

LANLING XIAOXIAOSHENG

THE GOLDEN
LOTUS

VOLUME 6

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Chapter 51

PAN JINLIAN MAKES MISCHIEF

Pan Jinlian was so angry when she thought that Ximen Qing had taken the love instruments to Li Ping'er that she tossed about the whole night through. She hated Li Ping'er. The next morning, when she knew that Ximen had gone to the office, she went to the inner court to see Wu Yueniang.

"The Sixth Lady," she said, "has been saying nasty things about you behind your back. She says you take undue advantage of your position and that you are overbearing. Last night, she says, our husband came in drunk and went to her room. She was in the inner court, and you shamed her before everybody there. She was angry, went to the other court and forced him to come to your room. He didn't wish to come, and went back again to her as soon as he could. They talked all night. He has given himself to her, heart, entrails and all."

This made Yueniang very angry. Aunt Wu and Meng Yulou were present, and she said to them: "You two were here yesterday. I said nothing that anyone could take exception to. When the boy brought the lantern, I asked him why his master had not come, and he said his master had gone to the Sixth Lady's room. Then I said: 'The Second Lady is expecting him, and he ought to come.' There was nothing wrong about that.

What does she mean by saying that I take undue advantage of my position? I used to think she was a good woman, but, evidently, I was judging by appearances, and did not realize what her mind was like. You never can tell. Now I see that she is like a needle hidden out of sight, a thorn in the flesh. How do I know what stories she may have been telling my husband? No wonder he was so anxious to go and see her yesterday. But never mind, my foolish lady. Even if he goes to you every day, it shall not worry me. You can have him, you people who cannot bear the strain of widowhood. Think of it! But when I first came here, and that rogue treated me without due respect, I managed to survive."

"Lady," Aunt Wu said, "say no more. There is the child, you know. Those in authority always have much to put up with. You are the mistress of the house, and the mistress is like a jar that has to hold all sorts of water. Both good and bad are your portion."

"One of these days," Yueniang said, "I will certainly ask her what she meant by saying I was overbearing."

This alarmed Jinlian. "Sister," she said, "you must forgive her. There is an old saying that tells us that the truly great do not concern themselves with the doings of those who are less worthy. And what person of that baser sort is without faults? We all suffer from the way she talks to our husband, especially I, who am her nearest neighbour. If I were as bad as she, there would be desperate trouble. And things are by no means better for us now that she has had this baby. She says more. She says that when her son grows up, there will be kindness for those who have been kind to her and revenge for those who have been unkind to her. We shall all die of starvation. But, of course, you knew nothing of this."

Aunt Wu said: "Lady, how can you say such things?" Yueniang said nothing.

When people get to discussing matters in this way, there are always some who speak for fire and some who speak for candles. Ximen's daughter, Ximen Dajie, was friendly with Li Ping'er, who had always given her needles, thread and cloth when she wanted them. She had given her fine silk and other things besides, and two or three excellent handkerchiefs. She never expected any return. So, when Ximen Dajie heard this conversation, she naturally went to tell Li Ping'er.

The Sixth Lady was sitting in her room making a charm for the baby to wear at the Dragon Boat Festival. She was also making different kinds of millet dumplings and delicacies to eat. When Ximen Dajie came in, she asked her to sit down, and told Yingchun to bring some tea.

"When we asked you to come and take tea with us, why didn't you come?" Ximen Dajie said.

"When your father went away, I began to make these things for the baby, now that it is cool."

"I want to tell you something," Ximen Dajie said. "Now, please realize, I don't wish to talk scandal, but have you done anything to displease the Fifth Lady? She has been telling the Great Lady that you said she was an interfering busybody. Mother is going to ask you what you meant by it. But when she asks you, don't tell her that I spoke to you about it, or she will be angry with me. You must think out your answer beforehand."

When Li Ping'er heard this, she could hardly hold her needle; she was so paralyzed by astonishment. For a long time she could not answer, and tears rolled down her cheeks. "I never said a single word," she said at last. "Last night, I was in the inner court and the boy came to tell me that your father had gone to my room. I came and asked him to go to the inner court, and that was all. The Great Lady has been very kind to me. Do you think I don't know how to distinguish good from

evil? How dare Jinlian say such things? I will have this out with her, face to face.”

“She did seem to be disturbed when the Great Lady said she would talk to you about it,” Ximen Dajie said. “If I were you, I should certainly challenge her.”

“No,” Li Ping’er said, “she is too clever for me. Her mouth is sharper than mine. Day and night she schemes to kill my child and me. I can only put my trust in Heaven. But one of these days she will be the end of me.” She sobbed as she spoke.

Ximen Dajie stayed for a while to comfort her, then Xiaoyu came to ask them both to go to dinner. Li Ping’er put down her sewing and went with Ximen Dajie, but she could eat nothing and went back to her room to lie down.

When Ximen Qing came back from the office and found Li Ping’er lying on the bed, he asked Yingchun what was amiss. The maid told him that she had had nothing to eat. He became excited and asked: “Why couldn’t you eat anything? Tell me. I see your eyes are very red. How are you feeling?”

Li Ping’er got up quickly, rubbed her eyes and said: “My eyes have been bothering me, but it is nothing very serious. I just wasn’t hungry.” She did not say a word about the trouble, but she could not get it out of her mind.

