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Accessibility
Fourth Sister Zhang Creates Havoc in the Eastern Capital

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The basic story of Fourth Sister Zhang Creates Havoc in the Eastern Capital (Zhang Si jie danao Dongjing 張四姐大鬧東京) is widely known in China and has been adapted, under a bewildering variety of titles, in many local genres of drama and storytelling.¹ The earliest record of this story is found in the notice devoted to the lost chuanqi 傳奇 play A Heavenly Bond (Tianyuan ji 天緣記) in the eighteenth-century Quhai zongmu tiyao 曲海總目題要 (Annotated Bibliography of the Sea of Plays).² This notice may be translated as follows:

*A Heavenly Bond.*

It is [also] called Displaying Flowers, Fourth Sister Zhang Longs for the Mortal World (Baihua Zhang Si jie sifan 擺花張四姐思凡). It is based on a drum ballad (guci 鼓詞) and is absurd and fantastic. But in its disposition of characters and armies, and its description of banners and weapons, fights and confrontations, it is ingenious and original, enjoyable and amazing, so it is well worth watching.

Duan Chengshi 段成式 [–863] in his Nuogao ji 諾皐記 [Record of Nuogao] writes: “Old Man Heaven is called Zhang Jian 張堅; his style is Cike 刺渴 and he hails from Yuyang 漁陽.”³ So it is not that there is no reason to say that a daughter of Heaven is surnamed Zhang.

The play may be summarized as follows: Fourth Sister Zhang is a daughter of the Jade Emperor and the Queen-Mother.⁴ She has six elder and younger sisters and lives in the Dipper and Buffalo Palace. In the days of the Humane Ancestor

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² Du Yingtao 杜穎陶, ed., Quhai zongmu tiyao 曲海總目題要 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1959), juan 40, pp. 1859-60. This work was compiled in the first half of the eighteenth century. We do not know the names of the compilers and the version we have today is not complete.

³ On Duan Chengshi’s Nuogao ji, a section of his Youyang zazu 酉陽雜俎 (Miscellaneous Morsels from the South Slope of You Mountain), see Carrie L. Reed, A Tang Miscellany: An Introduction to Youyang zazu (New York: Peter Lang, 2001). For a full translation of this item, see Duan Chengshi, Chinese Chronicles of the Strange: The “Nuogao ji,” Carrie E. Reed, tr. (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 32.

⁴ At this point a small-character double-column note warns against taking this figure as the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu 西王母).
[Renzong] of the Song dynasty a certain Cui Wenrui 崔文瑞 of the Eastern Capital, an impoverished gentleman, lives in an abandoned temple where he looks after his mother. Fourth Sister and Cui have an immortal affinity, so she descends [to the mortal world] and marries him. Cui suddenly becomes extremely wealthy; his gold and pearls and precious goods cannot be counted. A rich man, Squire Wang [Wang yuanwai 王員外], falsely accuses Cui of theft. Commander Zhang 張 accepts Wang’s bribes and questions Cui under torture. Fourth Sister then enters the jail to free Cui; she sets all prisoners free and kills Squire Wang. When the commander reports this to the throne, Bao Zheng 包拯 is dispatched to arrest Fourth Sister, but he too is captured. Upon his release he proposes to the emperor to have her subdued by the Generals of the Yang family. But when Yang Wenguang 楊文廣 and Huyan Qing 呼延慶 fight with her, they are both defeated and locked in her soul-catching bottle. [The court] next deploys the five women generals [of the Yang family] Mu Guiying 穆桂英, Third Sister Li [Li Sanniang 李三娘], Princess Chacha [Chacha gongzhu 查查公主], Miss Lanfeng [Lanfeng xiaojie 藍峰小姐], and Princess Prettier than a Flower [Saihua gongzhu 賽花公主], who all can ride on the mist and rise on the clouds, and who can make dust swirl and stones fly! But when they engage her in battle and manifest their supernatural powers they too are all defeated and locked in the soul-catching bottle. Bao Zheng enters hell and also visits the Buddha lands for a comprehensive investigation but nowhere can he ascertain the origins of Fourth Sister. He then arrives at the Southern Gate of Heaven and pays a call on the Old Lord [Laozi], who takes him to memorialize [the matter] to the Jade Emperor. Only when a personnel count is conducted in the Dipper and Buffalo Palace is it discovered that three days ago Fourth Sister descended to the mortal world. [The Jade emperor] thereupon dispatches a team of the Fire Dragon 火龍, Nezha 哪吒 and the Great Sage Equal to Heaven [Sun Wukong 孫悟空] to set off together, and orders them to bring her back to the palace. But when they engage her in battle, they too are utterly defeated. When the case is reported to the Queen-Mother she orders her [Fourth Sister’s] six immortal sisters to talk her around and tell her to report to the Jade Emperor. Fourth Sister then has Wenrui and his mother ascend to the sky together with her and both of them attain the fruit of immortality.

The three heavenly treasures that Fourth Sister had stolen and uses are the heaven–piercing cap [zuantian mao 鑽天帽]—if you wear it you can freely move through all thirty-three heavens; the earth-entering shoes [rudi xie 入地鞋]—if you wear those you can freely come and go through the eighteen hells; and the soul-catching bottle [shehun ping 攪魂瓶]—if you use it, all celestial gods and heavenly generals are sucked inside! The story very much resembles Journey to the West [Xiyou ji 西游記] and Creation of the Gods [Fengshen yanyi 封神演義]. But in each scene the immortal maiden appears in full armor, and this is something which is not found in other plays.
It will be clear from the summary presented here that the story of Fourth Sister Zhang Creating Havoc in the Eastern Capital in its modern shape must have appeared very late, at a stage when the legends of Judge Bao, the Generals of the Yang family, and many others had already been fully developed. But the origin of the tale can be traced a long way back. The editorial notes following this entry in the Quhai zongmu tiyao draw attention to the Tang-dynasty tale “Guo Han (郭翰)” in which the student of that name receives nightly visits from the Weaving Maiden (who is often identified as the eldest of the seven celestial sisters). The same notes also mention the tale of Wei Andao 韋安道, whose lover Lady Earth (Houtu furen 后土夫人) defeats all gods and demons dispatched against her. The most direct source for the story of Fourth Sister Zhang, however, is probably the Tang dynasty tale “Student Cui” (Cui shusheng 崔書生) from Niu Sengru’s 牛僧孺 (780-848) Xuanguai lu 玄怪錄 (Record of Dark and Strange Things). In this story Student Cui draws the attention of a beautiful maiden because of the flowers he grows and makes her his wife. But his mother grows suspicious because of her extraordinary beauty, whereupon she decides to leave. The present she gives him at her departure, however, makes his fortune as he is able to sell it for millions to a foreign monk who also informs him that his wife was none other than the third daughter of the Queen-Mother of the West. In the modern versions of the legend of Fourth Sister Zhang the immortal maiden also makes her husband a very wealthy man, but already during their married life. One of the magical objects she brings with her from heaven in many versions of the legend is a “tree” that produces cash when shaken (yaoqian shu 搖錢樹). Some of these versions are named after this object.

Tang students need little encouragement to sleep with the immortal maidens who offer themselves to them, but we also find examples of more reluctant lovers. In later centuries we encounter the motif of the amorous maiden who has to use all her magical powers in order to overcome the resistance of the young man she has set her mind on. If her actions are caused by lust and result in the birth of a baby, she will later be

5 Yamamoto, “Araburu senjo,” pp. 29-36, discusses at length the image of the fallible Judge Bao that is encountered in this tale.
7 Li Fang, ed., Taiping guangji, juan 299, pp. 2375-79. The Taiping guangji lists the Yiwen lu 異聞錄 (A Record of Strange Things Heard) as its source.
8 Taiping guangji, juan 63, pp. 392-394. See also Niu Sengru 牛僧孺 and Li Fuyan 李復言, Xuanguai lu 玄怪錄, 續玄怪錄 (Record of Dark and Strange Things and A Continuation of Record of Dark and Strange Things), Jiang Yun 姜雲 and Song Ping 宋平, annot. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1985), pp. 43-46.
9 On the “real” yaoqian shu and the role of such items in popular literature, see Jiang Yuxiang 江玉祥, “Guanyu kaogu chutu de ‘yaoqian shu’ yanjiu zhong de jige wenti” 關於考古出土的‘搖錢樹’研究中的幾個問題 (Several Questions Concerning the Study of Archaeologically-Discovered “Shake-Out Money Trees”), Sichuan wenwu 四川文物 (Sichuan Cultural Objects) 2000.4: 10-13.
imprisoned and it will be up to her son to eventually liberate her.\(^10\) If the immortal maiden is attracted to the young man not because of his handsome features but because of his high moral standards, preferably his great filial piety, she will be able to escape being jailed in the prisons of earth, but she still will meet with stiff opposition. Instead of battles that result in her capture and her son’s battles to free her, we now have battles waged by our heroine to save her husband. In her loyalty to her filial husband the wife defeats all mortal and celestial opponents and eventually is able to take her husband and his mother with her to heaven where they will all enjoy eternal bliss.\(^11\) The immortal maiden is only completely free of blame if she has been ordered to descend to the mortal world, as in the legend of Dong Yong 董永.\(^12\)

The version of the story of Fourth Sister Zhang Creating Havoc in the Eastern Capital translated here is a precious scroll (baojuan 寶卷)\(^13\) from Western Gansu. In the 1980s it became clear that local traditions of precious scroll recitation in many of the remote areas of Western Gansu had survived the Cultural Revolution rather well.\(^14\) Few of the scholars who have since published on the subject have failed to mention the popularity of the story of Fourth Sister Zhang, which circulated in a number of versions.

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\(^11\) Yamamoto, “Araburu senjo,” p. 26, notes that in some genres of regional opera Fourth Sister Zhang is eventually imprisoned by Yang Erlang 楊二郎, and interprets this as a sign of the influence of the legend of Chenxiang.

\(^12\) For the legend of Dong Yong see Wilt L. Idema, Filial Piety and Its Divine Reward and the Chinese scholarship listed in the bibliography.

\(^13\) Precious scrolls can be traced back at least to the Yuan dynasty. The earliest precious scrolls are Buddhist prosimetric narratives and ritual texts. From the Ming dynasty onward the term was also used in reference to sectarian scriptures. From the eighteenth century onward the genre broadened its subject matter and could include almost any traditional story but continued to have religious functions nonetheless. See Daniel L. Overmyer, Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999. See also Wilt L. Idema, “Prosimetric and Verse Narrative,” in Kang-i Sun Chang and Stephen Owen, eds., The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature, 2 Vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2: 350-54 and 399-401. For an introduction to English-language scholarship on baojuan, see my research note on this topic in this volume.

