

# The SCHOLARS

WU CHING-TZU



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## CHAPTER 10

Compiler Lu chooses a brilliant son-in-law, and Chu Hsien-fu marries into a rich family

*THE* Lou brothers were on the river when a junk overtook them and a man called to them to stop, then came aboard to invite them to the other boat. They recognized him as the servant of Mr. Lu, a compiler of the Han Lin Academy who came from their district.

"When did your master return?" they asked.

"He has asked for leave and is on his way home."

"Where is he now?" asked Lou Feng.

"He is on that junk, and invites you both to come over."

The two brothers went aboard the junk, which was carrying the insignia of the Han Lin Academy; and Mr. Lu came out, in a square cap and private citizen's dress, to the door of the cabin. This compiler had been one of their uncle's pupils.

"Just now I saw Lou Chan from a distance, standing at the prow, and I was wondering how you came to be on this little boat," he said with a smile. "Now I find Lou Feng is here too. This is very interesting. Please come into my cabin."

They went in, exchanged courtesies and sat down.

"Since we took our leave of you at the capital," said Lou Feng, "half a year has passed. May we ask why you requested leave, sir, to return home?"

"All we poor academicians have to look forward to is a few commissions," said Mr. Lu. "Since all the lucrative jobs had been taken by others, I was sitting there in the capital with nothing to do, spending my own money. Moreover, though I am nearly

fifty, I have no son but only one daughter whose marriage has not yet been arranged. I therefore felt my wisest course would be to ask for leave and return to see to some family affairs. But what were you two doing on that little boat without a single attendant? Where were you going?"

"We have nothing to do," said Lou Chan, "and since it was a fine, warm day my brother and I decided to come out for a little excursion. That was all."

"I called on an old friend this morning in a village over there," said Mr. Lu. "He invited me to lunch; but since I was eager to be home, I declined. He sent a feast to my boat, however, and I am very lucky to have met you both, for we can recall old times over the wine." He turned to an attendant to ask: "Has the second boat caught up yet?"

A boatman answered: "No, it's still a long way behind."

"Never mind," said Mr. Lu. "Bring the gentlemen's luggage aboard here, and send their boat back."

Then he ordered the feast to be spread and wine poured out, and as they drank they chatted about different yamens in the capital.

Presently Mr. Lu asked about the crops that year and whether their native place had recently produced any famous men. Given this opening, Lou Feng mentioned Yang Chih-chung and declared that he could be considered an extremely lofty character. Then, producing the poem, he showed it to the compiler. When Mr. Lu had read it, he looked at them quizzically.

"You two gentlemen are a match for all the patrons who ever existed," he said. "Even the Lord of Hsinling and the Lord of Chunsheng\* could do no more. But few of these men who appear so brilliant are genuine scholars. In fact, to put it bluntly, if this fellow is really learned why hasn't he passed the examinations? What use is this poem? With your condescension and respect for genius, you must be the best patrons this Mr. Yang has ever encountered in his life; yet he has twice avoided you, as if he were afraid of meeting you. Isn't the reason obvious? If I were you, I would not become too friendly with such people."

To this the two brothers made no answer. The feast continued for a long time, during which they touched on a multitude of topics, and when they reached the city Mr. Lu insisted

\* Nobles of the Kingdoms of Wei and Chai in the third century B.C., they both had over three thousand protégés.

on escorting the Lou brothers back before going home himself. As soon as the brothers stepped across their threshold, the gate-keeper told them: "Master Chu is here. He is sitting with the third mistress."

Entering the inner hall, they found Chu Hsien-fu there, being entertained by Lou Feng's wife. As soon as the young man saw his uncles he knelt down; but they stopped him and invited him into the library, where he presented a letter and gifts from his grandfather, besides two copies of the *Random Notes on Poetry* by Kao Chi which he had published.

"You are a young genius, nephew!" declared his uncles after turning a few pages. "We are none of us up to you."

"I am nothing but an ignoramus," replied Chu Hsien-fu. "I hope my uncles will point out my mistakes."

The two brothers were delighted. That evening they spread a feast to welcome him, and lodged him in the library.

The next morning, after a chat with Chu Hsien-fu, the brothers changed into official dress, ordered a servant to take their cards, and went by sedan-chairs to call on Mr. Lu. After paying their respects they returned home, instructed their cook to prepare a feast for the next day, and sent an invitation to the compiler saying that they wished to celebrate his home-coming. Then they went to the library.

"We have invited a guest for tomorrow," they told their nephew with a smile. "We hope you will help us to entertain him."

Chu Hsien-fu asked who it was.

"He is Compiler Lu of this district," Lou Feng told him. "He passed the examination when our uncle was chief examiner."

"He is the most vulgar person you can imagine," put in Lou Chan. "But since we are connected and he invited us to a feast the other day on his boat, tomorrow we are asking him here." As they were speaking, the gate-keeper came in.