In the inner court, Ximen Dajie said to Yueniang: “I have been speaking to the Sixth Lady about the things the Fifth Lady says. She swears she never said anything, and cried bitterly. She says she could not possibly say anything of the sort after you have been so kind to her.”

“I don’t believe a word the Fifth Lady says,” Aunt Wu said. “The Sixth Lady is much too good a woman to say things like that.”

“I fancy there is some trouble between Li Ping’er and Jinlian,” Yueniang said. “Perhaps Jinlian could not get her

husband to go and visit her, and that is why she comes and tells me such tales. I am the one who has to suffer.”

“You must be fair in your judgments, Lady,” Aunt Wu said. “It would take a hundred like the Fifth Lady to make one like the Sixth. She has been here three years now, and never has she done anything she should not have done.”

As they were talking, Qintong came in with a large parcel wrapped up in blue cloth. Yueniang asked him what was in it. “There are thirty thousand salt certificates here,” the boy said. “Clerk Han and Cui Ben have been to have them registered at the Excise office. Father is giving them something to eat, and seeing about the money. The day after tomorrow is a lucky day, and they will start for Yangzhou.”

“Master Ximen will be coming now,” Aunt Wu said. “I had better go with the two holy teachers to the Second Lady’s room.” Before she finished speaking Ximen Qing appeared.

“What is that thievish, fat, bald-headed old whore Xue doing here?” he asked his wife.

“Why do you use such unbecoming language?” Yueniang said. “Since you do not offer them charity, there is no call for you to make such rude remarks. She has done you no harm. And how did you know her name?”

“Don’t you know her history?” Ximen Qing said. “She got Counsellor Chen’s young daughter away to her temple where she carried on with some young fellow. For that she received three taels of silver. When the business came out, I had old Xue arrested. She was given twenty strokes and ordered to return to lay life and get married. I should like to know why she hasn’t got married yet. Perhaps she would like me to put the thumbscrews on her.”

“You must not speak evil of the servants of Buddha,” Yueniang said. “She is religious and observes her vows. Why

should she return to the secular life? You don't appreciate her holiness."

"Holiness!" said Ximen Qing. "Ask her how many men she welcomes in one night."

"Don't be so vulgar," Yueniang said, "or I shall tell you what I think of you." Then she said: "When are you going to send the men to Yangzhou?"

"I have sent Laibao to see our relative Qiao," Ximen said. "I want five hundred taels from him. I myself am contributing another five hundred taels: I shall send them off the day after tomorrow."

"Who is going to take charge of the shop?" Yueniang said.

Ximen told her that he had arranged for Ben the Fourth to do so. Then Yueniang opened a chest and took out the silver. It was weighed and wrapped up. Ximen gave each man five taels of silver as journey money.

Ying Bojue came while this was being done. "What are you doing, Brother?" he asked. Ximen Qing told him. "I congratulate you, Brother," Bojue said, bowing. "You will certainly do well out of the transaction."

Ximen Qing asked him to sit down and called for tea. Then he asked when Li and Huang were going to get their money. "Within a month, I expect," Ying Bojue said. "They told me yesterday that there is another contract going in Dongpingfu for twenty thousand lots of incense. They are very eager to get your backing to the extent of five hundred taels and, as soon as they get the money, they will bring it to you without even touching it."

"As you see," Ximen said, "I am sending people to Yangzhou, and I have had to borrow five hundred taels from Qiao. How can I spare money for them?"

"Well," Ying Bojue said, "they said to me with much insistence that one guest does not trouble two hosts. If you

do not do them this favour, they don't know where to get the money."

"Xu the Fourth, in East Street, outside the walls, owes me five hundred taels," Ximen Qing said. "They shall have that."

"Splendid," cried Ying Bojue.

At that moment Ping'an brought a visiting card and said that Xia Shou had come to invite Ximen Qing to go and visit Magistrate Xia next day. Ximen Qing looked at the card. "Good," he said.

"Brother," Ying Bojue said, "I have news for you. Have you heard about Li Guijie? Has she been here recently?"

"She has not been here since the end of the first month. I can't imagine what's been happening to her."

"General Wang's third son," Ying Bojue said, "is a nephew by marriage of Grand Marshal Huang of the Eastern Capital. In the first month, this young man went to the Capital to celebrate the New Year, and the old gentleman gave a thousand taels to the young couple as a New Year's gift. Oh, you have no idea of the beauty of Grand Marshal Huang's niece. No artist could paint more than a half of it. I have never seen so beautiful a woman. Since you have been staying at home with your own ladies, old Sun, Pockmarked Zhu, and Little Zhang have been spending all their time in the bawdy house with this young man. In Second Alley he has taken up with a girl called Qi Xiang'er, and sometimes he goes to Guijie's house. He stole his wife's ornaments and pawned them. This distressed his wife so much that she even tried to hang herself. The other day was the old gentleman's birthday. Wang's wife went to the Eastern Capital and told him all about it. The old gentleman was terribly annoyed. He had the names of all the naughty fellows set down and sent the paper to Marshal Zhu. Marshal Zhu has sent it here with orders to arrest the people

named. So, yesterday, old Sun, Pockmarked Zhu and Little Zhang were arrested at Guijie's house. Guijie herself escaped to a neighbour's and spent the night there. They have asked me to come and beg you to help them."

"Only a month or two ago I said they were a pack of cadgers," Ximen Qing said. "Pockmarked Zhu even tried his tricks on me."