\(^14\) For a concise summary of Chinese scholarship in this field, see Xun Fang 馮郇, “Hexi baojuan yanju huigu”河西寶卷研究回顧 (A Retrospective Look at the Scholarship on Hexi Precious Scrolls), Dang’an (Archives) 2010.1: 35-37. For a list of published and as yet unpublished precious scrolls from Western Gansu, see Wang Wenren 王文仁, “Hexi baojuan zongmu diaocha”河西寶卷緯目調查 (A Survey and Bibliography of Hexi Precious Scrolls), Minsu wenhua 民俗文化 (Folk Culture) 2010.12: 38-40. One of the earliest Western-language publications to draw attention to the precious scrolls of Western Gansu was Victor H. Mair, Painting and Performance: Chinese Picture Recitation and Its Indian Genesis (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1988), pp. 9-13. See also Wei Chiao, “Folk Literature and Popular Beliefs in the Ho-hsi Corridor (Kansu Province),” in Minjian xinyang yu Zhongguo wenhua guoji yantao hui luwen ji民間信仰與中國文化國際研討會論文集 (Collected Essays from the International Conference on Folk Belief and Chinese Culture; Taipei: Hanxue yanjiu zhongxin, 1994), pp. 181-200.
Fourth Sister Zhang is greatly praised for her daring in leaving heaven, her fidelity to her husband, and her brazen defiance of all earthly and heavenly authorities.\(^{15}\) This translation is based on the text included in one of the earliest monographs on this material, Fang Buhe 方步和, ed., *Hexi baojuan zhenben jiaozhu yanjiu* 河西寶卷真本校註研究 (Studies and Collation and Annotation of Authentic Copies of Hexi Precious Scrolls) of 1992.\(^{16}\) The text is described as having been “collected” (*souji* 搜集) by a Feng Qiang 馮強 from a copy (or copies) made (*tengchao* 擦抄) by a Wang Bin 王斌, Cai Zhengxue 蔡正學, and Xu Zhude 徐祝德 of the village of Zhangyibao 張義堡 in Wuwei 武威.\(^{17}\) A different text is included in *Jiuquan baojuan (shangbian)* 酒泉寶卷 (上編) (Jiuquan Precious Scrolls [First Collection]).\(^{18}\) This latter text is based on a manuscript made in 1943 by the local peasant Tian Shanghai 田上海 in Dongdong 東洞 Village in Jiuquan. The story line in both texts is roughly the same, but whereas the second text primarily relies on seven-syllable lines in its verse sections, the text translated here mostly employs ten-syllable lines and would appear to be somewhat less literary in character. In the main body of the narrative the sections in ten-syllable verse are followed by a short passage in prose, which in turn is concluded by a couplet or quatrain.\(^{19}\)

As noted above, in the Tang dynasty classical story “Student Cui,” it was Third Sister who became the lover of Cui Wenrui. There also exists a Gansu precious scroll in which Third Sister is the protagonist rather than Fourth Sister.\(^{20}\) But in that version Third Sister’s longing for the mortal world is inspired by Fourth Sister’s adventures. She goes to Guanzhou 貴州, where she marries Yan Tianyou 閻天佑. When her husband is

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\(^{16}\) Lanzhou: Lanzhou daxue, 1992, pp. 127-164. This same text is also included in He Denghuan 何登煥 ed., *Yongchang baojuan* 永昌寶卷 (Yongchang Precious Scrolls); Yongchang: Yongchangxian wenhua ju, 2003, pp. 77-96; Xu Yongcheng 徐永成, ed., *Jin Zhangye minjian baojuan* 金張掖民間寶卷 (Golden Zhangye Popular Precious Scrolls); Lanzhou: Gansu wenhua, 2007, pp. 41-59; and Zhang Xu 張旭, ed., *Shandan baojuan* 山丹寶卷 (Shandan Precious Scrolls); Lanzhou: Gansu wenhua, 2007, pp. 274-90.

\(^{17}\) See the parenthetical note at the end of the text in *Hexi baojuan zhenben jiaozhu yanjiu*, pp. 159-60.

\(^{19}\) Lanzhou: Gansu renmin, 1991, pp. 307-35. A revised version of this collection was included as the first volume in a more extensive set of three volumes, also called *Jiujuan baojuan* and published in 2001 by the Cultural Bureau (Wenhua guan 文化館) of the City of Jiuquan.

\(^{19}\) Yamamoto, “Araburu senjo,” p. 24, lists ten different titles used for *baojuan* versions of the Fourth Sister Zhang story. Besides the Jiuquan version mentioned above, two other *baojuan* versions of the Fourth Sister Zhang story using seven-syllable verse have been reproduced. A manuscript titled *Nao Dongjing* 諾東京 (Creating Havoc in the Eastern Capital) copied by a “Guanqun” 冠群 in a *dingsi* 丁巳 year (1857? 1917?) is photographically reproduced in *Baojuan chuji* 寶卷初集 (First Collection of Precious Scrolls), 40 vols. (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin, 1994), 35: 379-470 and in *Minjian baojuan* 民間寶卷 (Popular Precious Scrolls), 20 vols. (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2005), 20: 301-24, and a manuscript titled *Tianxian baojuan* 天仙寶卷 (Precious Scroll of the Heavenly Immortal) copied by Xu Jinzhai 許錦齋 in 1905 is photographically reproduced in the same volume, pp. 325-50 (divided in two *juan*, see the cover of the second *juan*, p. 337, for the date).

arrested, she not only defeats all government troops sent against her, but also all heavenly deities, including Sun Wukong. In the end she returns to heaven with her husband.
Precious Scroll of Fourth Sister Zhang Creating Havoc in the Eastern Capital

Now this precious scroll of Fourth Sister has been opened,  
May Her Majesty the Queen-Mother descend from heaven!  
May divine beings such as gods and dragons, filled with joy,  
Protect the common people, safeguard them from disaster!  
May you, good men and pious women seated on both sides,  
Prick up your ears to listen and remember this in your heart!  

May each of you act in accordance with this precious scroll;  
Practice many good deeds and be free from evil in your heart:  
If you practice good deeds, you will be loved by all people;  
If you commit evil deeds, your body will be burned to cinders.  
So I have made this scroll that may bring a smile to your face,  
And leave it behind in this world for people’s entertainment.

Now tell that this precious scroll took place during the reign of the Humane Emperor of the Song dynasty. In those days the winds and rains were moderate and timely, the state was prosperous and the people were settled. In the city of Bianliang, the Eastern Capital, there lived a student named Cui Wenrui. His father Squire Cui had been powerful and rich—his mules and horses formed herds, and he had plenty of gold and silver. But after his father passed away, the family had unfortunately been struck by lightning and their house and treasures had all been turned to ashes. Mother and son now had to rely on begging in order to survive, and at night they stayed in an old temple. Once the friends who had been so close to them in earlier days saw that Wenrui had been reduced to these circumstances, they promptly kept their distance.

(Ten-syllable tune)\(^{21}\)  
Cui Wenrui  
Was originally  
A golden lad\(^{22}\) who had come down to earth;  
When he had descended to this world,  
He had become a student  
Who made a living by selling his writing.  
His mother had been  
A daughter of the Wang family,  
But now she was old and bereft of energy;

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\(^{21}\) Each of these lines has ten characters and scan into phrases of three, three, and four characters. To show this structure, they have been translated so that each line has three phrases.  
\(^{22}\) Golden lads (\(\text{jintong} \) 金童), together with jade girls (\(\text{yunü} \) 玉女) were attendants in heaven. There are many tales in which they are incarnated and fall in love with each other in the mortal world.
Her eyes were hazy,
   Her ears were deaf,
         And she lacked the strength to move about.
So Cui Wenrui
   Would each day
         Beg for food going from street to street;
When he had begged a bowlful,
   He would save the larger half
         To offer up to his mother for her support.
Each and every day
   He didn’t even get
         Half a bowl of rice or half a bowl of noodles;
Mother and son,
   Bereft of food and clothes,
         Found it hard to bear such hunger and cold!

Now tell that Wenrui supported his mother by his begging and suffered greatly in this way—but no more of this. Instead tell that the fourth daughter of His Majesty the Jade Emperor, who was called Fourth Sister Zhang, one day, when she was sitting in the Palace of Dipper and Buffalo, suddenly noticed a burst of evil ether rising up to heaven. When she computed its causes on her fingers, she realized that a golden lad was in trouble, serving out his punishment in the mortal world. Unconsciously her feelings were moved: “Why don’t I borrow the “ocean-fixing” treasures²³ of the Third Prince of the Dragon King of the Eastern Ocean? On the one hand, I can save that golden lad. On the other hand, I can become man and wife with him!” When she had reached this conclusion, she promptly descended to the mortal world and arrived in the Eastern Capital. Indeed:

Holding her hairpin of gold she displayed her magical powers:
   The jade maiden wanted to become the wife of that golden lad.

Fourth Sister Zhang
   Saw in the mortal realm
   An ether of suffering that did not disperse,
So she borrowed treasures
   And without any thought for herself
         Descended from the heavenly palaces.
In the blink of an eye
   She had quickly passed through
         The three gates that guard heaven’s entrance,
And within an hour
   She had arrived
         In the Eastern Capital Bianliang.
Upon her arrival
   She promptly met

²³ Zhenhai bao 鎮海寶. The enormously heavy staff that Sun Wukong gets from the Dragon King is also referred to as such a treasure.
Face to face with that student Cui Wenrui,
And softly said:
“Dear Mr. Cui
What makes you so worried and sad?”

Cui Wenrui
Then walked up to her
And turning the question around he said:
“I am a man
And you are a woman—
What is your reason for asking this question?”

Fourth Sister Zhang
Then began to speak
And again said “Dear Mr. Cui,
Where do you live?
Where are you from?
Tell me your background in detail!
What is your surname?
What is your own name?
Please tell it clearly to me.
What kind of event
Did you encounter
That you now make a living by begging?”

When Cui Wenrui
Had heard these words
He said to her: “Young lady,
I will for you
In great detail
Completely recount the facts.

Our home was here
In the Eastern Capital
In a little lane named after our family.

My father was
Squire Cui
A man advanced in years and bent by age;

My mother is
A daughter of the Wangs
A woman of wisdom and virtue.

Above me no elder brothers
Below me no younger brothers
I am the only child that was born to them.

Remembering back then
When my father was still alive
Our family was powerful and wealthy,

But upon his death
The house was struck by lightning:
Everything was completely burned to ashes!
This left us
My mother and me
At a loss how to survive from day to day,
So I go out onto the streets
Begging for food to eat
To take care of my mother.”
When Fourth Sister Zhang
Had heard these words
Tears gushed from her eyes like rain,
And she cried out:
“Old man heaven
How can you so torture my darling!”

Now tell that Fourth Sister upon hearing this was awash in tears. She then asked Wenrui: “Do you have a wife?” Wenrui replied: “We are so poor! How could I be able to take a wife? And besides, who would be willing to live with me?” Fourth Sister said: “There is something I want to tell you. Whether or not it works out, please don’t be upset. Since you do not have a wife, if you do not despise my big feet and ugly face, I would be happy to become your wife. What, sir, do you think of that proposal?” Upon hearing this Wenrui promptly replied: “Young lady, I don’t have a single furrow of land and not a single room to live in. My mother and I survive by begging, so how could I support a wife? This is absolutely impossible. Young lady, please leave me alone.” Fourth daughter addressed him, smiling coldly, in the following words: “I treated you with completely pure intentions, but look how lacking in feeling is your response. In truth,

My sincere heart I placed in the bright moon,
But who knew the moon would end up in a ditch.

If you really are going to reject me, I will make it so that you will not be able to separate heaven from earth and will be unable to distinguish east from west, or north from south!”

As she was speaking, all you could see was Fourth Sister move one finger, and Cui Wenrui immediately lost all consciousness.

Cui was unconscious for a while, and when he came to Fourth Sister Zhang had disappeared. Groping his way he then left the city to find his mother. But for no reason that he knew of, his whole body was racked by pain and his four limbs were bereft of strength, and he found it very difficult to go any further. Seeing an abandoned kiln in front of him he crawled inside to get some rest. But suddenly he remembered that his mother had not had any rice to eat the entire day and that he had no idea how she was doing, so involuntarily tears fell from his eyes. How heart-rending! Indeed:

Fourth Sister Zhang had put a spell on Cui Wenrui:
His body was so racked by pain—he found no peace.

Fourth Sister Zhang
Was in origin
A girl from the heavenly palace,
And she scared
   Cui Wenrui so much
       That he had no idea of east or west.
His whole body was hurting
   He lacked all strength
       And found it impossible to move;
At a loss what to do
   He could only
       Lie down in a dilapidated kiln.
His old mother
   In the old temple
       Waited throughout the day:
From early morning
   Till the setting sun
       She did not see him come back.
So hungry that
   She lacked all strength
       Her eyes were hazy and her ears were deaf!
Who could have known
   That Fourth Sister Zhang
       Had put a spell on her darling son?
Cui Wenrui
   Had clearly said
       He was off to beg food for his mother;
Who could have known
   That in the midst of calm
       Threatening waves would swell up?
In such cold that
   Old mother of his—
       How could she possibly sleep!
When he thought about this
   He who was her son
       Felt extremely disconsolate indeed!
“If I had known
   That she was not
       A girl from the mortal world,
I would not have
   Refused her offer
       When she proposed this marriage.
Now she deliberately
   Has arranged for me
       To suffer these trials and ordeals,
But could it be
   She’d want my mother
       To really die of starvation?”
Mother longed for son
Son longed for mother
Their innards were torn by weeping,
They had no choice
That very night
But to cry through all five watches.²⁴

(Five Watches Tune)
In the first watch, how pained at heart,
Wenrui all alone in a dilapidated kiln.
Mother in the west, son in the east,
The whole day without any resources.
Oh my Heaven!
How bitter and hard the five watches are today!