"Mr. Niu Pu-yi of Shaohsing is waiting outside to see you, gentlemen," he announced.

"Show him into the hall at once," ordered Lou Feng.

"Is this the Mr. Niu Pu-yi who used to be a secretary under Examiner Fan in Shantung?" asked Chu.

"Yes," answered Lou Feng. "How did you know?"

"He was formerly my father's colleague; that is how I know him."

"True," said Lou Chan. "We forgot that your father was there too."

Then the brothers went out to see Niu Pu-yi and, after talking to him for some time, brought him to the library where Chu Hsien-fu paid his respects.

"Just now," said Niu, "when I learned from your uncles that your father was no longer with us, I felt very sad. But now that I see how brilliantly you are following in his steps, I feel happy again. Is your grandfather well?"

"He is well, thank you, sir. He often thinks of you too." "I remember how, when Examiner Fan was looking for some candidate's paper, your father told the story of Ho Ching-ming—that was an excellent joke."

He described what had happened and the Lou brothers and Chu laughed heartily.

"Mr. Niu," said Lou Feng, "we have been close friends for many years, so we need not stand on ceremony, and luckily our nephew is here to profit by your instruction. Won't you spend the day with us?"

Then a feast was spread and the four of them discussed literature over their wine until evening, when Niu Pu-yi took his leave and the two brothers saw him out, having ascertained his address.

The next morning a servant was sent to invite Mr. Lu; but only at midday did the compiler arrive, wearing his gauze cap and embroidered official gown. Upon entering the hall, he wanted to pay his respects before the shrine of his former tutor; but the two brothers declined again and again. Then they took off their official robes and sat down, while tea was served. When the tea had been drunk, Chu Hsien-fu came in to pay his respects. "This is our nephew," said Lou Feng. "He is the grandson of our uncle who was Prefect of Nanchang."

"I have long wished to make your acquaintance," said Mr. Lu. Each deferring to the other, they sat down; and after the usual courtesies had been exchanged, two feasts were laid.

"You shouldn't have done this," said Mr. Lu. "Good friends like ourselves needn't stand on ceremony. In fact, I think this hall is too big and would prefer to have a single feast in your library; so that the four of us can talk comfortably at the same table."

Falling in with his wishes, the two brothers ushered him forth-into the library, where he was charmed with the good taste with which the flowers and stands were arranged. When they had taken their seats, Lou Feng ordered incense to be burnt. At the word of command, a small boy with long hair took an ancient bronze incense-burner in both hands and carried it out, while

two servants let down curtains round the room. An hour or two later, when they had drunk three cups apiece and the two servants returned to draw back the curtains, and the guests saw incense smoke wreathing the panels of the wall, filling the room with a delicious scent. Mr. Lu felt that he was in paradise.

"Incense must be burnt this way," Lou Feng told the compiler, "if you don't want to be troubled by the smoke."

Mr. Lu expressed his admiration. Then he started talking to Chu Hsien-fu about affairs in Kiangsi.

"Wasn't your grandfather's successor in Nanchang Wang Hui?" he asked.

"It was."

"Intendant Wang is in great trouble now. The government has set a price on his head."

"He surrendered to Prince Ning," said Lou Feng.

"He was cited as the ablest officer in Kiangsi," went on Mr. Lu. "Yet he was the first to surrender."

"He did wrong in surrendering," put in Lou Chan.

"According to the proverb," said Mr. Lu, "no troops, no food, why not surrender? But while many officers surrendered to Prince Ning and are now in hiding, he was the only one to surrender with several districts. So the government regards him as by far the worst offender and has offered a reward for his arrest."

When Chu heard this, he dared not breathe a word of what had happened.

Mr. Lu went on to tell the story, which neither of the brothers had heard, of how Wang Hui had consulted the oracle. He then quoted the poem set to the tune "Moonlight on the Western River," and explained how each line had come true.

"That oracle was a strange one," he declared. "It foretold only that he would surrender, but not what would happen after. Apparently, it was still uncertain whether he would have good fortune or bad."

"Coming events cast their shadows before," said Lou Chan. "And a fortune-teller is sensitive to these almost imperceptible signs. It is nonsense to talk of ghosts or fairies."

After the feast the two brothers showed Mr. Lu some of Master Chu's poems as well as the *Random Notes on Poetry* he had published, describing him as a young genius. Mr. Lu expressed his admiration.

"How old is your nephew?" he asked Lou Feng.

"He is seventeen."

"And when was he born?"

Lou Feng asked Chu Hsien-fu, who said: "On the sixteenth of the third month."

Mr. Lu nodded and made a mental note of the date. When evening came the party broke up and, after the two brothers had seen their guest off, they all turned in for the night.

Some days later, Chu announced that he must go back to Chihsing. His uncles prevailed on him to stay for another day, and that day Lou Feng was in his library writing a letter to Prefect Chu when his serving-lad came in.