"I will be off," Ying Bojue said. "I expect Guijie will be coming to see you, and, whether you listen to her or not, she is sure to blame me for putting a finger in the pie."

"One moment," Ximen Qing said, "if you see Li, don't tell him I am going to let them have the money. Wait till I have got it from Xu, and then I'll talk to you again."

Bojue promised. As he went out of the gate, Guijie's sedan chair arrived. She was getting out of it, but Bojue went straight on.

Ximen Qing was telling Chen Jingji to go to Xu the Fourth's for the money when Qintong came and said: "The Great Lady would like to see you in the inner court. Guijie is here." Ximen went to the back court. Guijie was wearing a dun-coloured dress. There was no powder on her face, and her head was hidden in a white kerchief. There were no ornaments in her hair, and she seemed extremely miserable. She kowtowed to Ximen Qing.

"Whatever shall I do, Father?" she said, sobbing. "The fates have abandoned me. I was sitting quietly at home, when disaster seemed to drop suddenly from the skies. There is a certain young master Wang. He was a stranger to me, but, one day, old Sun and Pockmarked Zhu brought him to our house to see my sister. My sister was not at home, and I said to my mother: 'Don't let them in,' but, the older my mother grows, the bigger fool she becomes. It was the day of my aunt's birthday.

I wanted to get into my sedan chair and come here, but Zhu went down on his knees and implored me not to come until I had at least given them a cup of tea. He made it impossible for me to get away. Suddenly, a number of policemen came to arrest them. Wang slipped away, and I managed to escape to a neighbour's house. When everything was quiet again, our servant came to take me home again. My mother was frightened out of her wits. She talked about killing herself.

"Today the runners came with a warrant from the office and spent the whole morning at our place questioning us. They mentioned my name and wanted to take me to the Eastern Capital. Father, you must take pity on me and save me. I don't know what to do. Mother, won't you say a word for me?"

Ximen Qing laughed. "Get up," he said. "What other names were there on the document?"

"Qi Xiang'er's name was there," Guijie said. "It was young Master Wang who made her a woman. But it was right for her name to be there, for she took his money. But if I ever took a penny from him, may my eyeballs fall out. And if I ever allowed him to set hands on me, may a beastly sore grow at every one of my pores."

"You really must do something for her," Yueniang said. "Don't make her take these terrible oaths."

"Has Qi Xiang'er been arrested?" Ximen Qing asked.

"Not yet," Guijie said. "She went to the Wangs' house."

"The best thing you can do," Ximen Qing said, "is to stay here for a few days, and I will see what I can do for you at the district office." He told Shutong to write a letter and go at once to the office to see Magistrate Li. He was to tell Li that Guijie was at Ximen Qing's house, and ask that she should not be arrested.

Shutong put on his black clothes and went on this errand. In a short time he was back again with a card from Li. "His

Lordship told me,” the boy said, “that he will gladly do anything else you wish, but he can’t do this. In this case the document has come from the Eastern Capital. His Lordship must see that the people are arrested, and the best he can do for you is to allow her two days’ grace. If you wish to do anything for her, you will have to send to the Capital.”

When Ximen Qing heard this, he muttered a while. Then he said: “Laibao is about to go somewhere else, and I have no one to send to the Eastern Capital.”

“Why not send the other two to Yangzhou, and keep Laibao?” Yueniang said, “Then he can go to the Eastern Capital for Guijie. There will still be the other two to go to Yangzhou. See how terrified the girl is.”

Guijie kowtowed to Yueniang and Ximen Qing. Ximen sent for Laibao. “You will not go on the twentieth,” he said. “I am going to send the others to Yangzhou, and you must set off tomorrow for the Eastern Capital to get this business of Guijie’s settled. You will go and see Uncle Zhai and ask him to get the affair disposed of at the courts.”

Guijie hastily made a reverence to Laibao. He made reverence in return and said: “I will start immediately.”

Ximen Qing told Shutong to write a letter thanking Zhai for what he had done in the matter of Censor Ceng. He sealed up twenty taels of silver to go with the letter and gave it to Laibao. Guijie was greatly relieved. She offered five taels of silver to Laibao. “When you come back,” she said, “my mother will reward you suitably.” Ximen Qing took the five taels and returned them to the girl, telling Yueniang to give Laibao another five taels in place of them. “But this is quite wrong,” Guijie said. “You are taking all this trouble on my account, and I cannot allow you to spend your money as well.”

“Do you think I don’t have five taels,” Ximen said, “so that I must ask you to pay him for me?”

Guijie put away her five taels and made reverence after reverence to Laibao. "Brother," she said, "please start early tomorrow. I am so afraid you may be too late."

"I will start at the fifth night watch, the break of dawn," Laibao said. He took the letter and went to Han Daoguo's house in Lion Street.

Wang Liu'er was making clothes in her room. She saw Laibao through the window and said to him: "What can we do for you? Please come in. My husband is not at home. He has gone to the tailor's for some clothes, but he will be back in a moment." She said to the maid: "Go to Xu's, the tailor's, and tell your father Uncle Bao is here."

"I have come to say that I am not going with him tomorrow. I have to go to the Eastern Capital instead. Guijie pleaded urgently with my master to do something for her, and I have been ordered to start tomorrow morning. Your husband and Cui will have to go by themselves, and I shall join them later on. What are you making, Sister-in-law?"

"Underclothes for my husband," Wang Liu'er said.