In the second watch, how alarmed at heart,
Rejecting the marriage made her so angry.
My head dizzy, my eyes hazy,
I fall and get up but cannot walk.
Oh my Heaven!
This hunger in my belly is impossible to bear!

In the third watch, how sour at heart,
Forced to find shelter in a dilapidated kiln.
Weeping I fall to the ground but the tears don’t stop,
I can only wait for dawn to leave this dilapidated kiln.
Oh my Heaven!
I entrust my life and my fate to Heaven!

In the fourth watch, how broken at heart,
Suddenly in a dream I am back home again.
My white-haired old mother is seated in the hall,
Seeing my old mother I lament the injustice of it all.
Oh my Heaven!
Lacking in clothes but also without food!

In the fifth watch, how pained in feeling,
Of each ten inches of gut nine inches are empty.
My eyes are hurting and my head feels so heavy,
When I struggle to my feet I cannot move a step.
Oh my Heaven!
Just thinking of this really breaks my heart!

Now tell that when Cui Wenrui was bitterly weeping in that dilapidated kiln, he
suddenly heard the crowing roosters, knew it was dawn, and left that kiln in a hurry to go

²⁴ In traditional China the night was divided in five watches of equal duration. Songs organized in five
stanzas according to the five watches of the night were popular all through China.
and see his old mother—but enough of that. Instead tell that Fourth Sister Zhang had been waiting for Wenrui outside the kiln, and when she now saw him come out in great haste, she promptly stepped forward and said: “Sir, I’ve made you suffer!” As soon as Wenrui saw her, how panicked he was, but Fourth Sister hastily addressed him again, saying: “If you accept my proposal, and you and I become a couple, I promise you that you will forever be free from disaster and enjoy every kind of luxury and status. You and I as husband and wife will take care of your mother so she will never again suffer deprivation.” Wenrui replied: “Since things have come to this pass, I can do little else. But my mother is still alive, so we have to go back home and discuss this matter with her.”

Once Fourth Sister heard this, her heart was secretly filled with joy, and together with Wenrui came to the old temple. After they had exchanged salutations, his mother asked him: “Whose family is this girl, and what is she doing here?” Wenrui told her what had happened to him after he had left her. His mother then asked Fourth Sister: “Where is your home and what is your name?” Indeed:

“When I tell you the situation of my family,
My heart’s feelings are tangled like hemp.”

“My mother gave birth to four daughters;
I am the youngest so I am number four.
In a year of famine we met with disaster;
Fleeing from famine we came to this place.
Today I had the good fortune of meeting your son;
The two of us ran into each other in the world of men.
It was a good karmic bond that brought us together,
So today I can become the wife of this young student.”

Hearing these words his mother was filled with joy:
“How truly smart and intelligent a person!
As my son’s mother I happily agree to this marriage,
But alas, our family suffers poverty and deprivation.”

Hearing these words Fourth Sister was filled with joy;
With a restrained smile on her face she disclosed the truth:
“Dear mother, once I am your daughter-in-law,
You’ll never have to depend on others for clothes or food!”

From the bosom of her robe she took out four treasures
And handed them to her mother-in-law to seal the match.
The bed-curtains and the golden hooks were all new;
Incense and wax candles were also bought.
And because this day was a propitious day,
They were married then and there in the old temple.
First the couple bowed to Heaven, and then to Earth;
Next they bowed to express their thanks to his mother.
Husband and wife wished each other a very long life,
They raised a cup of wine to celebrate the wedding.
Husband and wife shared the same couch together:
One night as husband and wife establishes a life-long bond!
Heaven granted the wishes of men and made them a couple:
Filled with joy and pleasure they passed the hours!²⁵

Now tell that these two consummated their marriage. At dawn the next day, they once again bowed to his mother, and she was filled with joy. Fourth Sister said: “This old temple is not a place to stay forever. What was the original dwelling of your family? Why not move back there again?” Wenrui replied: “Our family used to live in Eastern Lane, but unfortunately the house was struck by lightning two years ago, and not a single tile remains. All that is left is an empty field, so how could we move there?” When Fourth Sister heard that, she produced a treasure which she handed to her husband, saying: “This is a priceless treasure. It is called a “shake-out-money tree.” Shake out some silver and go buy timber and tiles and hire craftsmen to construct courtyards in front and high rooms in back so as to completely change the way you live.” Hearing this, he took the shake-out-money tree from her hands, and once he had shaken some silver from it, he went out to go and hire some craftsmen. Indeed:

Today Wenrui is going to renew his family’s fortunes,
So he goes out to hire the necessary craftsmen.

Now Cui Wenrui
Had silver in his hands
His heart was filled with joy,
And in great haste
He went out the gate
To hire all kinds of craftsmen.
In the eastern part of the city
He bought a number of
Serving women to serve inside;
In the western part of the city
He hired a number of
Craftsmen for every kind of job.
Within an hour
He had assembled
These craftsmen at his old house,
Where they broke the earth
Started the construction
Worked busily without a pause.
In the front compound
They raised a number
Of comfortable guest apartments;
In the rear compound
What they built were
Pavilions to look at the scenery.

²⁵ This section of verse is in seven-character lines. Indentation at the beginning of some of the lines is meant to give an idea of how the section as a whole includes subsections.
They erected
  A splendid gate
       That was really beautiful to look at—
On both its sides
  The black dragon screen walls
       Were executed with consummate craft.
Through left gate-door
  What had been contrived was
       Golden Roosters vying in crowing;
Through the right gate-door
  What had been contrived was
       Phoenix Birds descending to earth.
There were wolf-teeth roofs\(^{26}\)
  And also rising \(dou\)\(^{27}\)
       That provided an impressive sight;
White-washed walls
  And gold-coated boards
       Marked the borders on both sides.
Then he bought
  Fine fields and land
       Thousands of \(mu\), hundreds of \(qing\)\(^{28}\)
And he also bought
  Sheep and buffaloes, and
       His horses and mules formed herds.
Husband and wife
  Set to live together till old age
       Enjoyed their life while at home—
In the Eastern Capital
  There was no other
       Family that possessed such wealth!
As for these things
  Let's put them aside
       And instead take up another person,
Called Half-City Wang:
  He was the one
       Who would be the source of trouble.

Now tell that in the Eastern Capital there lived a squire by the name of Wang Qin. His wealth was great and his character coarse; his behavior was evil and improper. If people in the Eastern Capital heard his name, they would do their best to avoid him. People called him Half-City Wang. He had been a sworn brother of Cui Wenrui’s father, but when the Cui mansion had been burned by lightning so the family had been ruined and reduced to poverty, he had ignored their distress and cut off all contact with them. On

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\(^{26}\) Upturned roofs.
\(^{27}\) The ornamented brackets between a pillar and a crossbeam.
\(^{28}\) A \(mu\) 斗 is roughly one sixth of an acre; one hundred \(mu\) make one \(qing\) 顷.
the day of which we speak, he was idly walking through the streets with a boy-servant, and noticed a new mansion that was extremely impressive. So he asked his boy: “Whose mansion is this?” The boy replied: “This is the newly constructed mansion of that Cui Wenrui who is loaded with money.” “So it is the mansion of the Cui family,” Squire Wang said. “His father and I were friends, but he has been living in utter poverty for several years; how has he become rich again in the space of a year? Let me go over there and pay him a visit, so I can find out.” As he was saying this, he arrived at the gate of the Cui mansion, and he told the gatekeeper: “Hurry up and inform your master: Half-City Wang of this city would like to see him.” The gatekeeper went inside to report. Fourth Sister said: “Truly it is:

Even in a crowd there’s none who cares for a poor man,
But a wealthy family has relatives in distant places”!

But as he has come to pay you a visit and was a sworn brother of your father, you should go and receive him.” When Wenrui heard these words, he hastily went outside to welcome his visitor. Indeed:

Wenrui went outside his gate to welcome his guest,
But he had no idea what this guest had in mind.
When he was destitute, without even a grain of rice,
Never had anyone come to ask after him.

When Cui Wenrui
   Had heard those words
      He hurried forward in great haste;
Taking large steps
      He came out of the gate
         And promptly asked what was up.
Outside the gate
      He saw the squire
         And his heart was filled with great joy;
He scurried right up
      And asked the squire:
         “Have you been in good health?”
He stepped forward
      Grasped his hand
         And led him inside.
He invited him in
      Had a banquet spread
         And was exceedingly diligent.
While the two of them
      Were drinking their wine
         And discussing this and that,
Squire Wang
      Began to speak
Interrogating Wenrui as follows:

“Allow me to ask
   All this gold and silver
   Where did it all come from?
Could it be that
   On such and such a day
   You came by some unexpected wealth?
You have oxen and sheep
   And also horses and mules
   In such exceedingly large numbers,
If one compared them
   To all that is mine
   They would top them a hundred percent!”

Now tell that Squire Wang asked Cui Wenrui: “How many fields do you have, and how many mules and horses, oxen and sheep?” Wenrui replied: “I have an unlimited store of silver, a thousand qing of fertile fields, oxen and sheep beyond counting, and three hundred serving girls.” When Squire Wang heard this, he thought to himself: “People all say that I am Half-City Wang, but by the looks of it today Cui Wenrui has become the number one moneybags of them all.” Cui Wenrui also said: “We don’t only have fertile fields and gold and silver without number, but we also have some magical treasures that are not of this world.” The squire then asked: “How about bringing them here and letting me have a look at them so I can see whether they are the real thing or fakes?” Indeed:

   Face of a man but heart of a beast: that’s Squire Wang;
   With his devious schemes he creates all kinds of trouble.

Cui Wenrui
   Went to the main hall
   And grabbed those precious objects,
And explained to that
   Half-City Wang
   Their magical qualities in great detail:

“Our family
   Has in its possession
   A splendid double-doored gate;
This is an object
   That in this world
   Has no other like it.
One of these doors
   Opens to reveal
   Golden Roosters vying in crowing,
The other of these doors
   Happens to show
   Phoenix Birds descending to earth.
In the courtyard in the back
   Shake-out money trees
       Are neatly arranged into two rows,
And the copper cash
   In that courtyard
       Surges up to the mansion’s back gate:
If for three days
   You neglect to
       Sweep them off the ground,
That shaken-out
   Copper cash
       Piles up more than three feet!
And then there is
   A treasure-collecting bowl
       That gives off a clear and bright light—
Found only in heaven
   But not on earth
       Yet our family has one of them.
If you throw
   A few copper coins
       Into that treasure collecting bowl,
By the third day
   Copper coins
       Will fill the bowl to overflowing!

Now tell that Half-City Wang said as soon as he heard this: “What is the point of keeping such treasures at home? Why don’t you present them to the current Son of Heaven, so he will appoint you to an official post—wouldn’t that be better?”
   Wenrui said: “I also have seven wine cups of glass, and on them there are twenty-four beautiful maidens who hold a musical instrument in their hands and who sing and dance just like human beings.” As soon as the squire heard this, he said: “Hurry up and fetch those out and let me have a look.” Indeed:

   It happened that these treasures did not know the stranger:
       Once taken out to the front courtyard they enticed disaster.

Cui Wenrui
   Seated in the high hall
       Ordered one of the serving girls,
   “Go and fetch the wine cups
       In order for the squire
           To be offered up cups of wine.”
This serving girl
   In a great hurry came
To the upstairs embroidery room,29
Took the master’s words
And reported them to
Fourth Sister for her to hear.