"The gate-keeper has something to report," he announced.

"Send him in."

The gate-keeper stepped in and told him: "There is a gentleman outside asking to see you."

"Tell him we are not at home and ask him to leave his card."

"He has no card. And when I asked him his name he wouldn't give it—just said that he wanted to speak to both masters."

"What does he look like?"

"He is between fifty and sixty, wearing a square cap and a silk gown. He looks like a scholar."

"It must be Yang Chih-chung!" thought Lou Feng.

Hastily putting away his letter, he called in his brother and told him that someone who might well be Yang Chih-chung had arrived.

"Invite him into the hall," he ordered the gate-keeper. "We shall see him at once."

The gate-keeper ushered the stranger into the hall, after which the two brothers came out to greet him and invited him to sit down.

"Your fame, which resounds like thunder, has long since reached my ears," said the stranger. "But hitherto I have had no opportunity of making your acquaintance."

"May we ask your honourable name?" said Lou Feng.

"Chen Ho-fu, at your service. I reside in the capital, but recently I accompanied Mr. Lu to your honourable district, so at last I am fortunate enough to meet you. I observe that Mr. Lou Feng's ears are whiter than his face—a sure sign that his fame will spread throughout the world; while the retulgence of Mr. Lou Chan's nose indicates that he will shortly receive news of official promotion."

The two brothers realized that this was not Mr. Yang.

"You are no doubt an adept at fortune-telling, sir," they said.

"I have a smattering of knowledge concerning the hexagrams, astrology, fortune-telling, medicine, surgery, yoga and chemistry, besides knowing how to consult the oracles," said Chen Ho-fu.

"When I resided in the capital I was constantly invited by the ministers of all the great ministries and by the gentlemen of the literary yamens. And whenever I foretold promotion, it invariably came to pass. To tell you the truth, gentlemen, I always speak straight out, never keeping anything back or indulging in flattery. That is why great personages have always favoured me. As I told Mr. Lu the other day: 'In the twenty-odd years between my departure from Kiangsi and my arrival in your honourable province, I have travelled through nine provinces.'" When he had said this, he laughed heartily.

Then attendants served tea which they drank.

"Did you say that you came on the same boat as Mr. Lu?" asked Lou Chan. "We met Mr. Lu on the river and spent a day on his boat, but we did not see you."

"That day I was on the second boat," explained Chen Ho-fu. "Only that evening did I learn that you gentlemen had been there. It was my misfortune to have to deter making your acquaintance for several days."

"Your conversation is most edifying," declared Lou Feng. "We regret that we did not meet earlier."

"Mr. Lu has asked me to convey a message to you," said Chen.

"May we speak in private?"

"Certainly," replied the two brothers, and invited him into the library.

Chen Ho-fu looked about him and saw the spacious courtyard outside and the elegant lyres and books.

"It is true that 'In heaven there is the mansion of the gods, and on earth the house of the prime minister,'" he declared. Then, hitching his chair forward, he said: "Mr. Lu has a daughter, who has just reached marriageable age. Since I am staying with them I know the young lady, and she is virtuous, gentle and beautiful. Because Mr. and Mrs. Lu have no son, this girl is the apple of their eye; so although many families have sought her hand in marriage, her parents would never consent. The other day, however, when Mr. Lu met Prefect Chu's grandson in your honourable house, he was struck by his genius. He has asked me to come and find out whether the young gentleman is married or not."

"The young man is our nephew," said Lou Feng, "and he is not married. We are most grateful for this mark of Mr. Lu's high regard; but we would like to ask the age of the young lady and whether their horoscopes correspond."

"You need have no anxiety on that score," replied Chen with a smile. "Mr. Lu ascertained the date of your nephew's birthday

when you entertained him to a feast here; and on his return home I cast both their horoscopes to see whether they could marry or not. The young lady is one year younger than the young gentleman, being sixteen this year. They are born for each other: their horoscopes accord in every single respect. And they are destined to enjoy long life, good fortune and a numerous progeny, with nothing to mar their happiness."

"So that was why he asked the date of our nephew's birthday during the feast," said Lou Chan to Lou Feng. "I wondered at the time, and now it seems he had this in mind all along."

"Excellent," said Lou Feng. "Since our nephew has found favour with Mr. Lu and Mr. Chen has come as go-between, we shall write immediately to our uncle, then choose an auspicious day to send to Mr. Lu's house to ask for the young lady's hand."

"I shall take the liberty of calling again some other day," said Chen Ho-fu, rising to take his leave. "But I must say goodbye for the present and go back to report to Mr. Lu."

When the Lou brothers had seen Chen Ho-fu off, they told Chu Hsien-fu what had happened.

"Since this is the case, you had better not go back to Chihsing yet," they advised him. "We shall send your servant with a letter to your grandfather, and you may as well wait for his reply before you make any move."