"Tell him not to take much in the way of clothes," Laibao said. "The place to which we are going is the very home of silk, so why bother about clothes?"

As they were talking, Han Daoguo came in. The two men greeted one another, and Laibao told Han what he had told Wang Liu'er. "I will join you in Yangzhou," he said.

"Our master has given instructions that we are to stay at Wang Boru's inn," Han said. "Wang's father was a friend of his Lordship's father. He has a very large inn, and there are always many merchants there. Our money and our goods will be safe there. That is where you will find us."

"Sister-in-law," Laibao said to Wang Liu'er, "I am going to the Eastern Capital. Is there anything you would like me to take to your daughter?"

“Her father has had a pair of hairpins made, and I have made two pairs of shoes. Would you be so kind as to take them?” She wrapped them in a kerchief and gave them to Laibao. Then she told her maid to bring something to eat and to warm some wine. She laid down her sewing and set the table.

“Sister-in-law,” Laibao said, “do not take any trouble on my account. I must not stay. I must go home and pack my luggage so as to be ready to start first thing in the morning.”

Wang Liu'er smiled. “Why do you stand on ceremony with us? We are colleagues in business, and it is only right that we should entertain you and that you should drink a cup of wine with us.” She said to Han Daoguo: “Now, old sober sides! Help me to get the table ready and ask Uncle Bao to sit down. Don't look as though you did not wish him to stay.”

Dishes were brought, and they offered Laibao wine. Wang Liu'er sat with the two men. When Laibao had drunk a few cups, he said again that he must go. “It is late, and my house is shut up early.” Han Daoguo asked what arrangements had been made about the horses, and Laibao told him that they were to be hired early the following morning. “If I were you,” he said, “I should hand over the keys and the accounts to Ben the Fourth, and not go to the shop. Take a rest at home in preparation for your journey.”

“I am going to give them to him tomorrow,” Han Daoguo said.

Again Wang Liu'er urged Laibao to drink. “Just this one cup, Uncle,” she said, “I will not ask you to drink any more.”

“If I must drink,” Laibao said, “may I have a cup of very hot wine?” Wang Liu'er poured the wine into the pot and told the little maid to heat it. Then she poured it out again and offered it with both hands to Laibao. “I am sorry that I have nothing better to offer you to eat,” she said.

"I thank you, Sister-in-law," Laibao said. "We do not, of course, stand on ceremony since we are all members of one household." He took the wine and drank with Wang Liu'er. Then he got up. She gave him the shoes to take to her daughter.

"Go to the palace, Uncle," she said, "and see whether my daughter is well." Then she and her husband together took him to the gate. Laibao went home, packed his baggage, and, next day, set off for the Eastern Capital.

Uncle Wu came to talk to Ximen Qing. "A document," he said, "has come from the Capital to Dongpingfu appointing me Keeper of the Seals and Controller of the Granary in this city. I am to be on six months' probation and, if my work is well done, I am to be promoted; and, if not, reported by the Censor. Brother-in-law, if you can spare the money, I should be glad if you would lend me some. I will pay you back when I get paid myself."

"How much do you need?" Ximen Qing asked. "You shall have it."

"It is very kind of you, Brother-in-law. Perhaps twenty taels." They went together to Wu Yueniang's room. Yueniang took out twenty taels and gave them to her brother. Then they had tea, but, as there were lady guests, Uncle Wu could not stay in the inner court, and Yueniang asked her husband to entertain him in the great hall.

While they were drinking, Chen Jingji came in. He made a reverence to Uncle Wu, and said to Ximen Qing: "Xu asks to be allowed a few days in which to make his payment."

"Rubbish," Ximen said, "I need the money now. You will have to speak to him severely."

Uncle Wu asked Jingji to sit down and drink with them.

In the inner court, Aunt Wu and Aunt Yang, Ximen's ladies, and Guijie were drinking wine together. Miss Yu sang

to them the first act in *The Western Wing* play cycle. When she had finished and laid down her lute, Meng Yulou gave her some wine. "What a terribly long ditty," she said, "I don't like you at all." Pan Jinlian, with a pair of large chopsticks, took a piece of meat and dangled it before Miss Yu's nose, to tease her.

"Sister," Guijie said to Yuxiao, "give me the lute, and I will sing a song for the ladies."

"But you are in trouble," Yueniang said. "You can't feel like singing."

"Now that you and Father have made things all right, I have nothing to worry about," Guijie said.

"Guijie," Yulou said, "I suppose you are able to change the parts you play so quickly because of where you come from. When you first came, your brows were knit, and you would not even take a drop of tea. Now you laugh and talk readily enough."

Guijie stretched her delicate fingers, plucked the strings and sang to them. While she was singing, Qintong came with the things from the outer court. Yueniang asked if Uncle Wu had gone and was told that he had. "It must be time for my brother-in-law to come here," Aunt Wu said. "We had better go elsewhere." Qintong told them that Ximen Qing had gone to the Fifth Lady's room.

When she heard this, Jinlian was on tenterhooks. She lifted first one foot and then the other in her anxiety to get away, but she felt that it would not be polite to go. At last Yueniang said to her: "Get off to your room since he is there. Don't sit there looking like a guest who can get nothing to eat."

Jinlian tried to pretend to be in no great haste, but her feet carried her quickly away. When she came to her room, Ximen Qing had already taken some of the Indian Monk's medicine. Chunmei had taken his clothes and he was sitting on the bed.