When Fourth Sister Zhang
Had heard these words,
She was upset and angry in her heart,
Saying, “As for those
Treasures of mine
They are by no means ordinary!
They are certainly not
Your run of the mill
Utensils of the mortal realm,
It took quite some effort
To borrow these things
From the depths of the Eastern Ocean!

I did it because
I wanted to save
My husband from disaster and misery,
So how can he
Take Heaven’s secrets
And disclose them to mere mortals?
To take them out
And show them once or twice
Is of course not such a major matter
But I am afraid
That Half-City Wang
Will conceive all kinds of evil designs.
But if I were to
Not let him take those
Wine cups made out of glass,
I would then be afraid
Of provoking anger in
My darling dear husband.”
She thought it over this way
She thought it over that way
But was unable to make up her mind.
With a hundred instructions
With a thousand biddings
She let her take them to the front hall:

“Plum Fragrance”30
Take these cups
And make sure to be extra careful!

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29 Even women of elite families who could afford to pay for embroidery were expected to do embroidery in their private quarters.
30 Plum Fragrance (Meixiang 梅香) is the generic name of a serving girl.
And when he leaves the house,  
To send off that Wang Qin  
Observe everything carefully!”

Squire Wang  
With great care  
Inspected them completely.

“Truly these are  
Wonderful treasures  
Hard to find in all the world!”

Now tell that Cui Wenrui saw Wang Qin holding these glass wine cups in his hands, so in love with them that he could not let them leave his hands, so they used the glass cups to drink wine. When they drank, they saw the beauties on the cups start to sing and dance just like living people. This pleased Wang Qin so much that he did not know what he was doing and collapsed in laughter on the ground. He said: “Treasures of this kind could only belong to the immortals, so where did you get them from?” Wenrui replied: “Old Squire, I would not dare hide it from you. I married a woman named Fourth Sister Zhang, and she brought these treasures with her.” Wang Qin then said: “If you have such a fine wife, why don’t you ask her to come to the hall in front so I can pay her my respects.” Indeed:

Wenrui invited his wife to greet the squire,  
Not knowing it would be the cause of disaster.

Cui Wenrui,  
Upon hearing  
These words of Squire Wang Qin,  
Said to Plum Fragrance  
“Go fetch your mistress  
I have something to tell her.”

That Plum Fragrance  
With great haste  
Arrived at the inner quarters,  
And said: “My lady  
Master asks you  
To come and greet Squire Wang.”

When Fourth Sister Zhang  
Had heard these words  
She was upset and angry in her heart,  
But if she didn’t go  
That would anger her husband  
Something she hated to do.

Obedient to her husband  
The immortal maiden from heaven  
Left her room to greet a mortal man,  
And as she walked
She looked exactly
   Like Guanyin of the Southern Sea.31
As she moved
   She floated along—
   A heavenly picture transported by clouds,
Walking along
   She then arrived
   Before the gate of the reception hall.
Fourth Sister Zhang
   Stepping forward
   Made salutation with lowered head,
Salutations finished
   Right there did she
   Sit down to one side.
Squire Wang
   Lifted his head
   And observed her in great detail:
She was indeed
   Of great beauty
   Just like a female immortal!
How greatly she resembled
   That goddess Chang’ė
       Descending from the moon palace;32
Looking more carefully,
   She also resembled
       Xi Shi arriving at the gate!33
When that Wang Qin
   Saw Fourth Sister
   His heart and mind were disturbed:
It seemed as if he
   Was borne by the wind
       Up to the Western Heavens!
Fourth Sister Zhang
   Lowered her head
       And stealthily inspected him.
Looking at Wan Qin
   She saw from his face
       That he greatly lacked propriety:

31 The Bodhisattva Guanyin 觀音 was widely venerated in female form and in this manifestation was believed to be the perfection of female beauty. One of the main centers of her cult was Mt. Putuo, a small island off the Zhejiang coast.
32 Chang’ė 嫦娥 is the beautiful goddess of the moon.
33 Xi Shi 西施 was the most beautiful maiden in the Spring and Autumn period state of Yue. The king of Yue presented her to his rival the king of Wu, hoping that the latter would become so besotted with her that he would neglect the affairs of state. When this indeed happened, the king of Yue destroyed the state of Wu.
Hiding a roguish heart
Darting thievish eyes
He concealed a heart bent on disaster.

Fourth Sister Zhang
Having seen enough
Returned to her embroidery room.

Squire Wang
Heart harboring evil
Also went back to his own home,

Not thinking of tea
Not caring for food
In his mind he thought to himself:

“I have wives
Three or four of them
But not a one approaches her!

If Heaven vouchsafed
That that woman
Would fall into my hands,

A full bushel
Of first-rate incense
I’d burn to thank the gods!”

Thinking in his heart
Of Fourth Sister Zhang
And her startling beauty,
He conceived of a scheme
And selected with care
Some trustworthy servants.

He told the boys
“Listen to my words
I have instructions for you.

Today I have
An important matter
That I am going to explain to you.

That Cui Wenrui
Has many treasures
And also is loaded with money.
In each of these aspects
He surpasses all others
And is Number One in the Eastern Capital!

Wine cups of glass
Shake-out money trees
Who on earth ever saw such things?

Then he has
Fourth Sister Zhang
Who surpasses a heavenly maiden.

If it is the case
That Fourth Sister Zhang
Can be brought into my house,
I promise that you will
Enjoy glory and riches
Wealth and status for the rest of your life!”

Now tell that Wang Qin upon returning home summoned his trusted servants and said to them: “Cui Wenrui not only has an enormous amount of gold and silver, but he also has that Fourth Sister Zhang, whose beauty surpasses the heavenly immortals. I’ve come up with a scheme. Tomorrow I will write a little note and you will go and invite Cui Wenrui, and then we’ll ply him with drink till he’s drunk. You will open the back gate and take gold and silver, jewelry, and pearls and precious stones, and scatter them all along the road to his house. Then we will say that I invited him for a drink out of friendliness, but that he, however, stole these precious goods from my house. We will have him arrested and taken to the office of District Magistrate Zhang. I will also take some silver with me to buy the cooperation of His Excellency, who will have him beaten till he confesses and will condemn him for robbery and theft, and throw him into jail. After that I will marry his wife as my own. How could this not succeed! This is my plan, and on no account can you reveal the truth!” Indeed:

Wang Qin devised a scheme to harm a fellow human being,
But by harming someone else he eventually harmed himself.

Squire Wang
Wrote a note of invitation
He had devised a devious scheme:
Each and every character
Each and every line
Concealed a deeply hidden intention.
Above he wrote:
“To Mr. Cui
I wish you health and comfort.”
Below he wrote:
“Half-City Wang
Greets you with all due humility.
A few days ago
I bothered you
Without end,
Today I’d like
To invite you
To offer you some wine in return.”
When his boy servant
Had arrived at that
Gate of the Cui mansion,
He took the note
And handed it to
When Cui Wenrui saw this note, his heart was filled with joy.

When Fourth Sister heard about it, her heart was filled with worry.

She stepped forward and exhorted her husband, “Don’t go to that place.

From my observation, this Squire Wang is not a good person at all.

I think that he is purposefully plotting to harm his fellow man,

I am afraid that he covets our wealth and secretly plans to harm me.”

When Cui Wenrui heard what she said, he completely disbelieved it, so Fourth Sister Zhang hastily took out some coins and used them to divine the future.

The very first combination of coins allowed for no doubt or misunderstanding,

Spelling out: “The husband will be able to go but will have no way to return.”

And then the second combination of coins as soon as they fell on the floor,

Spelled out: “The husband can go on this day, but will meet with disaster.”

But Cui Wenrui covering his ears refused to listen to his wife’s words.

He turned around and all puffed-up went out through the gate of his house.

He ordered a servant to saddle his horse and promptly set out on his way.
Squire Wang
    Came out of his gate
    And welcomed him with great honor.
He brought him inside
    And laid out a banquet
    Making a show of all due respect.
The squire said:
    “My dear Mr. Cui
        A cup of wine will aid our merriment.
Although lacking fine wine
    And lacking good dishes
        Please don’t think it beneath you—
Please don’t refuse
    Please don’t put me off
        But instead enjoy a few cups of wine!”
Here a cup
    There a cup
        Cup after cup he urged him on;
Offering up one toast
    And then yet another
        Toast after toast he offered.
When Cui Wenrui
    Had drunk until
        He was drunk as drunk could be,
Squire Wang
    Ordered his servants
        To tie him up as tight as could be.
He loudly cursed him:
    “You Cui Wenrui!
        You have stolen my gold and silver!”
He cursed Wenru
    In such a way that he
        Although having a mouth could not utter a word.
“I invited you
    To come and have some wine
        Out of the pure goodness of my heart:
Who would have thought
    That you on the contrary
        Would steal my gold and silver?”
Within a short time
    They had taken Wenrui
        And forcibly shackled him tight,
And packed him off
    To the magistrate’s office
        So that the case could be tried.
Now tell that once Wang Qin had arrested Wenrui, he took him to District Magistrate Zhang Du, and there lodged an accusation against him. Once Zhang Du had read this statement, he promptly took his seat as judge, and the various court attendants brought out Cui Wenrui. His Excellency the District Magistrate asked him: “That Squire Wang invited you to drink some wine out of friendliness, but harboring evil intentions you stole his silver, and you also kidnapped his wife! Confess to your crimes according to the truth!” When Wenrui heard this, he kowtowed and said: “I have no idea how to rob people, and on top of that I am extremely wealthy, so why would I rob him? He claims that I kidnapped his wife, but Fourth Sister has been my wife for three years, so why has he waited until today to lodge an accusation? It is obvious that he hopes to obtain my possessions by harming me, and that he hopes to use force in order to make my wife his own. May Your Excellency examine this clearly!”

District Magistrate Zhang sent away Cui Wenrui and then asked Wang Qin: “The two of you are both loaded with money, so why would he want to steal your gold and silver? This must obviously be a false accusation!” When Wang Qin noticed that the case was not going his way, he hastily produced three hundred ounces of first-rate silver, which he presented to District Magistrate Zhang. When the latter saw that amount of money, his desire was aroused, and he told the court attendants to bring Wenrui back into court for further interrogation and further questioning. Indeed:

Pure white silver can buy people whose hearts are black,
So that during interrogation blatant lies become the truth.

Magistrate Zhang
As he held court
Manifested a towering anger and rage,
And ordered his underlings:
    “Hurry up and have
That criminal brought before the bench!”
Then he shouted: “Wenrui
Confess to every item
In accordance with the facts of the case,
And you’ll be spared
On this very day
Being beaten till the blood flows!”