Chu did as they said, and remained with them.

The servant came back about ten days later with Prefect Chu's letter, and reported: "When Prefect Chu heard this, he was very pleased. He ordered me to tell you that, since he cannot come himself, he hopes you will make all arrangements for him and decide whether Master Chu should stay in his wife's family or return home. Here is his letter, sir, and here are five hundred taels of silver for the wedding gifts. The prefect also says that there is no need for Master Chu to go home until after his marriage. The prefect's health is good, so there is no need to worry about him."

Having received this reply and the silver, the two brothers chose an auspicious day, asked Chen Ho-fu to act as go-between, and requested Niu Pu-yi to act as a second go-between for the bridegroom's family. Chen and Niu came to the Lou family where they were entertained to a feast, after which they mounted sedan-chairs preceded by servants carrying their cards, and were borne to Mr. Lu's house. Mr. Lu, who had prepared a feast for them, gave them his written consent to the match as well as the card containing the horoscopes of the betrothed couple. On the third day the Lou family sent scores of bearers with gold, silver, pearls,

emeralds, jewellery, silk, embroidery, sheep, wine and fruit as gifts for the bride's family. And after these presents had been despatched they gave each go-between twelve taels of silver for new clothes and four taels of silver for wine and fruit. So everybody was happy.

The two brothers next asked Chen Ho-fu to fix a date for the wedding, and he chose the eighth of the twelfth month, which was an auspicious day. When they proposed this date to Mr. Lu, he requested that, since he had only the one daughter and was loath to part with her, Master Chu should stay with the Lu family. To this the Lou brothers agreed.

On the eighth day of the twelfth month, the go-betweens were entertained to a feast in the Lou mansion, which was hung with lanterns and decorated with streamers. When evening came the musicians struck up. The Lou family had more than eighty lanterns inscribed with official titles, and these, supplemented with the lanterns of Prefect Chu's family, filled three or four streets to overflowing. There was the whole regular wedding procession too, with banners, canopies, wind and stringed instruments and eight pairs of gauze lanterns — because the rain had just stopped and there were still clouds in the sky, the lanterns were covered with green oil-cloth shades — and behind came a great sedan-chair carried by four bearers, in which sat Chu Hsien-fu. After him followed four other chairs carrying the two Lou brothers, Chen Ho-fu and Niu Pu-yi, who were accompanying the groom to the wedding.

At the gate of Mr. Lu's house they sent in largesse to the attendants; then the gates swung wide open and music struck up to welcome them. The Lou brothers and the go-betweens descended from their chairs first and went in. The two brothers were wearing official robes and the go-betweens auspicious dress. Mr. Lu, in gauze cap and embroidered gown, satin shoes and gold belt, came out to welcome them, bowing as he invited them to ascend the steps. Then the musicians and sixteen lantern-bearers ushered in Chu Hsien-fu. In gauze cap and official gown, he was wearing flowers and had red silk over his shoulders. He entered the hall with lowered head, first presented a swan and then bowed to Mr. Lu who invited him to sit at the front table, while the two brothers, two go-betweens and he sat at side tables. Tea was presented three times, after which the feast was spread: one feast for each person, making six feasts in all. Mr. Lu went first to the bridegroom's table to toast him and Chu returned his toast, while music was played at the lower end of the hall. While Mr. Lu was going to the tables of the other guests, Chu had a quick look

round and saw that he was in the old, old hall of an ancient mansion. Scores of great candles had been lit, so that the place was very bright.

These ceremonies at an end, the music stopped and Chu Hsien-fu left his table to greet his father-in-law, his two uncles and the two go-betweens, after which he returned to his place and sat down again. Players came in next, kowtowed to the feasters, then clashed their cymbals and beat their drums as they danced the "Dance of Official Promotion." After that, they performed "The Fairy Brings a Boy" and "Golden Seal."

Now it had been raining heavily for two days and, although the rain had stopped, the ground was still wet; so the players in their new boots had to make a detour as they entered from the courtyard. After the first three items an actor with a list of plays from which to choose went up to Chu's table and knelt down. A servant, who had just brought in the first bowl of boiled birds' nests, told the actor to stand up. He did so, but just as he was presenting the list of plays — bang! — something dropped from the ceiling straight into the bowl, knocking it over and splashing the scalding soup into his face and over the table. It was a rat which had slipped from the rafters! The hot soup gave it such a fright that it knocked over the bowl as it scuttled for safety, jumping on the bridegroom's knee and smearing his red silk official gown with grease. All present were aghast. They hastily removed the dish, wiped the table clean and brought the bridegroom another gown into which to change.

Chu Hsien-fu modestly declined to choose a play; but after much discussion they settled on "Three Generations' Glory." Then the actor took his list away.