“Ah, my son,” Jinlian said, “you could not wait for your mother to come, but went to bed first. I have been drinking in the inner court. Guijie was singing there, and I have had several large cups of wine. I had to find my way here alone in the dark, one foot in the air and the other on the ground. Really, I don’t know how I got here.” She asked Chunmei for some tea. When the maid brought it, Jinlian drank it and made a sign to her. Chunmei understood and went to heat some water for her. The woman washed herself with sandalwood water and alum and took off her headdress so that her hair was held by a single golden pin. She stood before the mirror, reddened her lips and put some fragrant tea into her mouth. Then she came back and Chunmei brought her sleeping shoes. The maid went away and made fast the door behind her.

The woman took the lamp and set it beside the bed. Then she pulled down the curtains, took off her scarlet trousers, and stripped her jade body. Ximen Qing was sitting on the bed, the silver clasp in position upon a fierce-looking weapon. Jinlian was startled when she looked at it. It was too great for one hand to grasp, full-blooded and heavy. She stared at Ximen Qing and said: “I know what you’ve been doing. You’ve been taking some of that monk’s medicine to make it like that. Then you think you’ll come here to show what a mighty fellow you are. Fresh wine and fresh meat for others. I have to content myself with the defeated champion. I can serve the meanest of your purposes. Then you pretend to be fair to me. Why, the other day, when I was not in my room, you came and ran off with the instruments to the Sixth Lady’s room and carried on your games there. And she pretends to be one of those pure, pious people. You wretched little creature, you can be twisted around anybody’s finger. When I think about it, I swear I won’t have anything to do with you for a hundred days.”

Ximen Qing laughed. "Come here, you little strumpet," he said, "and see if your mouth can make this smaller; if you can, I'll give you a tael of silver."

"I'm ashamed of you, you rascal," she said. "How can it get smaller when you have drunk that potion?" But she lay on the bed and put his penis between her red lips. "It's so huge," she said, "that it hurts my mouth." Then she sucked and teased the prick's head with her tongue, licking the outer skin and rubbing it up and down with her lips. But, although she stroked the giant with her cheeks and played a thousand love games with it, it merely became longer and thicker. Ximen looked at her. Her beautiful body gleamed among the silk sheets. She took his hairy monster in her delicate fingers, put it between her lips, and took it all in her mouth; when she released it, it was limp.

Beside them lay a long-haired white cat. Watching the movement of this hairy thing, the cat crouched ready to spring. Ximen had a gold speckled fan in his hand and with it he teased the cat. Jinlian seized the fan and struck a hard blow at the cat. It ran quickly away. She looked up at Ximen Qing and said: "You terrible fellow. You are amusing yourself with me, and that isn't enough for you, you must play with the cat. Suppose it claws me. What then? Do you think I shall go on playing this game?"

"You funny little whore," Ximen said, "you would talk anybody to death."

"Why don't you ask Li Ping'er to play these games with you?" Jinlian went on. "You ask me every time you come here. What that medicine you have been taking may be I don't know; I could suck it all day without success."

Ximen took from his sleeve a little silver box and from it picked out with a toothpick some of the reddish ointment. He put it upon the horse's mouth. He lay down and made her ride

on top of him. "Let me get into position first," she said. "If I do, perhaps you'll be able to penetrate me." But the head of his penis was so broad that they both struggled hard and long before even a little of it would go in. She rode on top of him, up and down, hither and thither, but could not conceal her pain. "Darling," she said, "that hurts me so much that I can't bear it any longer," and feeling around with her hand she found that less than half the penis was inside her. She collected some of her spittle and moistened the inside of her cunt with it to make the path easier. Then she moved up and down and gradually the penis went the whole way into her vagina.

"Darling," the woman said, "the medicine you always used to take gave me a tremendous feeling of burning inside, but this makes me feel a coldness that reaches even to my heart. My whole body seems numb. I shall certainly die at your hands today."

Ximen Qing laughed. "I will tell you a story," he said. "I heard it from Brother Ying. Once upon a time a man died and went down to the infernal regions. The King of Hades put an ass's skin upon his body and told him that in his next life he must be a donkey. But the record keeper looked in his books and found that the man still had thirty years to live. They sent him back to earth. His wife perceived that, except for his weapon, his body was as it had been before, but he had still the donkey's weapon. 'I will go back to Hell and change it,' he said to his wife. 'No, my dear,' said the wife. 'They might not let you come back again. I will put up with it somehow.'"

Jinlian struck him with the fan. "Beggard Ying's wife is able to put up with a donkey's weapon," she said. "That is obvious. You are a foul-mouthed thing, and I ought to hit you harder."

They went on with their work, but Ximen Qing did not give forth. He closed his eyes and made the woman move. She,

wriggled and writhed with terrible moans. Then they changed places. He held her legs, and thrust in his penis with all his might. He worked hard in the face-down position, but he felt very little, and she did not become wet. They changed places again; she embraced his neck and hurled herself at him, put the tongue in the mouth, and pressed the whole penis inside herself. Then she whispered gently, “Darling, finish it off or I’ll die.” Soon she drooped; her tongue was as ice, and the juices of love flowed from her. Ximen felt that her cunt was warm, his passions were aroused, and he felt an enormous orgasm. Both their juices flowed like rivers. She mopped them up with a handkerchief. Then they embraced and kissed each other—but the penis was still erect. They slept for an hour; after that Jinlian, still unsated, climbed on top of him and played with him again. The juices again flowed, but at last began to exhaust themselves. Ximen Qing was undaunted. He could only marvel at the medicine that the Indian Monk had given him. Then they heard the cock crow. It was just before dawn.