When Cui Wenrui
Heard these words
He was filled with fear and trepidation,
And he cried out:
    “Your Excellency
Please listen carefully to my explanation!
Your Excellency
I would not dare
Blindly confess to this accusation.
Only after receiving an invitation
Did I go down to
Pay a visit to his house,
Right in the midst
   Of drinking some wine
      His servants started to holler and scream;
They took hold of me
   And against all reason claimed
      That I had stolen his gold and silver.”
When Magistrate Zhang
   Had heard this statement
      His heart was filled with a towering rage,
He shouted an order:
   “Now throw him down
      And apply the five instruments of torture.”
No sooner had they started
   When they had already administered
      Fifty strokes of the broad board,
And then they gave him
   Forty strokes of the cudgel
      Till his skin was broken and his flesh was torn.
That Cui Wenrui
   Suffered these tortures
      But was completely unwilling to confess,
So His Excellency said:
   “Into his body
      Nail some iron nails!”
The various yamen attendants
   Hearing this order
      Did not dare to tarry or delay,
So they picked up
   Some iron nails
      And in the courtyard hammered them in.
Then they threw Wenrui
   Down on the ground
      And doused his body with boiling water,
From the eastern side
   To the western side
      Without showing any compassion at all.
The skin and flesh
   On his whole body
      Was completely scalded and softened,
So that he closely resembled
   A fish that had been stripped
      Of all layers of its scales and skin.
The attendants were ordered
   To go and bring out
      Iron chains heated red-hot,
And wrap them around him
    In order to see
          Whether he would confess or not.
Cui Wenrui
    In a flash
          Could not bear the torture anymore,
And against his will
    Saying whatever came into his head
          Confessed in conformity with the accusation:
“This Squire Wang,
          It was his gold and silver
                That I went and stole.
I crawled over his wall
    And dug under his gate
          In order to steal his gold and silver.
I took his wife,
    I stole his riches
          Transgressing the royal law of the land—
The words above
    Are a true statement indeed
          I wouldn’t dare hide anything.”
Magistrate Zhang
    Seeing that he had confessed
          Had him sign the confession and affix a thumbprint,
He had him shackled
    And then escorted to
          That dark and dreary jail!
When the district magistrate
    Had been informed of this
          He did not dare waste a moment;
When Squire Wang
    Had received this news
          A happy smile covered his face,
And leading a bunch
    Of uniformed troops
          He set out to welcome the bride.
One of the pages
    Informed Fourth Sister
          As fast as he could of this news.
The troops told her:
          “Your husband
                While drinking wine at the Wangs,
Stole away from
    Squire Wang
          Quite a lot of gold and silver.
Magistrate Zhang
Has condemned him to death
And has him locked up in the jail,
And His Excellency
Has in his verdict
Awarded you to Squire Wang.
It has been given to us
To carry you over to
His mansion for the wedding,
When you enjoy luxury and glory
And experience wealth and status
Never forget our services to you!”

When Fourth Sister Zhang
Had heard these words
She was filled with a towering rage,
She cursed that dog of an official
And longing for her husband
Myriads of arrows pierced her heart.
She blamed her husband:
“At the time you
Did not listen to my advice,
Now you’ve been unjustly jailed
Suffered every kind of torture
Who is it that is to blame?”

The troops and cavalry
Urged Fourth Sister
To set out with all haste,
But Fourth Sister Zhang
Lowering her head
Came up with a scheme of her own.

Now tell that when Fourth Sister heard the soldiers say that her husband had been thrown in jail, her heart was filled with rage. While the troops were urging her to get going, she employed her supernatural powers and dispersed them in all directions. The troops informed the district magistrate. When Magistrate Zhang heard this, he was greatly astonished, and this time he dispatched three hundred troops to go and arrest Fourth Sister. The troops surged forward like a swarm of bees and all together came into action with a great show of power, but Fourth Sister recited her true spells and magical words, and when she pointed a finger to the sky, a raven-wood cudgel came rolling down and delivered such a beating to these troops that some lost their lives and some were wounded, leaving only a few to run away and report the news.

Fourth Sister Zhang
Displayed her supernatural powers
With their myriads of transformations,
And she killed
Of those troops
More than two hundred men,
With one blow of the cudgel
She gave them such a beating
They fled in all directions;
With one blow of her staff
She gave them such a beating
They were reduced to utter disorder.
Magistrate Zhang
Received such a beating
That he knew he was in a bad situation,
So he ordered his subordinates
To call up and mobilize
The whole army to join the campaign.
Five thousand men
Surrounded the Cui mansion
Layer after layer deep,
But Fourth Sister Zhang
At such a sight
Only smiled a cold smile.
She said “District Magistrate
Hurry up and call back your troops
And return my dear husband to me—
That will save
You and me
From having to take up arms and fight.
But if you will not
Call back your troops
And continue to besiege the Cui mansion,
When the time comes
I will force you to
Lose your life and go to the land of darkness.”
Magistrate Zhang
Called out to his underlings:
“Capture and arrest that demonic monster!
She has killed
Government troops
Her crime is not light!
Her husband
That thief
Has been thrown in jail,
How can there be
This sort of
Brazen demonic monster?”
When Fourth Sister Zhang
Had heard these words,
Her heart was filled with anger and rage,
Below her feet
    Auspicious clouds rose up
    And she stood in the middle of the sky.
Then she changed
    Into seven dragons
    Rising higher and higher in the clouds,
And threw one needle
    For embroidering flowers
    Up into the emptiness of the sky.
She called up a twister,
    Sent down heavy rains
    Thunder and lightning booming together!
The heavens turned black
    And the earth was darkened
    Scaring everyone out of their wits.
When she had captured
    Magistrate Zhang
    She wanted to immediately kill him,
But then she feared
    That the Jade Emperor
    Would punish her for that infraction.
So she took that scoundrel
    And strung him up by his hands
    On top of the tower above the city gate,
And gave him such a beating
    That from his whole body
    Blood came dripping down.
She also gave him
    So many strokes with a cudgel
    That his skin broke and his flesh was torn,
And Magistrate Zhang
    Under such heavy torture
    Sank into a stupor.
He cried out:
    “Young lady
    Please spare my worthless life!”
He also cried out:
    “Your ladyship
    If you let me live what life is left to me,
From this day forward
    I will never again dare
    Act in such an outrageous way!”
When she saw Zhang Du
    And how he implored her
    In such a miserable manner,
Fourth Sister Zhang
Upon hearing these words
   Lowered her head and pondered the matter:

In her heart
   Compassion arose
   And she ended up sparing his life.

Now tell that once Fourth Sister had released Zhang Du, she returned home and told Wenrui’s elderly mother: “You son is languishing in jail, but just put your mind at rest and stay home and watch over things. I am going to go save my husband, and when that’s done we can take further measures.” Having said that, she went through the gate and took off, and before too long had arrived at Zhang Du’s yamen. When Zhang Du saw Fourth Sister, he was so scared that his soul flew off beyond heaven, and he ran for his life! Indeed:

Fourth Sister had freed Zhang Du,
   And now Zhang Du ran for his life.

Fourth Sister Zhang
   Having arrived
      At the office of the district magistrate,
Promptly scared that
   Magistrate Zhang
      So that he hurriedly ran for his life!
Following her nose
   She found herself at
      The southern jail,
She saw inside
   That southern jail
      Quite a number of convicts.
Each and every one
   Suffered bitter pain
      Their hair unbound and hanging loose.
   “But I don’t see
      My own dear dear husband—
         Not a shadow of him to be found!”
Then when she opened
   The door of the eastern jail
      And took a look inside,
What she saw was
   A face and appearance
      That was black and dirty!
Only when Fourth Sister
   Had gone up to him
      And observed the face closely,
Did she recognize
   Her very own
Darling husband!
With both arms
She caught up in an embrace
That husband of hers,
And from her eyes
Tears gushed forth
And she let out a cry of woe.
She cried out:
“My dear husband
You suffered a terrible wrong,
But this was because
Of your own mistake
So whom can you blame?
Think back to that time
When I exhorted you
But you refused to listen!
But now that you
Have suffered all kinds of torture
How could I bear to not do anything?”
As she was speaking
She displayed her powers
And spat out some immortal water,
That took her husband’s
Iron shackles and cangue
And made them fall into the dust.
Cui Wenrui
Saw that Fourth Sister’s
Magic powers were very great,
In that prison
All the other convicts
Asked him to ask for her help!

Now tell that when Fourth Sister Zhang saved her husband in the prison, all the criminals saw it very clearly. They all knelt down on the floor and implored her: “Your ladyship, please also save us from this prison! We will never forget such a great favor!” When Fourth Sister heard these words, she recited her magic words and true spells, and promptly the iron shackles and cangues on those criminals fell to the floor. They hurried to express their gratitude to Fourth Sister, and then each went back to his home. Employing the true fire of samadhi Fourth Sister burned down the prison. Once they were back home, husband and wife discussed how to kill Wang Qin and his whole family. Indeed:

The golden lad and jade maiden met once again:
Where clouds part bright daylight can be seen!

Once Fourth Sister Zhang
Had saved her husband
They returned to their mansion;
They greeted his mother
And then discussed
How they could greatly take revenge.
As they were talking
They watched the sun
Sink down behind the western hills,
And they pondered
How they would the next day
Again confront their arch-enemy.
The two of them
Could not for one moment
Let go or part from each other,
But suddenly they heard
From the drum tower
The beating out of the watch. 34
At the first watch
They entered the embroidery room
Silver lamps gleamed on high;
At the second watch
Husband and wife
Were in perfect emotional union;
At the third watch
Underneath a red damask quilt
The two of them went to bed;
At the fourth watch
They were holding hands
Hard to part or divide.
At the fifth watch,
The Golden Rooster crowed
And the sky became very bright.
They hastily got up
And went to the Wang mansion
Where she greatly displayed her powers.
With one shake of her body
She was transformed
To a height of thirty-six zhang, 35
First she grabbed that
Harmer of men
That villain Wang Qin.
“You sought to ruin me
And also to harm
My darling husband,

34 The text actually says that the third watch was beaten, but that makes no sense.
35 One zhang 丈 equals ten Chinese feet (each foot was slightly shorter than an English foot).
I will cause you
This very day
To meet the king of the dead.
I will capture your
Entire household
And completely slaughter them all,
I will snatch you up
You villain Wang Qin
And mince your corpse into a myriad pieces!"
She tore open his belly
Gouged out his eyes
And chopped his whole body into mincemeat.
As for the furniture
And the utensils
She smashed them all to bits and pieces.
Fourth Sister Zhang
Greatly took revenge
But no more of that for now,
Instead let us speak
Of Magistrate Zhang
Who reported the case to Judge Bao:
“In the Eastern Capital
On Old North Street
There is a small lane;
In the mansion
Of Cui Wenrui
A demonic monster has appeared.
Its name is called
Fourth Sister Zhang
And she has great supernatural powers;
She and that
Cui Wenrui
Cohabit as husband and wife.
Squire Wang
Invited Wenrui
With the best of intentions indeed—
How could he know
That this Wenrui
Would steal his silver and gold?
Squire Wang
Brought that criminal Cui
Down to my yamen;
With due haste I
Accepted his complaint
And read it very carefully.
I ordered my troops
To go to his house
    To conduct a thorough investigation,
But she struck dead
    My soldiers,
    Two hundred men and more!
She also released
    From my prison
    Three hundred criminals,
With fire
    She further burned down
    That jailhouse of mine.
To get revenge
    She went to Wang’s house
    And wiped out the entire household,
I implore Your Honor
    To hurriedly apprehend
    That demonic monster!”

Now tell that Judge Bao, upon hearing this, thought to himself: “How is it possible that such a demonic monster manifests itself in the present world of peace and order? This Zhang Du is ordinarily not upright in the way he conducts official business. I have always wanted to remove him but I never had an opportunity. Now that he has come to report to me today, I won’t be able to stop worrying about him.” But let’s put Zhang Du aside for the moment—he will be dealt with properly later. Let’s only tell how Judge Bao ordered Wang Zhao and Ma Han to ready their horses and men. Taking his demonoscope with him, he set out with his party to go see. Indeed:

    Possessing demon-beheading sword and demon-revealing mirror,
    During the day he judges the living and at night he judges the dead.

That Judge Bao
    Having heard this report
    Pondered the matter in his mind;
He ordered Wang Zhao
    And also Ma Han
    To hurriedly go before.
They carried the bronze chopper
    And also the iron sword—
    How bright they gleamed!
They also took
    The demonoscope
    To capture that demonic monster
And the peach wood shackles

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36 *Zhao yao jing* 照妖鏡: a mirror that reveals the true shape and appearance of shape-shifting demons.
37 The Judge Bao of the Qing dynasty had three of these huge choppers (zha 鍘) that he used for executing different classes of people.
And willow wood cudgels  
    Feared by gods and ghosts alike.
Those carrying the sword  
    And those carrying the chopper  
    Followed closely behind.
The bronze “melons”\(^37\)  
    And crescent moon hatchets  
    Covered sky and earth,
While the gods of the hills  
    And the gods of the soil  
    Accompanied him with due diligence.
Within a short while  
    They had arrived  
    Outside the gate of the Cui mansion,
And Lord Bao called out:  
    “Quickly capture and arrest  
    That demonic monster Fourth Sister!”
This so scared that  
    Household of people  
    That their gall bladders\(^39\) shook and their hearts were frightened,
But Fourth Sister Zhang  
    On hearing this command  
    Only smiled a cold smile.
She went outside  
    And lifted her head  
    And took it all in:
On all four sides  
    They were surrounded so tightly  
    That not a drop of water could leak out!
Fourth Sister Zhang  
    Exhorted Judge Bao:  
    “Hurry up and pull back your troops,  
    Otherwise with eyes wide open  
    And quite intentionally  
    You will be offering yourself up to disaster!”
But when Judge Bao\(^40\)  
    Saw Fourth Sister  
    He called out: “You demonic monster,
I ordered my subordinates  
    To hurriedly apprehend you  
    So do not do anything foolish.”