When they had finished several cups of wine and two courses, it was time to serve soup. Now the cook was a countryman who was standing in hobnailed shoes in the courtyard enjoying the plays as he held the tray with six bowls of soup. The servant had taken four of his bowls away, and there were still two left. But at the sight of an actor singing and posturing as a singsong girl, the cook was so carried away that he forgot all else, thought all the soup had been served and let the tray down to pour off any slops. The two bowls were smashed, and all the soup spilt. Losing his head, the cook bent down to mop up the soup, but two dogs got there before him and started licking it up. Furious, the cook kicked with all his might at the dogs. In his haste, however, he missed the dogs and one of his hobnailed shoes flew off ten feet into the air.

Now Chen Ho-fu happened to be sitting at the first table on the left, where two plates of food had been served: one plate of pork dumplings, the other of dumplings stuffed with goose fat and sugar. These dumplings were steaming hot and there was another bowl of soup before him. He was just raising his chopsticks to his mouth when something black hurtled from behind the table to smash the two plates of sweetmeats. And as Chen Ho-fu jumped up in a fright, he caught the bowl of soup with his sleeve and overturned it, so that it slopped all over the table. Everybody present was taken aback.

Mr. Lu was extremely put out, knowing this was most inauspicious; but he could not very well say anything. Instead, he called his steward and cursed him under his breath.

"What do you all think you are doing?" he hissed. "Idiots, to tell a fool like that to carry in the dishes! When the wedding is over, I shall punish you properly."

In this confusion the opera came to an end. The servants took candles to light Chu Hsien-fu to his bridal chamber, while the other guests changed their seats to watch more operas until it was dawn.

The following day Chu Hsien-fu went to the hall to thank his father- and mother-in-law and feasted with them. After this he returned to his chamber, where wine was served again and husband and wife feasted together. By this time Miss Lu had changed out of her ceremonial dress into an ordinary gown, and when Chu looked at her closely he saw that her beauty would put the flowers to shame. She had three or four slave girls and nurses to wait on her, as well as two maids called Tsai-ping and Shuang-hung, both of whom were exceedingly pretty too. Chu Hsien-fu felt as if he were in paradise.

But to know what followed, you must read the next chapter.

# CHAPTER 11

Chu Hsien-fu's wife  
embarrasses him by asking  
him for an essay, and  
Instructor Yang  
recommends a man of  
worth to the prime  
minister's household

WHEN Chu Hsien-fu married Mr. Lu's daughter, even before he realized how accomplished she was, he was almost bowled over by her beauty. She was not one of the usual run of accomplished young ladies, however; for her father, having no son, had brought her up as if she were a boy. When she was five or six he had engaged a tutor to teach her the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics*,\* so that by the time she was twelve she could expound the classics and read essays, having thoroughly mastered the works of Wang Shou-hsi. She had also learned to write the *paku* essays with their divisions into eight paragraphs: "broaching the theme," "advancing the theme," "embarking on the subject," "the first strand," "the central strand," and so forth. Her tutor was paid as highly as if he were teaching a boy, and he supervised her studies just as strictly. She was an intelligent girl with a good memory. By this time she had read all the works of Wang Shou-hsi, Tang Shun-chih, Chu

\* The *Four Books* were *The Analects of Confucius*, *Mencius*, *The Great Learning*, and *The Doctrine of the Mean*. The *Five Classics* were the *Book of Songs*, *Book of History*, *Book of Changes*, *Book of Rites*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. All these were important Confucian classics.

Ching-chun, Hsueh Ying-chi and other famous essayists as well as the examination compositions from the chief provincial examinations, and could recite over three thousand essays. Her own compositions were logical, concise, and elegant; and her father often declared with a sigh that, had she been a boy, she would have sailed through all the examinations.

Whenever the compiler had leisure, he would tell his daughter: "If you write *paku* essays well, then whatever literary form you use—and this applies even to lyrics or descriptive poems—you will express yourself forcefully and exactly. If, however, you cannot write *paku* essays well, then all your writing will be unorthodox and third-rate."

Miss Lu took her father's instructions to heart. Her dressing-table and embroidery-stand were stacked with essays, and every day she annotated and punctuated a few. As for the poems, odes, elegies and songs that were sent her, she did not even glance at them, giving the various anthologies of poetry in the house to her maids to read, and occasionally asking them to compose a few verses for fun.

Now Miss Lu and Master Chu appeared an ideal couple, perfectly matched as regards family status, appearance and accomplishments. She took it for granted that her husband had completed his studies and would soon pass the metropolitan and palace examinations; yet, even after they had been married for nearly two weeks, he still paid not the slightest attention to the essays which filled her room.

"Of course, he must know all these by heart," she thought. "And he is newly married; he wants to enjoy himself and thinks this is no time for study."

