to her. Don't I know it! When men get into bed there isn't one dirty trick they won't pull. One time some old mother-fucker damn near strangled me with his hands around my neck, and he got sore, that bastard! kept asking me, Why ^{aren't}~~don't~~ you pant? Why ^{ing}~~aren't~~ you panting? The ^{night}~~evening~~ of Precious Fifth's initiation, night, the dude who copped her cherry was an army man,

strong as an ox. The morning after, Precious Fifth crawled into my bed, rolled against my bosom and cried her eyes bloodshot, her tiny little breasts black and blue, all covered with toothmarks.

"Who was the one who deflowered you, Peach Bud?"

Once when Peach Bud got up very late after a call, I asked her as I was combing her hair.

"My father."

I stood behind her and just kept on combing her hair, without a sound.

"Whenever my father got drunk he'd come straight into my room . . . " She talked with a cigarette in her mouth, an exhausted look on her face. "I was just fifteen then; ^{was} the first night, I ~~got~~ scared and I bit him. He grabbed me and began knocking my head so hard against the headboard my head swam and I blacked out. From then on, every time he'd bring me back some rouge and lipstick from Ilan and sweet^ttalk me into doing it with him ——— "

- Peach Bud laughed drily, the cigarette in her mouth bobbing up and down.

"When I got ^{would} ~~knocked up~~, my father ~~kept~~ dragging me to the door every day, ~~he~~ pointed his finger ~~right~~ in my face in front of all the neighbors and ^{cuss} ~~cursed~~ me out. 'You slut! Been sleeping around, huh!' ^{Then} I felt my swollen belly ^{and} I got frightened and started to cry. My father got hold of a handful of bitter herbs and crammed it ^{down} ^{throat} ~~into~~ my ~~mouth~~. That night I dropped a clot of blood — "

As she said it, she giggled nervously again; her face was all twisted till you couldn't tell her eyes from her eyebrows. Gently I caressed her bony back; I felt as though I was stroking a sick kitten with only one of its lives left 奄奄一息 that someone had thrown out on a pile of garbage, and left to die d. leave for work at

^{When} ~~After~~ Peach Bud got through dressing we ~~left for~~ the Mayflower. On the street I watched her long hair blow about in the evening wind, her tiny waist ^{wig} swayed this way and that as if it would snap at any moment. At the entrance of the street we ran up against a huge setting sun, ^{which looked} as if it had just rolled out of a dying-vat, ^{making} ~~it made~~ Peach Bud's pale triangular face appear splashed with blood. From the cast of her face, I had a secret feeling

means almost breathing his last

a dark fate awaited her. How many unatoned-for sins from former lives, I wondered, weighed upon this swaying, fragile body?

* * * * *

It's only recently that Peach Bud's begun staying out all night. One hot, humid night in June, I was lying in bed; I hadn't slept a wink all night waiting for her; I watched it grow light little by little outside the window, my back soaking wet. Peach Bud didn't come home until seven or eight in the morning, reeling from side to side ^{like} ~~as if~~ she was still drunk, her face white with fatigue, her mascara run and spread into two big black circles, as if her eyebrows and eyes had decomposed. She walked into the room, without a word she kicked off her high heels, ^{and} struggling out of her cheongsam she fell back onto the bed, her eyes closed, and lay there, totally inert. I sat down next to her and took off her bra; her nipples had been bitten through and swelled up like two overripe oxblood plums; there was a sticky substance oozing from them. ~~It was a sticky substance oozing from them.~~

On her neck was a ring of blue toothmarks that made her earthworm-like red scar stand out even more. I lifted her arm. To my horror I saw a row of four or five black needle-marks in the vein.

"Peach Bud!" I called to her.

✓ "Yama K'o Lao-hsiung — " Peach Bud muttered, her eyes closed. She turned her head away and passed out.

As I kept watch by her side, all at once everything that had happened at the Mayflower the night before last

flashed across my mind. That night when Yama K'o Lao-hsiung, *nicknamed*

the king of Hell

~~Yama~~

came to the Mayflower I had sent Princess Beauty and

Heart Plum over; he didn't want either of them; he told

them to "fuck off;" for some reason he had his eye on

Peach Bud. Three years ago he was a regular at the

Mayflower, a smuggler, a gambler, and a dope addict into

the bargain; there was nothing he wouldn't do. A known

underworld capo, all right. He was a big spender in those

days, had gone through quite a number of wine ^{house} ~~parlor~~ girls;

there was one called Graceful Phoenix who had shacked up

with him less than a month and then suddenly she was dead.