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\(^{37}\) Heavy metal balls mounted on top of a short staff and used as weapons.
\(^{39}\) The gall bladder was considered the locus of courage in the body.
\(^{40}\) The text actually refers to him here by a title given him in popular literature, Wenzheng 文正 (“Cultured and Upright”).
Served as prime minister\textsuperscript{41}  
But failed to recognize her as an immortal,  
Because he believed  
The report of Zhang Du  
He wanted to take military action!  

Now tell that Judge Bao told his underlings to bring out the demonoscope. Fourth Sister said: “Star of Literature, if you can display my true nature in that demonoscope, I will truly be impressed by your abilities!” Judge Bao employed his demonoscope and shone it again and again on her, but he did not see any demonic shape at all! Indeed:

He shone the magic mirror again and again,  
But no demonic monster appeared therein.

When her left side  
Came before the mirror  
No form or reflection appeared;  
When her right side  
Came before the mirror  
No human shape could be seen either.

Chancellor Bao  
At this time  
Saw rage rise up in his heart,  
He ordered his underlings  
To advance together  
And apprehend that woman.

There was Wang Zhao  
And also Ma Han  
Who advanced and began to fight,  
But Fourth Sister Zhang  
Suppressing her anger  
And only played a little trick on them.

First she employed  
An eye-blinding magic  
So their eyes were blinded by flowers;  
Next she employed  
A body-fixing magic  
So their bodies were fully immobilized.

That Wang Zhao  
Could not lift  
His awe-inspiring running feet,  
And that Ma Han  
Could not display  
The martial arts of all his limbs.

\textsuperscript{41} In popular literature Judge Bao was thought to have been an incarnation of the Star of Literature (Wenqu xing 文曲星). In real life he never served as prime minister.
She took Judge Bao  
  And also blinded him  
    So that his eyes blurred and pupils went dark;  
She pulled him down from his horse  
  And he was fixed and immobilized  
    By the main gate of the front courtyard.  
This body-fixing magic  
  Had immobilized  
    The five hundred government troops,  
Scaring those  
  Various official troops  
    So that their gall bladders quaked and their hearts were frightened.  
One of those present  
  Hastily made a bow  
    For he had a quick mind and keen eyes,  
He said: “Milady,  
  As your powers are divine,  
    Please do us a favor!  
That actually is  
  The court-appointed  
    His Honor the Chancellor,  
If you kill him  
  You are bound to arouse  
    The towering rage of the imperial court!”  
Fourth Sister Zhang  
  Was not in the least afraid  
    Of either the imperial court or beyond,  
This so scared  
  Cui Wenrui,  
    That he hurriedly pled on Bao’s behalf.  
So Fourth Sister  
  Listened to her husband,  
    And released Judge Bao,  
But Judge Bao  
  Memorialized the Humane Ancestor  
    Informing him in great detail of the events.

Now tell that when Judge Bao had entered the palace and paid his respects to His Majesty the Humane Ancestor, he told how a demonic monster had appeared in the mansion of Cui Wenrui of the Eastern Capital: her name was Fourth Sister Zhang; she was sixteen years of age, possessed great supernatural powers, and was capable of many transformations. She had murdered all the members, old and young, of the household of Wang Qin, and had killed a complete detachment of men and horses under Magistrate Zhang. “When I went forward to capture and arrest her I returned greatly defeated. I was also unable to use my demonoscope to find out what kind of demonic monster she was. I
therefore request Your Majesty to dispatch a major force to go capture and arrest her.”
Indeed:

Judge Bao entered the palace and bowed to the Humane Ancestor:
“The divine power of Fourth Sister even frightens the lofty skies.”

Judge Bao declared:
“There are no other people
Who can capture this demonic monster:
All you can do
Is to summon the Yangs and the Huyans
And have both clans lead forth their troops.”

The Humane Ancestor
Hearing this report
Promptly proclaimed an imperial edict,
An emissary
Went first to that
Mansion of Heavenly Waves. 42
He first paid his respects
To Taijun the Matriarch,
And presented the imperial order,
And the Matriarch,
Having received the edict
Hurriedly read it through:
“In the Eastern Capital
A demonic monster has appeared
Harming our troops and killing our officers,
So your great-grandson
Yang Wenguang
Is ordered to mobilize his entire army!”

Yet another emissary
Also had arrived
At the mansion of the Huyan family,
Where Huyan Qing
And the princess
Came forward to receive the edict.

As His Imperial Majesty
Had proclaimed this edict
They didn’t dare tarry or delay,
But with all due speed
Proceeded to the parade-ground
And mobilized their troops for action.

Yang Wenguang
And Huyan Qing
These two great generals,

42 Home of the Yang family.
In accordance with the edict
  Departed the palace gates
    In order to apprehend that monster.
Leading cavalry and infantry
  They ordered their whole army
    To raise a battle cry all in one voice,
As three cannons resounded,
  They arrived outside
    The gate of the Cui mansion.
On all four sides
  They tightly surrounded
    This great mansion of the Cui family,
When commanded three times
  They shouted in one voice:
    “Apprehend that demonic monster!”
When Cui Wenrui
  Saw how things were,
    He was scared completely out of his wits,
Trembling with fear
  He said: “My dear wife
    This disaster we’ve called down is not light!”
But Fourth Sister
  Was not concerned in the least
    In her eyes they counted for nothing at all.
She was not afraid
  Of these great generals
    And their millions of strong troops:
  “Just watch how I
    Make my advance
      See if those men and horses,
  Each and every one
    Are not caused by me
      To go and meet the king of the dead!”
When she rushed outside
  She came face to face
    With General Huyan Qing, 43
He cursed her:
  “How dare you
    Demonic monster Fourth Sister!
Hurry over
  And give up your life
    Better not act foolishly,
That would avoid
  Our having to use our troops
    Bringing destruction and loss of life.”

43 The text here gives Hu as his surname and Yanqing as his personal name.
When Fourth Sister Zhang
    Had heard these words
        She did not react by word or expression,
But recited true spells
    And recited magic words
        That penetrated the very gate of heaven!
She also took out
    A golden hairpin
        On which she blew one puff of breath,
Whereupon it turned
    Into a yellow dragon stallion
        That surpassed any horned dragon at leaping;
She also took hold
    Of a silk handkerchief
        Which she twisted a few times.
It changed into a golden tiger
    And into a jade unicorn
        Both displaying blinding light.
A golden cup
    She took in her hands
        And turned it round several times,
One puff of breath
    And it changed into
        A black-bladed sword!
Huyan Qing
    Observing how Fourth Sister
        Could transform with a shake of her body,
Raised his sword
    Rushed forward to fight
        His heart frightened and gall quaking!
On the other side
    Yang Wenguang
        Felt a towering rage in his heart,
He rushed forward
    To lend a hand
        And the ether of death rose up in thick clouds!
Spear crossed blade
    And blade crossed spear
        Crashing together with deafening noise,
They fought in such a way
    That throughout the Eastern Capital
        Earth and sky were filled with darkness.
Fourth Sister Zhang
    Fighting these two generals
        Did not dare treat them lightly,
So she jumped out of the fray
And rose upon a fine cloud
  To stand in the empty sky.
Toward the Gate of Heaven
  She pointed just once,
  And the entire sky turned black:
There was swirling dust
  And flying stones
    That threw the army into disorder!
They rained down so thickly
  That Huyan Qing
    Could not distinguish north from south;
They rained down so thickly
  That Yang Wenguang
    Could not separate east from west.
Fourth Sister Zhang
  Then produced
    The soul-catching bottle:
With a wave of her hand
  Generals Yang and Huyan
    Were both sucked into this magic bottle.
Using flying stones
  She caused the death
    Of a thousand officers and troops,
All of the army
  Seeing this state of affairs
    Decided it best to run for their lives.

Now tell that when various officers and troops reported their defeat to the Throne,
this frightened His Majesty the Humane Ancestor so much that he was at a loss for what
to do. He hurriedly dispatched Judge Bao to go to the Mansion of Heavenly Waves to
again raise troops to come to the rescue. When the Matriarch heard his report, tears
flowed from her eyes, and she said: “I don’t know how many men of the Yang family
have died for the sake of the Song empire! Let me go and capture this demonic monster
and free the dynasty from this harm.” When Judge Bao heard this, his heart was filled
with joy, and he said: “If the women generals of the Yang family join the battle to capture
this demon, success is ensured. I will, for the moment, go back to my office in the
southern city.” Indeed:

When he heard these words, Lord Bao was filled with joy:
  The women generals of the Yang family would join the fray.

When Lord Bao
  Saw that the Yang family

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44 The office in the southern city is the yamen of the prefect of Kaifeng. The historical Bao Zheng only
served as prefect of Kaifeng for a little more than one year, but in the popular mind Judge Bao was
identified with that function.
Had women generals who were so heroic,
He knew that when they went
To apprehend that demonic monster
They were certainly bound to succeed.

But let’s not talk
About Black-Faced Judge Bao
Who returned to his own office,
But let’s only talk
Of those heroic
Yang family women generals.

Third Sister Li
Went together with them
To go take great revenge,
There was also her daughter
‘Prettier than a Flower’
Who wanted to make a contribution too.

Mu Guiying
Called the roll
And then left the Yang family mansion;
She next arrived
At the Huyan family mansion
Where she fully explained the situation.

At the Huyan mansion
Out there came
The princess [Lanfeng].

When she saw
Mu Guiying,
She asked about all the details.
‘Prettier than a Flower’
And Third Sister Li
Completely told them to her.

On this side
This stirred to rage
The princess Lanfeng.

“My husband
Huyan Qing
Has suffered such a terrible disaster,
I too today
Definitely want to
Capture and arrest that demonic monster!”

These two families
Mobilized their troops
And set out to pay a visit to His Majesty,
Receiving his order
To lead their troops
They were sure to achieve immediate victory.

These two families
Consisted exclusively
Of female troops and female officers;

They broke up camp
And soon arrived
At the richly decorated palace gate.

In the golden hall
They kowtowed to the emperor
Thanking His Majesty for his grace;

As soon as he saw them
The Humane Ancestor
Was filled with great joy in his heart,

And he declared:
“Mu Guiying
Will be commander-in-chief.
My daughter Lanfeng,
Do not be lax:
I appoint you as vanguard.”

Now tell that when Princess Lanfeng had been made the captain of the vanguard, she selected three thousand mounted soldiers, and after she had fired a cannon, they all set out. The troops shouted their battle cries and the war horses snorted and neighed. Within a short while they had arrived outside the gate of the Cui mansion. They surrounded it tightly, and shouted: “You demonic monster, hurry up and come out here to do battle!” Cui Wenrui was so scared that he did not know where to hide himself, and when he tried to escape through the back door, he was arrested by women generals of the Yang family. At precisely that time Fourth Sister Zhang was sitting in her embroidery room and heard the shouting and noise of men and horses. A serving girl came to report, and only then did she realize that the female generals of the Huyan and Yang families had surrounded the mansion. Fourth Sister went outside to have a look. Indeed:

She greatly created havoc in the Eastern Capital,
Time and time again pitched battles were fought.

Mu Guiying
Ordered her troops
To pitch camp and build fortifications,

And she encircled
The Cui mansion
So tightly no drop of water could escape.