A few days later her husband, returning from a feast, took from his sleeve a volume of poems to declaim by the lamp, and invited his wife to sit beside him and read with him. Too shy at the time to remonstrate, she forced herself to look at the poems for an hour until it was time to sleep. The next day, however, she could bear it no longer; and, knowing that her husband was in the front library, she took a piece of red paper and wrote down an essay subject: "When a man purges himself of error, his family will be well governed."

Then she called Tsai-ping and said to her: "Take this to the young master and say that my father requests him to write an essay for our edification."

Chu Hsien-fu laughed when he received this message.

"This is hardly in my line," he said. "Besides, not having been a month yet in your honourable house, I would prefer to write something more cultured. I really have not the patience to write these common compositions."

He thought this would impress his brilliant young wife, not realizing that this was just the sort of talk she disliked most.

That evening, when the nurse went in to see her young mistress, she found her frowning, sighing and in tears.

"Why, miss?" exclaimed the nurse. "You have just had the luck to marry a good husband; whatever is the matter with you?"

The girl told her what had happened that day.

"I thought he had already completed his studies and would soon pass the metropolitan examinations," she concluded. "Who could have imagined this? My whole life is ruined!"

The nurse reasoned with her for a little, until Chu Hsien-fu came in, to be treated rather coldly by his wife. Knowing what had caused this aloofness, he felt a twinge of shame; but neither of them liked to say anything. After this, they were not on the best of terms and she was very unhappy. But if she raised the question of the examinations, her husband would not reply; and if she insisted, he criticized her as worldly. So she became more and more depressed, until a frown never left her face.

"Don't be such a foolish girl," urged her mother when she knew this. "I think your husband is already very accomplished; didn't your father like him because he was a brilliant young scholar?"

"Listen, mother, do you know of anyone, past or present, who is entitled to be called a brilliant young scholar without having passed the examinations?" As she spoke she began to grow angry again.

"You are a married woman now," said Mrs. Lu and the nurse. "So don't carry on like this. Besides, you both come from such well-to-do families that even if your husband doesn't become an official you will lack for nothing as long as you live."

"Good sons don't live on their inheritance; good daughters don't wear clothes from their own homes after they marry. I believe in a man making his own way. Only a good-for-nothing would let his grandfather support him."

"Well," said her mother, "even so, your only course is to win him round gradually. You can't hurry him."

"Even if the young master can't pass," said the nurse, "you will have a son who can learn from you from the beginning instead of following his father's example. With a good teacher like you right in the family he will surely turn out to be a Number One Palace



Graduate. He will reflect such credit on you that you can be sure of receiving a title."

At this, both the nurse and the mother began to laugh; but the young wife sighed and said no more.

When knowledge of this came to Mr. Lu's ears, he also set two composition subjects for his son-in-law, and Chu had to make shift as best he could to write two essays. But when the compiler read them, he discovered that they were full of words and phrases pillaged from poems, a line here resembling Chu Yuan's *Lament* and a line there reminiscent of the early philosophers. They were not proper essays at all. This was a great disappointment to Mr. Lu too; but he could not very well say anything. Mrs. Lu, however, doted on her son-in-law as if he were her own flesh and blood.

Soon it was the end of the year, and after New Year Chu Hsien-fu went home to pay his respects to his grandfather and mother. On the twelfth of the first month, after his return, the Lou brothers invited him to dine with them. When the young man arrived, they took him into the library and inquired after Prefect Chu's health.

"There are no other guests today," they said. "But during the New Year festival we wanted to invite you to drink a few cups of wine with us."

They had barely sat down, however, when the gate-keeper came in.

"Chou Chi-fu the grave-keeper has come," he announced.

The two brothers had been busy for over a month arranging Chu Hsien-fu's wedding, and when that was over they had started making preparations for New Year, with the result that they had forgotten all about Yang Chih-chung. Now the arrival of Chou Chi-fu suddenly reminded them of him.

Old Chou was invited in, and the two brothers and Chu Hsien-fu went to the guest hall. They found the old man wearing a new felt cap, a padded gown of thick blue cloth, and warm shoes. His son was carrying a big cloth bag full of fried rice and dried bean-curd. When they came in and put down the bag, the two brothers greeted them.

"We are glad to see you, Chi-fu," they said. "But there was no need to bring all these presents, which it is difficult for us to refuse."

"When you say that, young masters," said Chou Chi-fu, "I could die of shame. These are only country products for you to give your servants."

Attendants were ordered to take in the presents, and Chou Erh was invited to sit outside while Chou Chi-fu was asked into the

library. Introduced to Master Chu, he asked after his grandfather.

"I met your grandfather that day twenty-seven years ago when our old master died here," he said. "Well, well, we all have to grow old! Is your grandfather's hair white too?"

"His hair has been white for three or four years."

Chou Chi-fu would not sit down above Chu until Lou Feng insisted. "He is our nephew and you are an old man," said Lou Feng. "You must take the place of honour."