There was a lot of talk around the Mayflower that he was her Cause of Death, so he stayed out of sight for a couple of years. When he came back this time he was twice as nasty, more ferocious than ever. By the time Peach Bud was there on her round^s, he was already eighty percent loaded, in with a gang of card-sharks every one of them shouting all kinds of filth. Yama took off his shirt baring his dark-red, massive arms, showing the two big clumps of dark hair under his armpits; his belt loosened, ^{the} zipper on his fly half down^{open}. A skinhead, the back of his enormous head shaved shiny, on his crown a tuft of hair stiff, erect, like pig bristles. He had a big, mean jaw that stuck out like a carp's gills; a pair of pig eyes, bloodshot, eyelids swollen, his ~~dark~~ black thick lips pushed out, ^{flashing} ~~showing~~ a mouthful of flashing gold teeth. His head was asweat, his body was asweat; before I ^{came} ~~got~~ near him I ^{got a whiff} ~~was already~~ ~~attacked by~~ ^{of} that smell of his that stank of fish.

As Peach Bud ^{approached} ~~came near him~~, he rolled his pig eyes and sized her up from head to toe. Without warning he stretched out a dark-red, massive arm, seized ^{the girl} ~~Peach Bud~~ by the hand

and pulled her toward him. He grinned, his gold teeth flashing. Peach Bud lost her balance and fell right into his lap. His bare arm clutching her tiny waist, he tried to pour a cup of wine down her throat; before she'd finished it he snatched the cup out of her hand; smacking his lips he drained the rest. He thrust his nose out and sniffed around Peach Bud's neck; one hand pawed her breasts; then abruptly he pulled Peach Bud's arm up, stuck out his tongue and gave her armpit a quick lick. Peach Bud couldn't help but let out a piercing laugh, her feet kicking violently.

Yama ~~just~~ wouldn't relax his grip; he caught her hand and pulled it down below his belly.

"Afraid?" he leered.

The johns around the table cackled. Peach Bud struggled wildly; in Yama's arm her slender waist twisted as if it had broken in two. I could see those tadpole eyes of hers in her pale face ^{all but} ~~about~~ to leap ^{ing} out in panic.

* * * * *

I don't understand what it is in Peach Bud's fate

that's brought about such a retribution, that's attracted such demons. Ever since she got mixed up with Yama it's as if her soul was ^{snatched} ~~taken~~ away. Whenever he came to the Mayflower to pick her up she'd go along meekly; every time she came back she was all bruises, her arms were stuck full of needlemarks. I did everything I could to stop her; I told her just how dangerous these underworld thugs are. Peach Bud just looked at me vacantly, as if she were under a spell.

"Don't you understand? Peach Bud!?" Sometimes I got so worked up I would shake her violently by the shoulders. Then she would shake her head and smile sadly.

"I can't help it, Commander — "

Without a stitch on except her bra, she'd go sit on the window-sill; she hunched over, one leg drawn up, picked up a bottle of Cutex and began painting her toenails while she plaintively hummed snatches of "Yearning for You,"

"Three Forlorn Sighs," those weepy ballads, her voice hollow, like a widow wailing. Every few lines she'd blow her nose with a wad of kleenex. She's become addicted to

a morphine addict,

Yama
took Peach Bud to a hotel once and she
got picked up by the police as a hooker. I had to spend
quite a bit of money before I could bail her out. From
then on I wanted Peach Bud to bring Yama home;
at least he wouldn't dare to get nasty with her ~~in front~~
^{at my}
~~place~~
~~of me~~. I'm always afraid one day Peach Bud will lose
her life to that King of Hell. A couple of times I've
taken her horoscope to be read; they've all said she's
got an extraordinarily violent destiny.

Every time they come home I excuse myself and go into
the kitchen; I can't stand the sight of those gold teeth.
They remind me of that pimp Hua the Third. When he beat
Precious Fifth up, he'd bare all his gold teeth and curse,
I'll beat you to death, you stinking whore! While I'm
in the kitchen stewing the lovage-tonic chicken for Peach
Bud's late-night snack I keep my ears open all the time;
I hear Yama's lewd laugh, his bark, Peach Bud's
agonized whimpering like a sick kitten; not until Yama
leaves do I draw Peach Bud's bath and go into
the room to see her. One time I went in only to find her

sitting mother-naked on the bed, holding a wad of crisp hundred-dollar bills, counting this way and that way, over and over, like a little child playing with bubble-gum cards. I went up close and saw a dark-red spot of dried blood, as big as a fingernail, on her small face by the corner of her mouth.

* * * *

On the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month, the Ghost Festival, it's finally happened.