This angered
Fourth Sister Zhang
Her heart was filled by a towering rage;

She swiftly came outside
Mounted her horse
And opened an armed attack.

‘Prettier than a Flower’
Came forward
To meet her in battle,

These two women,
Compared their prowess
Each displaying her supernatural skills.

They fought and fought
Some tens of rounds
Without deciding winner and loser,

Then ‘Prettier than a Flower’
Spat out some magic water
And rose up into the empty sky;

Holding in her hand
A demon-subduing cudgel
She shook herself to transform,

And transformed herself
Into a three-headed
Six-armed giant:

When she opened her mouth
It was as big as a blood bowl
With teeth like awls of steel,

Her two eyes
Resembled bronze bells
As if about to devour human beings!

When Fourth Sister Zhang
Saw this apparition,
A faint smile briefly crossed her face,

She pulled out
Her embroidery needles
And threw them high into the sky.

Reciting a spell
She turned them into
Ten fierce tigers,

Who rose up into
The middle of the sky
Ready to manifest their great might.

Shaking their heads
And sweeping their tails
They bared their fangs and claws,

They wanted to eat
That three-headed
Six-armed giant.

‘Prettier than a Flower’
No sooner saw them
Than she turned around and took to her heels;
On the other side
Third Sister Li
  Flourished her blade of steel.
She recited true spells
  And magic words too
  And a wild storm started to blow;
She made sand swirl
  And stones fly
  It was like thunder booming.
But Fourth Sister Zhang
  Put into employ
  A turn-around magic,
And that swirling sand
  And flying stones
  Turned around to batter ‘Prettier than a Flower’!\(^{45}\)
Mu Guiying
  Seeing this
  Was filled with a towering rage,
And she threw paper men
  And also paper horses
  Up into the sky.
But Fourth Sister Zhang
  Spat out magic water
  And darkened heaven and earth:
A dust storm blew
  Torrential rain fell
  Thunder crashed and lightning flashed!
But from the Huyan mansion
  There now rushed forward
  Young Princess Lanfeng,
Her forces
  And those of the Yangs
  Collaborated in a coordinated attack.
Princess Lanfeng
  Made use of sesame seeds
  Three pecks and three cups in all,
Onto those seeds
  She blew a breath
  And transformed them into an army.
All of these troops
  Raised blades of steel
  And rushed forward to join battle;
In a great hubbub
  They surrounded Fourth Sister
  So that she was unable to make any move.

\(^{45}\) As ‘Prettier than a Flower’ has already fled the battle field, this is probably a mistake for Third Sister Li.
But Fourth Sister Zhang
   Was not afraid at all
   At the loud shouts of the enemy troops;
She gave her body a shake:
   Ten turned to a hundred
   A hundred to ten million!
They dashed to the east
   They fought to the west
   And surrounded the government soldiers.
‘Prettier than a Flower’
   And Princess Lanfeng
   Sought to block them in the west and in the east.
Third Sister Li
   Was so anxious that
   She could not make a move,
But Guiying cried:
   “Six-Armed One
   Don’t forget to come to our rescue!”
In this battle
   They fought until
   The sky had lost its light:
Wild winds blew
   Torrential rain fell
   Sun and moon lost their brilliance.
The various women generals
   Were lost in a haze
   Dashing to the east and the west;
Fourth Sister Zhang
   Took out her magic bottle
   And captured the souls of them all.
Within a short while
   She had captured
   All the Huyan and Yang women generals,
And before anyone knew
   Evening had fallen
   And the moon had risen above the buildings.
But when she went home
   No husband was there
   And tears flowed forth from her eyes,
Cui Wenrui
   Had been captured
   And was enduring suffering.
Fourth Sister Zhang
   In her embroidery room
   Pondered this matter all by herself:
“I still will have
To go out again
To save my darling and bring him home!”

Now tell that while Fourth Sister Zhang was in her embroidery room she thought about her husband who was still locked up in custody. Disregarding her fatigue from doing battle, she wanted to immediately go and rescue him. Her husband Cui Wenrui had been captured by the women generals of the Yang family and taken to the yamen in the southern city. Fourth Sister Zhang hurried there, and using a body-concealing magic, saved him and brought him home.

Let’s tell instead that Judge Bao thought to himself: “This Fourth Sister Zhang is not some demonic monster. She must be an astral deity who has escaped from somewhere or other, but she is creating such havoc in the Eastern Capital that no one can live in peace. As for the generals of the Huyan and Yang families, I don’t know if they are alive or dead. The only solution is for me to go and conduct an investigation in the offices of the underworld and in the palaces of heaven.” When he had reached this conclusion, he promptly ascended the palace hall and memorialized the Humane Ancestor. When the latter had heard his proposal, he gave him a golden seal, and told him to go and come back as quickly as possible. Indeed:

When the Humane Ancestor heard Judge Bao’s proposal,
He promptly offered him three beakers of imperial wine.
In order to apprehend and arrest that Fourth Sister Zhang,
Judge Bao has to travel through underworlds and heavens.

That Judge Bao
Drank the imperial wine
And thanked the Humane Ancestor;
He then took out
The Yin and Yang boards
And the headrest that calls back the soul.
Judge Bao’s
Three ethereal souls
Arrived in the Dark Offices,
His seven earthly souls
Also found their way
To the middle of the underworld.
Before long
He had arrived
At the precious hall of King Yama,
And the ten infernal kings
Together came outside
To receive Judge Bao.
They all asked him:
“Star of Literature
What business brings you here?”

46 When sleeping on a bed made of these boards, Judge Bao’s souls can travel through heavens and hells.
Judge Bao replied:

“I have come here
To investigate the case of a demon.

In the Eastern Capital
There has appeared
A horrific demonic monster,

And I very much fear
That she will bring to disorder
The empire of the Song dynasty.

The finest heroes
Went to arrest her
But they all failed to achieve victory,

Causing the Eastern Capital
To be so disturbed
That everything is out of joint.

In your halls
Has there gone missing
Any ghost or deity perhaps?

With great care
Please make a check
To see if all is as it should be.”

Now tell that when the ten kings of the infernal courts had heard the request of Judge Bao, they ordered the infernal judges to go and investigate each bureau of the underworld administration to see which bureau might have lost track of a ghost or deity. When the infernal judges received this command, they completely investigated all eighteen layers of hell, but none had lost track of a ghost or deity. When Judge Bao heard this, he took his leave of the infernal kings.

He then went on to the Thunderclap Monastery in the Western Heaven, where he met with Our Buddha the Tathagatha. After he had paid his respects, he once again told how a demon had appeared in the Eastern Capital and asked Lord Buddha to conduct an investigation. The Tathagatha dispatched people to completely check on the Eighteen Arhats, the Eight Great Diamond Kings, and the Thirty-Six Devas, but they were all at their posts and none had run off. Judge Bao quickly took his leave of Lord Buddha and at the third quarter of the first hour he arrived at the Southern Gate of Heaven to conduct an investigation in the palaces of heaven. Indeed:

Judge Bao lay down
On his Yin and Yang couch
Wanting to go up to the palace of heaven,

And before too long
He did arrive
At the Southern Gate of Heaven.

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47 In this text prose passages as a rule are followed by a couplet or a quatrain introduced by this phrase “Indeed” (Zhengshi 正是), but no couplet or quatrain appears in the original text at this point.
The Star of Great White†
   Escorted Judge Bao
       To go see the Jade Emperor,
And Jade Emperor Zhang
       Hurriedly began to speak
   Asking the chancellor:
“I dispatched you
   Star of Literature
       To go down from this heavenly palace,
Together with the Song court’s
   Humane Ancestor
       To rule the country and pacify the people.
For what reason
   Have you now come to
       The Precious Hall of the Divine Welkin?
Could it be that
   The Humane Ancestor
       By any chance has treated you unfairly?”
When Chancellor Bao
   Heard these questions
       He hurriedly stepped forward and replied:
“Your Imperial Majesty
   In the Eastern Capital
       A demonic monster has appeared.
She has brought down
   Quite a number of
       Loyal and excellent top generals,
She has also killed
   Countless numbers of
       Ordinary people and commoners!
I have been wondering
   Whether up here in heaven
       Some astral deity might have escaped,
And created such havoc
   In the Eastern Capital
       That the people there cannot live in peace?
So I implore Your Majesty
   To very carefully
       Do a complete investigation,
To see which deity
   May have escaped
       So she may be captured and returned to heaven.”

Now tell that the Jade Emperor, when he had heard this report, ordered the divinities on duty for that day to check the Twenty Eight Asterisms, the Nine Astral

† The Star of Great White is the planet Venus, one of the “moving stars.”
Palaces of the Dipper, the Five Lakes and the Four Seas, and the Twenty Four Grottoes, but they all reported that no deity had escaped. The Jade Emperor then gave an order for the investigation of the Dipper and Buffalo Palace of the Queen-Mother. Indeed:

Ascending to heaven, entering the earth: he searched everywhere,
But still he did not know where Fourth Sister had come from.

That Queen-Mother
On receiving this command
Was in no position to ignore it,
In Dipper and Buffalo Palace
She very carefully
Investigated so that all was clear.
From the start
Down to the end
They searched here and searched there:
In Dipper and Buffalo Palace
Only one person was missing:
The Jade Emperor’s own fourth daughter!
From the celestial palace
She had been gone
The space of three days,
But in the realm of men
That was equal to
Three years and more!
That Judge Bao
Hearing this report
Was completely scared out of his wits:
So all along it had been
The Jade Emperor’s
Fourth daughter no less!
The Jade Emperor said:
“Star of Literature
First go back to earth,
In the Eastern Capital
Inform the Humane Ancestor
That I will dispatch my celestial troops.
First I will dispatch
From the Dragon King’s Palace
Water Dragon Crown Prince;
Second I will dispatch
Li Nezha
To restore order to heaven and earth.”
That Judge Bao
Thanked the Jade Emperor
And quickly left the palaces of heaven;
On the soul-recalling headrest
   He woke from his sleep
       And so returned to this realm of light.
In the five watches of the night
   He had completely traveled through
       Both the underworld and the heavens,
And with great pleasure
   Reported to the Humane Ancestor
       The success he achieved on this mission.
The Humane Ancestor
   Poured him imperial wine
       And hurriedly expressed his thanks to Judge Bao:
   “You have investigated
       The heavenly palaces
           So what was the cause?”
Chancellor Bao
   Memorialized the emperor
       “Please listen to my clear report,
As your minister I
   First went to
       The offices of the infernal bureaucracy,
Arriving there
   A complete investigation was done
       But no relevant information was obtained.
But up in heaven
   In the Dipper and Buffalo Palace
       Investigation provided a clear result:
It was discovered that
   Fourth Sister Zhang
       Had left the Dipper and Buffalo Palace;
She descended to the mortal world
       And arrived in the Eastern Capital
           Now more than three years ago.
The Jade Emperor
   Proclaimed an edict
       Dispatching celestial troops,
They will descend
   To arrest Fourth Sister
       And she will return to the Heavenly Palace.”
When the Humane Ancestor
   Had heard these words
       He was greatly frightened;
To his left and right
   Civil and military officials
       Shuddered with fear.
They all had thought
Fourth Sister Zhang
Was some kind of demonic monster;
Nobody had known
That she actually was
The Jade Emperor’s precious daughter!
This line of the story
We abandon for the moment
We can’t go into detail now,
But instead we return
To Fourth Sister Zhang
And the way in which she wielded her weapons.

Now tell that Fourth Sister Zhang and her husband were resting in her embroidery room, when she suddenly felt her ears burning and her eyes twitching. When she silently calculated what this meant, she realized that this spelled trouble, so she promptly told her husband: “Today the Jade Emperor will dispatch heavenly troops to this place to arrest me and take me back to heaven.” When Wenrui heard these words, he was frightened and panicked without end, but Fourth Sister said: “My darling, don’t worry! If they come this way, I will inflict such a defeat on them that they will be left with not one piece of armor intact!”