First they had a meal and then, while fresh dishes were brought in and wine was poured, the brothers described their two attempts to call on Yang Chih-chung.

"Of course, he couldn't know this," said Chou Chi-fu. "I have been living in East Village for the last few months, so there was no one to tell Mr. Yang. But he is as honest a fellow as you could find: he would never put on airs and deliberately avoid anyone. He is one of the most friendly people I know, and if he realized that it was you two gentlemen who had called on him, he would travel all night to see you. Tomorrow I will go back to tell him, and bring him here to pay his respects."

"Wait till after the Lantern Festival," said Lou Chan. "On the fifteenth you can go out with our nephew to watch the lanterns, and on the seventeenth or eighteenth we will call a boat and go with you to Mr. Yang's house. It is more fitting for us to call on him first."

"That's even better," said Chou Chi-fu.

That night after the feast, they sent Chu Hsien-fu back to the Lu family and kept Chou Chi-fu in the library.

The next day was the date for trying out the lanterns, and in the main hall they hung two huge pearl lanterns from the palace, which had been presented to the Lou family by Emperor Cheng Hua. These lanterns were the work of extremely skilful court craftsmen, and Chou Chi-fu called his son to look at them as a treat. On the fourteenth he sent Chou Erh home.

"After the Lantern Festival I shall come with the Lou gentlemen to New Market, and we shall call at your sister's house," he told him. "I shall not be home till after the twentieth. You go home first."

Chou Erh did as he was told.

On the evening of the Lantern Festival Chu Hsien-fu was dining at home with his mother-in-law and wife when a message came from the Lou brothers asking him over to drink with them before going out to see the lanterns. In front of the prefect's yamen was an enormous lantern in the form of a sea monster bearing a moun-

tain on its back, and celebrations were taking place in all the temples and shrines to the accompaniment of cymbals and drums. Men and women alike had come out to enjoy the lanterns and the moon, and the authorities allowed the revelries to last till late into the night.

The next morning Chou Chi-fu told the Lou brothers: "I will go on ahead to my daughter's house in New Market and meet you there on the eighteenth, to go with you to see Mr. Yang."

The two brothers agreed, and saw him out.

Chou Chi-fu boarded a boat bound for New Market. There his daughter welcomed him, kowtowing because it was just after New Year, and gave him a feast. On the eighteenth, Chou Chi-fu decided to go to Yang Chih-chung's house to wait for the Lou brothers, saying to himself: "Mr. Yang is very hard up: how can he entertain our young gentlemen?" So he asked his daughter for a chicken, and went to the market to buy three carries of meat, a bottle of wine and various vegetables. Then, borrowing a small boat from a neighbour, the old man had all his purchases put aboard and rowed to where Yang Chih-chung lived. He moored the boat by the bank, and walked up to Yang's door to knock. Presently the door was opened and Yang Chih-chung came out holding a bronze urn which he was rubbing vigorously with a handkerchief. When he saw that it was Chou Chi-fu, he put down the urn and they greeted each other. Then Chou Chi-fu carried over the provisions from his boat.

"Why have you brought all this wine and meat here, Mr. Chou?" demanded Yang in surprise. "I presumed too much on your generosity in the past; yet you are still so good to me."

"Take it, sir," said Chou Chi-fu. "This is only poor stuff, and it's not for you but to entertain two honourable guests here. Give this chicken and meat to your wife and tell her to cook them well; then I'll tell you who your visitors are."

Putting his hands in his sleeves, Yang Chih-chung said with a laugh: "I don't have to tell you, Mr. Chou. Since I came out of gaol last year we've had nothing in the house, and many's the day we've eaten only a bowl of gruel. But on New Year's Eve that fellow Wang who keeps a pawnshop in the village remembered this favourite little urn of mine and offered me twenty-four taels of silver for it, wanting to take advantage of the fact that we had no rice or fuel for the festival. I told him: 'If you want this urn of mine, you must pay three hundred taels of silver for it, not a cent less. I should want a hundred taels just to pawn it to you for half a year.. The few taels you have offered are not even enough to buy

charcoal for this urn.' Then he took the money back — the dog — and that night we had to go without rice and fuel after all. So my old woman and I lighted a candle and I fondled this urn all night: that's how we passed New Year. Look at the colour of that patina! Today, since there was no rice again for lunch, I was amusing myself with this urn to while away the time, never expecting to see you. Now we have wine and meat, but there is no rice."

"That can be remedied," said Chou Chi-fu. And taking out his purse he gave Yang twenty cents of silver.

"Quickly ask someone to go and buy several measures of rice," he said. "Then we can sit down and talk."

Yang Chih-chung accepted the silver and ordered the old servant to take a container to the market as quickly as possible for rice. When she had bought it she went to the kitchen to prepare the meal. Then Yang closed the door and sat down.

"Who are the honourable guests you said were coming today?" he asked.