“If it doesn’t go down, come back to me tonight and my lips will make it do so.”

“You can never do so,” Ximen said, “there is only one thing that will.”

Jinlian asked what that was, but he said: “This is not a thing to be told to other ears. Wait till tonight and I will tell you then.”

In the morning he rose and Chunmei helped him to dress. Han Daoguo and Cui Ben were waiting. Ximen went out and gave them two letters, one to introduce them to Wang Boru, who kept the inn at Yangzhou, and the other to Miao Qing to ask if his affair had been settled satisfactorily. He told them that, if they needed more money, he would send it later by Laibao. “You said you were writing to Censor Cai,” Cui Ben

said, but Ximen said the letter had not been written and that he would send it by Laibao. Then the two men set out upon their journey.

Ximen Qing put on his hat and robe of ceremony and went to the office. He thanked Magistrate Xia for his invitation. "It will be a great honour if you visit me today," Xia said. "There will be no other guests." They attended to their business, then each went to his own home.

An official on horseback, carrying a parcel, with sweat rolling down his cheeks, came to the gate and asked Ping'an if Ximen Qing lived there. Ping'an asked his business. The man dismounted, bowed to Ping'an, and said: "I come from An, the Warden of the Royal Forests, with presents for your master. My master and Huang, the Controller of the Brick Fields, are now at Dongpingfu, at Master Hu's place, drinking wine. My master wishes to visit his Lordship, and I have come to see if he is at home." Ping'an asked for a card, and the man took one from the wrapper and gave it with the presents to the gatekeeper. The boy took them and showed them to Ximen Qing. On the list of presents he read: "Zhejiang silk, two rolls; four measures of Hu brocade; a scented girdle; and an ancient mirror." Ximen told him to give the messenger five *qian* of silver and a card in return, and to say that Ximen would be happy to receive his master. The man went away and Ximen hastily made the necessary preparations.

The two gentlemen arrived about noon. They came in sedan chairs with a fine array of umbrellas and men to clear the way for them. They sent in visiting cards with their names An Shen and Huang Baoguang. Both were dressed in ceremonial attire, with black hats and black boots. They got down from their sedan chairs and Ximen Qing went to the gate to meet them. They went into the hall and exchanged salutations. Then they sat down, Huang on the left and An on the right.

“Your fragrant renown has long been known to me,” Huang said. “I am only sorry that my visit has been so long delayed.”

“The kindness is on your side,” Ximen said, “it was for me to come and see you first. May I ask your illustrious name?”

An answered for his colleague. “Brother Huang’s name is Taiyu. It is expressive of the principle that earth is made peaceful by the glory that comes from Heaven.”

“May I ask your name?” Huang said.

“My unworthy name,” Ximen said, “is Siquan. I was so called because, on my poor estate, there is a well with four openings.”

“The other day,” An said, “I met Brother Cai. He told me how he and Song had inflicted themselves upon you.”

“Yes,” Ximen Qing said, “I had orders from my friend Zhai, and besides, his Excellency Song is my superior officer. It was only fitting that I should entertain them. When my servant was at the Capital, I heard of the exalted rank you had attained, and I can only apologize for not having come in person to congratulate you. When did you set out?”

“Last year, after I left you, I went home to marry again. Then, in the first month of the new year I went to the Capital and was appointed to the Board of Works. Now I have been detailed to superintend the transport of the imperial timber from Jingzhou. I had to pass this way, and, of course, felt bound to come and pay my respects to you.”

“I am grateful for your precious gifts,” Ximen Qing said. He asked them to change their clothes, and summoned the servants to lay a table. But Huang rose, and An said: “Indeed, we have to go to drink wine with the prefect of Dongpingfu. We only called in passing, and we will trouble you some other day.”

“It is a long way from here to Dongpingfu,” Ximen Qing said, “and if you are not hungry yourselves, there are still your

servants to consider. I shall not offer you anything very special, merely common, everyday food, and when your servants have been refreshed by a meal, you will travel more quickly.” A table was set with food of all kinds, delicious dishes, soups, and pastries. Ximen took a small golden cup and offered three cups to each of them. The servants were entertained. Then the two officers stood up and An said:

“We are giving a little party tomorrow and should be very honoured if you would come. The party will be at Chamberlain Liu’s place. He is a friend of my brother Huang. Will you give us the pleasure of your company?”

“Since you are good enough to invite me,” said Ximen, “I dare not refuse.”

He escorted them to the gate. Just as they went away in their sedan chairs, a man came from Magistrate Xia to remind Ximen Qing. “I will come at once,” he said. He ordered his horse to be brought, went to the inner court to change his clothes, then came out again and mounted. Qintong and Daian followed him, and soldiers went before him to clear the way. When he reached his colleague’s house, he went to the hall. The two men saluted each other. Ximen said: “Their Lordships An and Huang have just been to see me. They stayed a long time, or I should have been here earlier.” Two tables were set in the hall. Ximen Qing sat on the left, and, next to him, the graduate Ni. They talked to one another and Ximen asked Ni his second name. “My name is Ni Peng, and my second name Shiyuan. I am also known as Guiyan. I am on the staff of the college of this prefecture, and at present am coaching his Lordship’s son for his examination. I am ashamed to say I am too ignorant to have many friends.” The two young actors came up and kowtowed.