This evening! Yama had taken Peach Bud off to the town of Sanchung for the wild jamboree ^{there}. I came home earlier than usual, bought silverfoil ingots and candles, prepared four sacrificial dishes and took them to the terrace behind the kitchen ^{as} ^{ingot} to offer to Precious Fifth. The night was so hot it made you feel dizzy; the whole sky looked as if it had been scorched; even the huge moon had turned red. By the time I'd finished burning the ingots I was dripping with sweat; my cheeks grew feverish. One doesn't usually think about it, but when I counted I realized

it's already fifteen years since Precious Fifth died. Whenever I think about her, it's as if everything is right before my eyes: the way she lay on Hua the Third's opium couch, dead, her mouth stuffed with opium scum, her eyes wide open; I can still see it. Over and over Precious Fifth had sworn: I'll turn into a ghost and hunt him down!

It was almost midnight before . . . Yama came in dragging Peach Bud along, both of them reeling, the old Yama's face flushed purple. Damn your mother's soul! the minute he walked in he spat and cursed. He literally yanked Peach Bud off the ground and took her into the other room. As I sat in the kitchen I felt a burning in my heart; I simply couldn't calm down no matter how hard I tried. This time . . . Yama's howls turned savage, and now and again there were sounds of a scuffle. The scene right before Precious Fifth's suicide suddenly reappeared — Precious Fifth sits down hard on the floor in Hua the Third's room; Hua grabs her by the hair and keeps twisting her head around as if he's turning a handmill; the copper opium pipe in his hand slashing down at her, sending out

a shower of gold sparks. I see her two hands in the air swinging and grasping like mad, and then comes her scream for dear life, SISTER — ^{*summon up all my strength and*} I smash the window with my fists, ^{*end*} with all my strength. The broken glass cuts my hands; blood comes — an ear-piercing shriek made me start up in fright. Catching up a cleaver I rushed into the other room. As I burst through the door, it was Peach Bud, stark naked, who rode astride *Yama's* body. He lay flat on the floor; he was naked, too. She raised a black flatiron in her two hands and hammered it down on *Yama's* skull. Thump, thump, thump, one blow after another. Her long hair flying, her mouth wide open, shrieking like a wildcat gone mad. *Yama's* ^{*crown*} skull was split open, his grayish brains, like beancurd dregs, splashed all over the floor; that tuft of pig's bristle hair on his crown still intact, stuck there; those dark-red massive arms of his thrust up in the air, quivering. Peach Bud's bluish-white breasts thrashed up and down, spotted with blood. Riding on *Yama's* dark-red corpse, her thin white body all of a sudden grew larger

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and larger. A wave of dizziness washed over me; the cleaver in my hand dropped to the floor.

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Peach Bud's case never went to court: she had gone completely insane. They've locked her up in an asylum by the sea, in Hsinchu. It was more than two months after I filed my application before they gave me permission to see her. ^{Third-Son} Lin San-lang came along to keep me company. When Peach Bud was at the Mayflower, Lin San-lang was really fond of her and taught her many Taiwanese ballads. That song he wrote, ^{"Love's"} "A Lone Amorous Flower," Lin taught her himself.

We got to see Peach Bud at the Hsinchu asylum. They had handcuffs on her; they said she bit people. They had her hair cut short, to ear length, curling up around the ends; it made her look like a fifteen-or-sixteen-year-old little girl. She was wearing a gray cotton robe with a low neck; that earthworm-like red scar on her throat showed. She didn't know us any more; only after I called her name

several times did she smile a little. That triangular little face of hers looked even paler and thinner. But, oddly enough, her smile no longer had that touch of sadness; instead she had taken on a dash of mad childlike innocence. We stayed for a while, but we didn't have much to say. I left her a basket of apples I'd bought; ^{Third-Son} Lin San-lang brought her two boxes of Water Pavilion cookies. Two male nurses ushered her inside; I knew they would never let her out again, ever.

^{Third-Son} When Lin San-lang and I left the asylum it was already dusk; the sea breeze had blown sand up onto the road; when the setting sun shone on it it looked like a cloud of yellow dust. It was quite a walk to the bus station, and since ^{Third-Son} Lin San-lang was almost completely blind he could only walk very slowly. He wore dark glasses and guided himself with a cane. I held onto his arm, ^{and} the two of us trudged along step by step down along the endless dirt road. There was [#] no one in sight; on both sides of the road one stretch of paddy-field ^{stretched one after} ~~followed~~ another. The autumn harvest was already over; all that was left standing in the parched

fields were clusters of withered stalks. After we'd been walking for some time, I suddenly began to feel lonely.

⁴ Thuid-Son, ^(Love's)
"San-lang, sing your song 'A Lone Amorous Flower'
for me."

"All right, Commander."

^{Thuid-Son}
Lin San-lang cleared his throat, ^T in a falsetto,
imitating those wine ^{house} ~~parlor~~ girls, softly he began to hum
^{Love's}
"A Lone Amorous Flower."