As they were speaking, the heavenly troops arrived. Fourth Sister Zhang rose to her feet and went outside. When she lifted her head to have a look, she noticed the Water Dragon Crown Prince rising atop the clouds. Very soon he had arrived in front of her. The Crown Prince came forward, bowed to Fourth Sister, and said: “Princess, at the command of the Jade Emperor I have come here to invite you to return to heaven.” When Fourth Sister heard this, she said: “If this is an invitation, then why have you come in full armor?” The Crown Prince replied: “If you reject the invitation, I’ll be obliged to use force.” Fourth Sister was filled by rage when she heard this, and she cursed him, saying: “You have some gall! If you have the ability to defeat me, I will go back.” Indeed:

Fourth Sister reviled the Crown Prince;
The Crown Prince was filled with rage.

That Crown Prince
Hurriedly began to speak,
Furiously cursing Fourth Sister;
He cursed her:
“Fourth Sister Zhang
Listen carefully to my words.
Your father
The Jade Emperor
Is the ruler of the myriads of gods;
He administers the cosmos
Dominate heaven and earth
How awesome is his authority!
This very day
I received from him
   An edict to transmit to you:
Return with all speed
   To the heavenly palace
   And report to that worthy deity!"
When Fourth Sister Zhang
   Had heard these words
   A burning rage rose up in her heart:
   “You and I
   Will display our powers
   To see who comes out on top!”
The Crown Prince was furious
   And did not say any word
   But with a shake of his body transformed,
He transformed himself
   With one clap of thunder⁴⁹
   Promptly into a dragon made of fire.
He spat from his mouth
   A huge glare of fire
   That rose up thousands of zhang,
But Fourth Sister Zhang
   When she saw that
   Just gave a little snort in her nose.
Without any panic
   She took out
   A magic object she carried on her person;
She raised this
   Treasure-collecting bowl
   And flung it high into the empty sky.
Before too long
   Black clouds assembled
   And everything grew dark and blurry,
A great wind blew
   Mixed with hailstones
   While a heavy rain came pouring down.
That fire dragon
   Seeing the situation below him
   Beat his retreat with all possible speed,
And so that Crown Prince
   Did not achieve victory
   But instead nearly lost his life!
But from the other side
   Came dashing out
   Crown Prince Nezha,
He advanced and cursed

⁴⁹ Here the text reads zì hé léi 子和雷, which is difficult to make sense of.
“You villainous young lady!”
And displayed his miraculous powers.

His transformation
Was nothing less than
A three-headed six-armed giant:

With his feet treading
On wheels of fire
He inspired more fear than a unicorn!

Fourth Sister Zhang
Never for one moment
Took serious notice of him,

She just loudly shouted:
“You brazen rogue
Don’t try to show off your skills.

Never in my life
Did I treat you badly
So why do you try to bully me?”

Quickly she
Drew out a sword
Which she held up in her hands.

One turned to ten
One hundred to ten thousand
Each blade flashing a chilling light,

In the middle of the air
They all turned into
Flying blades ready to kill!

All aimed for
Li Nezha
Hacking in from all four sides,

So Li Nezha
Unable to resist
Hastily fled for his life.

But now arrived
Sun Wukong
The Great Sage Equal to Heaven,

Who loudly shouted:
“Fourth Sister Zhang
You damned hussy you!

You originally were
An immortal maiden
Covered in luxury and glory,

For what reason
Did you marry a mortal
And create such havoc in Bianliang?

You hurry up
And come with me
And return to the palaces of heaven,
To save me from
Using my gold-hooped staff
To beat your body into fragments!”

Fourth Sister Zhang
Loudly shouted:
“You brazen monkey sprite!
You dare come
In front of my face
To spit out such wild words?
This very day
I’ll make sure
You can’t save your worthless life:
I’ll flay your monkey skin,
Pull out your monkey tendons
And scoop out your monkey heart!”

Sun Wukong
Having been reviled this way
How could he put up with that?
Pulling out monkey hairs
He recited magic spells
And they all took on the shape of monkey gods.
Each and every one
Raised in his hands
The same gold-hooped cudgel,
Rushing forward
Each took aim
At Fourth Sister Zhang with his strokes.
Once Fourth Sister
Saw this situation
With a shake of her body she transformed,
She transformed herself
Into thousands of myriads
Of Fourth Sister body-doubles.
When Sun Wukong
Saw that his monkey hairs
Would be unable to achieve victory,
He drew in his
Gold-hooped staff
And hurriedly tried to escape.
Fourth Sister Zhang
With a faint smile
Reviled him saying: “Monkey,
This young miss
Has her own magic object
To thrash your monkey butt.
When you go back to heaven,
   Go to my father the Jade Emperor
   And there tell him on my behalf:
Let him issue an edict
   To the emperor on earth
   To care lovingly for the common people;
Let men and women
   Who love each other
   Never have to suffer separation,
And may all the Half-City Wangs
   And the Half-City Lis
   Be completely wiped from the earth.
If my respected kind father
   Will not promise this
   The bond between father and daughter will be cut;
And if I
   Fight my way to
   The Divine Welkin Hall,
Within the heavenly palaces
   All the various deities
   Will be completely exterminated."
Sun Wukong
   Pulled back men and horses
   And hurriedly made his retreat;
He went up to heaven
   And before the Jade Emperor
   Transmitted the true state of affairs:
“Fourth Sister
   Has superior skills
   She’s an expert in each and every art.
Even this Old Sun
   Who was never defeated
   Was unable to win victory.
She also wants you
   Jade Emperor
   To protect and safeguard mortal men,
To ensure that they
   Enjoy the bliss of man and wife
   And enjoy the favor of heaven.”
Jade Emperor Zhang
   Before he had heard all
   Felt a towering rage blasting upward,
But the Queen-Mother
   From one side
   With wise words exhorted him:
“That little wench
Possesses superior skills
Who will be able to capture her?
It’s your own fault
For pampering her
So that she recognizes no authority at all!”
Jade Emperor Zhang
Then began to speak:
“You go and try to persuade her,
If you persuade her
To return to heaven
I will absolve her of any crime.”

Now tell that Her Majesty the Queen Mother descended to the mortal world with the other six immortal maidens in order to exhort Fourth Sister to change her mind—but enough about that. Tell instead that Fourth Sister having won victory returned home. Only now did Cui Wenrui understand that she was the fourth daughter of His Majesty the Jade Emperor, and he was extraordinarily elated.

While the two of them were idly chatting, Fourth Sister Zhang suddenly saw that the gate of heaven had been opened and that an auspicious cloud was slowly moving in her direction. Fourth Sister knew that this was her mother coming to persuade her, so she explained the situation to Wenrui. When he heard this, his eyes brimmed over with tears, he found it so hard to part from his wife. Fourth Sister told him: “My darling, don’t be so sad! I’ll just take you along when I return to heaven today.” Having said this, she took out her handkerchief, picked up the soul-capturing bottle and released the heroes and heroines of the Huyan and Yang families, and allowed each and every one of them to return to their homes. She then spread her handkerchief on the floor and gathered the treasure-collecting bowl and the other magic treasures in order to return them to Dragon King’s Crown Prince.

Fourth Sister Zhang was just in the midst of packing up these things when Her Majesty the Queen Mother arrived. Fourth Sister went forward and paid her respects to her mother, and then greeted her sisters. After these rituals were over, the Queen Mother began to speak, saying: “You are an immortal maiden from heaven, so how could you marry a mere mortal? This mother of yours for your sake has been forced to bear so much bitterness! If you still remember the debt you owe for my bearing and raising you, come with me to the palaces of heaven. If you refuse to listen to your mother’s advice, your father the king will issue his orders, and both mother and daughter will end up as beheaded ghosts!” When Fourth Sister had heard what her mother said, she replied: “It is not that I, your child, don’t wish to obey you!” Indeed:

Fourth Sister had gone down on her own from the celestial palace,
Because she longed for the inexhaustible joys of the human realm.

Fourth Sister Zhang
Cried out: “Dear Mother
Please carefully listen to my explanation.
It is not the case
That I your child
    Had no wish to be filial and obedient.
I was in that
    Dipper and Buffalo Palace
    Properly but idly sitting,
When I saw an aggrieved ether
    Rise straight up on high
    To the gate of the Dipper and Buffalo Palace!
That very moment
    My passion was aroused
    So on my own I descended to the mortal realm.
Now Cui Wenrui
    Is on no account
    A mere pawn with no name.
He is originally
    From the upper world
    A divine lad from the immortals.
He left the heavenly palace
    Arrived in the mortal realm
    And was reborn as a human being.
This day you,
    My dear old mother
    Have arrived here in person on earth,
The Cui mother and son
    Should together with us
    Return to the heavenly palaces above!"
The Queen Mother
    Furrowed her brow in thought
    But then put on a welcoming expression,
Fourth Sister Zhang
    Seeing her mother had agreed,
    Was now filled with a limitless joy!
The various female immortals
    After hearing these words
    Together set out on their way;
Riding auspicious clouds
    They moved through the skies
    And together returned to the palaces in heaven.
Before too long
    They had arrived
    By the banks of Clear Water River.
Fourth Sister Zhang
    Suddenly thought
    It would be good to wash out her stomach and guts.
But not being careful
    She fell into the river
And soaked all of her clothes,
Fourth Sister Zhang
   After changing her clothes
      Went to see the Jade Emperor.
Before too long
   They had arrived at
      The Precious Hall of the Divine Welkin.
Lifting her head
   She saw her father the Jade Emperor
      Seated high on his heavenly throne.
She walked forward
   And paid her respects
      To her father who had sired her,
The August Jade Emperor,
   His fury not yet dissipated
      Showed her a very stern face.
At this moment
   Fourth Sister Zhang
      Felt her heart jumping without cease,
But the Queen Mother
   Immediately began to speak:
      “You already promised to absolve any crime!”
When the Jade Emperor
   Saw his darling daughter
      In front of him once again,
And the Queen Mother
   Reminded him of his promise
      The rage in his heart was already pacified.
The Jade Emperor
   Opening his mouth asked:
      “Fourth Sister listen clearly to me now:
Why did you
   All by yourself
      On your own authority leave these palaces of heaven?”
Fourth Sister Zhang
   Answered her father the emperor:
      With a full confession of her adventures:
“On that day
   Your child was just sitting
      Right and proper as could be,
When an aggrieved ether
   Blasted up as high as
      The gate of the Dipper and Buffalo Palace,
Only then did I leave
   For the world of mortals
      To tie the bonds of matrimony.
Cui Wenrui
That silly student
    Had suffered his share of bitter pain,
But he too
    Is from the upper world
    And is a divinity in his own right.”

Now tell that the Jade Emperor asked her: “What manner of upper world divinity is Cui Wenrui?” One of the divinities at his side promptly reported: “Cui Wenrui was originally a golden lad of Laozi’s; his mother is the Auntie in the Moon.” When the Jade Emperor heard this story, he said: “As you both are divinities of the superior world, you should all go back to your own palaces. From now on, without my express permission, no divinity is allowed to descend to the mortal world.” All the divinities there present thanked him for his grace, and they all went back to their own palaces. Indeed:

    All three members of this one family ascended to heaven,
    And each of them returned back to his or her own palace.

Having completed
    This precious scroll
    I leave it to later generations,
I admonish those in the world
    Whether male or female
    To listen to it very carefully.
That Wang Qin
    Lusting for riches and sex
    Did not die a good death,
Magistrate Zhang
    Was executed
    In front of the ornate palace gate.
Listen to it with your ears
    Remember it in your heart
    Never commit evil deeds;
On no account
    Consider it an idle tale
    You can ignore and put aside:
Those who harm others
    Will precisely harm
    None other than themselves,
In the end
    No reward will be theirs
    Only disasters will come to roost!

The copier of this scroll has had little education,
Those who read this scroll should keep this in mind.
There may be many wrong and faulty characters,
So please correct them after you read this scroll.
I had to spend much energy in copying the scroll,
So when reciting this scroll, be very careful of it.