When Jinlian had said goodbye to her husband, she went to bed again and did not get up before midday. Even then, she

was too languid to dress her hair. She was afraid those in the inner court would remark it, so, when Yueniang sent for her to go to dinner, she would not go but said she was unwell. Not until afternoon did she go to the inner court.

Yueniang, taking advantage of Ximen Qing's absence, decided to hear Nun Xue expounding the teachings of Buddha and interpreting the *Diamond Sutra*. An altar was prepared, and incense burned. The two nuns, Wang and Xue, sat down facing each other, and the two novices, Miaoqu and Miaofeng, stood beside them. The service began. All Ximen's ladies were present, with Aunt Wu and Aunt Yang. They gathered round and listened to Xue recite.

"It has been said," Xue began, "that lightning and brightness soon pass away but that stone and fire are everlasting. The withered blossom can never return to the tree on which it grew, and flowing water can never go back to the spring from which it came. In painted halls and tapestried chambers, life is but emptiness. The noblest and the greatest die, and all is but a dream. Gold and jade are no more than fountains of trouble. Silken garments are wasted labour. Wives and children can never spend a hundred years together and, in the darkness beyond, a thousandfold sufferings await.

"When you have lain upon your dying bed and your spirit has gone to the realms below, only in history will your name be recorded. It will avail you nothing, and the yellow earth will cover your corrupting bones. Your fields and gardens, though they cover ten thousand acres, will be divided and cause strife among those who come after you. Your chests of silks and satins, though they are a thousand, will give you not a moment's pleasure. Before life is half done, white hairs assail us. When we have received the congratulations of one guest, he will be followed by another who comes to condole with our

children. It is bitter, bitter, bitter. Our spirit is transformed into vapor and our body goes beneath the ground. On go the transmigrations, ceaselessly, and so our heads and countenances are ever changed.

“Hail to the limitless void of the Dharma Realm, to the Three Treasures of the Buddhas of Past and Future, the Dharma, and the Holy Orders.

“Oh, highest, deepest, most admirable Law! Through a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand ages, it is difficult of attainment. Let us now behold it, hearken to it, receive it, hold fast to it. Let us vow to grasp the Buddha’s great Truth.”

Then Nun Wang said: “Shakyamuni Buddha was the ancestor of all the Buddhas, the Founder of our religion. Do you know how he left his home? Hear me tell of it.” Then Nun Xue sang:

*The Buddha Shakyamuni was a prince in India.
He left his kingdom and went forth to the Himalayas
Where he cut off his flesh to feed the eagles, magpies nested
on his head.
He cultivated his purity until the nine dragons spittle made
him a body of gold,
And became the Perfect One, the Buddha of the Great
Vehicle.*

Then Nun Wang said: “Now that you have heard of Shakyamuni, I will tell you how the Bodhisattva Guanyin strove after perfection, attained hundreds of manifestations, and attained the fullest power of the Path. Would you like to hear?”

Xue was about to sing again when Ping’an came rushing in and said: “His Excellency Song has sent two runners and a servant with a number of presents.”

Yueniang was flurried. "Your father has gone to Magistrate Xia's," she said. "Who is there to accept the presents?"

Daian came in, put down his wrapper and said: "Don't worry, lady. I will take the card and go and tell my father. Meanwhile I will ask Master Chen to entertain the servants here." He took the card, mounted a horse, rode quickly to Xia's place and told his master. On the card was written: "A freshly slaughtered pig; two jars of Jinhua wine; four quires of writing paper and a miniature book." It was signed: "With the respects of the junior official Song Qiaonian." Ximen Qing told the boy to go home and ask Shutong to write a card with his full title, and give the servant three taels of silver and two handkerchiefs, and five *qian* to each of the runners.

Daian hurried home. He looked everywhere for Shutong but could not find him. This made him so excited that he ran around like an ox going around the grindstone. Nor could he find Chen Jingji. Clerk Fu had to come and entertain the men. Daian went to the inner court to get the silver and the handkerchiefs. There was nobody to wrap them up, and he had to go to the shop to have a parcel made of them. He asked Clerk Fu to write the necessary card. Then he asked Ping'an where Shutong was. "He was here when Master Chen was here," Ping'an said, "and when Master Chen went to get some money, he disappeared."

"I suppose the young rascal has gone off after some girl," Daian said.

At that moment, Chen Jingji and Shutong came riding along on the same mule. Daian scolded the boy and bade him quickly write the card. They dismissed the men who had brought the presents.

"You rascally young scamp," Daian said to Shutong. "You are too ready to roam about. When Father is not at home, you

think you can go too. You have been after your girl, beyond a doubt. Father never told you to go out with Master Chen. Wait till he comes back and see what I tell him.”

“Tell him what you like,” Shutong said. “If you don’t, I shall know you are afraid of me, and I shall consider you my boy.”

“What, you dog!” Daian cried. “Do you dare me?” He went up to Shutong and kicked him. The pair rolled about on the ground struggling. Daian gained the upper hand and spat upon Shutong’s face. “I am going for Father now,” he said, “but when I come back I will settle my score with you.”

In the inner court, Yueniang gave the two nuns some tea and refreshments, and they continued their hymns and their preachings. Jinlian grew impatient and tugged at Yulou, but Yulou would not move. Then she thought of suggesting to Li Ping’er that they might go, but she was afraid Yueniang would reprove her.

“Sixth Sister,” Yueniang said, “she wants you to go with her. I think you had better go. She is so very impatient.” Li Ping’er went out with Jinlian. Yueniang looked after them. “Now that the turnips are out of the way,” she said, “we shall have more room. We don’t want her here, jumping about like a rabbit. She is not the sort of woman to listen to religion.”

Jinlian, holding Li Ping’er by the hand, came to the second door. “The Great Lady,” she said, “is very fond of that sort of thing. But there isn’t anybody dead in the household, and I don’t see why we should have the nuns to read stuff of that sort. I have had enough of it; that’s why I asked you to come out. Let us go and see what Ximen Dajie is doing.” They passed through the great hall. There was a light in one of the side rooms. Ximen Dajie and Chen Jingji were quarrelling over the disappearance of some money. Jinlian tapped at the window.

“So, instead of going to the inner court to hear the nuns, you are squabbling here.”

Chen Jingji came out. “It is a lucky thing I didn’t curse you. Fifth Mother and Sixth Mother, won’t you come in?”

They found Ximen Dajie busy making shoes. “It is late and very hot,” Jinlian said. “Why are you making shoes now?” She asked what they were quarrelling about.

“Father told me to go outside the city walls to get some money,” Chen Jingji said, “and my wife gave me three *qian* to buy her a handkerchief. Unfortunately, when I got there, I couldn’t find the money. I couldn’t buy it for her. When I got back, she said I had spent the money on some woman. She scolded me and made me take oath upon my body. When the maid was cleaning the floor, the money was found. She has taken it, yet still she tells me I must buy a handkerchief for her tomorrow. You two ladies can judge which of us is in the wrong.”

“You thievish rascal,” his wife said. “You say you don’t keep a woman, but what were you doing out with Shutong? You must have heard Daian cursing him. I have no doubt that you and that boy went to some strumpet together. That’s why you came back so late. Where is this money you were sent for?”

“Have you found the other money?” Jinlian asked.

“Yes, the maid picked it up when she was sweeping the floor. I have it now.”

“Don’t worry,” Jinlian said to Jingji, “I will give you some money and you can buy two handkerchiefs for me.” And Li Ping’er said:

“If there are handkerchiefs to be bought outside the city, please buy some for me.”

“Outside the city,” Jingji said, “there is a Kerchief Lane where some well-known merchants are having a special sale of kerchiefs of all sorts. Some are woven with gold; others have

jade trimmings. They can supply as many as you like. Tell me what colour you like and what kind of pattern you want, and I will get them for you tomorrow.”

“I will have an orange-coloured one, with gold and green, and a phoenix among the flowers,” Li Ping’er said.

“Mother,” Jingji said, “orange and gold don’t look at all well together.”

“Mind your own business,” said Li Ping’er. “I want another of pink wavy silk, with the design of Eight Precious Treasures, and still another of shimmering silk with gold and flowers.”

“What design do you want, Fifth Mother?” Jingji asked Jinlian.

“I have only a little money, so two will be enough for me. One the colour of jade, with edges of lace and gold.”

“You are not an old woman,” Jingji said. “What do you want with white?”

“Don’t think you know better than I do,” Jinlian said. “I shall use it when I have to wear mourning.”

“Then you will need a coloured one too.”

“Yes, I want one of the most delicate purple grape shade, made of Sichuan silk, gold and green, with a pattern of crossed squares, and in every square a pair of love symbols. On the lace I must have tassels and pearls and other bits of jewellery.”

“Ai ya! Ai ya!” Chen Jingji cried. “You are like the melon-seed seller, who sneezed when he opened his box, and scattered the seeds all over the place.”

“You horrid man,” Jinlian said. “Since it is my money, I shall buy what I like. It is a question of taste and nothing to do with you.”

Li Ping’er took a piece of silver from her purse and gave it to Jingji. “This will pay for the Fifth Lady’s too,” she said. Jinlian shook her head.

“No,” she said, “I will pay for my own.”

“We are asking Brother-in-law to buy them all at the same time. Why should you bother?”

“Even so,” said Jingji, “it is more than enough.” He took a balance and weighed the silver. It weighed a tael and nine *qian*.

“With the rest,” Li Ping’er said, “buy two handkerchiefs for your wife.”

Ximen Dajie stood up and made a reverence to Li Ping’er. “Now the Sixth Lady has paid for your handkerchiefs,” Jinlian said to her, “you ought to hand over those three *qian* of silver. You and your husband can draw lots to decide which of you shall be our host. If it is not enough, we will ask the Sixth Lady for some more. Your father will be out tomorrow; we will buy roast duck and white wine and enjoy them together.”

“Yes,” said Jingji, “hand over that silver.”

Ximen Dajie gave the silver to Jinlian, and Jinlian passed it to Li Ping’er for safe keeping. They found some cards, and Ximen Dajie and her husband played. Jinlian helped Ximen Dajie, and she won three games. Then they heard a knocking at the gate. Ximen Qing had returned. Jinlian and Li Ping’er went to their rooms and Jingji went to tell Ximen that Xu the Fourth would pay two hundred and fifty taels in a day or two, and the remainder the following month. Ximen Qing cursed, for he was drunk. He did not go to the inner court but straight to Jinlian’s room.