"Sir, after your trouble in the salt shop, how did you get out of the district gaol?"

"As a matter of fact, I don't know. When the magistrate suddenly released me, I asked at the yamen gate and was told a certain Mr. Tsin had acted as my guarantor. I thought hard, but I didn't know anyone called Tsin. Do you have any inkling what it is all about?"

"It wasn't anyone called Tsin! That man Tsin is a steward under Mr. Lou Feng, the third of the Lou brothers of the prime minister's house. The two Lou gentlemen heard of your great reputation when they visited me, and when they went back to the city sent seven hundred taels of silver to the district treasury and told Tsin to act as guarantor. After you returned they came twice to call on you — didn't you know?"

Yang Chih-chung suddenly realized what had happened.

"Yes! Yes!" he cried. "That old maid of ours mixed things up. The first time, when I came back from watching people fishing, she said: 'Some man called Liu came from the city to see you.' I thought it must be that runner Liu, so I didn't want to meet him. And the next time, when I came back another evening, she said: 'That man Liu was here again today, but I sent him about his business.' And that was the last I heard of him. Of course, it wasn't Liu but Lou! But how could I guess it was the Lou family? I thought it was the runner from the yamen."

"A man who has been bitten by a poisonous snake will be frightened if he dreams of a rope three years after!" said Chou Chi-

fu. "Because your lawsuit dragged on for a year, you imagined it must be the runner. I went on the twelfth of this month to pay my respects to the Lou gentlemen, and the two masters mentioned you and asked me to come with them to your house today. But I didn't want you to be caught unprepared, so I brought a few things along to act as host for you. Is that all right?"

"Since the two gentlemen have done me such a favour, I ought to go to the city to call on them. Why did you trouble them to come out here again?"

"Since they have decided to come, there is no need for you to call on them first. Just wait for them here."

After they had talked for some time, Yang Chih-chung made tea; and as they were drinking they heard knocking at the door.

"The young gentlemen have arrived," said Chou Chi-fu. "Hurry up and open the door."

As soon as the door opened, however, a man burst in roaring drunk, who fell down, staggered to his feet, rubbed his head and rushed inside. Yang saw that it was his second son. After gambling and losing in the market, he had got drunk and decided to come home and ask his mother for more money so that he might go out and gamble again. He had charged straight in.

"You drunken beast!" cried Yang Chih-chung. "Where are you going? Come and greet Mr. Chou."

Reeling tipsily, the young man made his bow, then disappeared into the kitchen. The chicken and pork simmering in one pan set his mouth watering; and he saw a pan of good rice, too, and a bottle of wine. Not troubling to ask where this feast had come from, he lifted the lid of the pan to get at the meat. His mother slammed the lid on again.

"Greedy pig!" cried Yang Chih-chung. "This food was brought by somebody else, and we're keeping it for guests."

Do you think his son would listen? Dodging tipsily about, he kept trying to grab something to eat. And when his father swore at him, he glared and answered back. Losing his temper, Yang snatched up a poker to drive him out, while Chou Chi-fu tried to restrain the young man by saying: "This wine and food are being kept for the gentlemen of the Lou family."

Dolt as he was, and drunk into the bargain, when Yang's son heard the name Lou, he dared not misbehave. And his mother, seeing that he was sobering up, smuggled him a leg of chicken and a big bowlful of rice and soup. When he had finished this, he flung himself on his bed and slept.

Only at sunset did the Lou brothers arrive, accompanied by Chu Hsien-fu. Old Chou and Yang Chih-chung went out to welcome them and ushered them in to the small room which had three rickety bamboo chairs on each side and a desk in the middle. On the wall hung a scroll inscribed with Chu Pai-fu's maxims on regulating the household, flanked with two strips of paper on which were written: "Three tumble-down rooms, one simple fellow." Above these was pasted an official announcement: "This is to inform you that the master of your house, Yang Chih-chung, has been appointed instructor for Chu yang County, Huaian Prefecture." But before they had time to read it through, Yang Chih-chung stepped forward to ask them to be seated. He himself went into the kitchen to fetch the tea tray which he offered to each of his guests.

When they had drunk the tea and exchanged the usual compliments, Lou Feng pointed to the announcement.

"May I ask if this is recent news?" he inquired.

"It dates from three years ago," said Yang, "before I'll luck overtook me. I happened to become a salaried licentiate; but although I took the next examination sixteen or seventeen times, I failed to pass it. I was offered the post of instructor when I was growing old; but since it involved making reports to the superintendent and humbling myself to him I felt it would be too much for my self-respect, and excused myself on grounds of ill health. Then I had a great deal of trouble trying to get a medical certificate from the magistrate; and I had not resigned long when I was falsely accused by a money-grubber! So it seemed to me I should have done better to have accepted that post and gone to Chu yang, for then I should not have been imprisoned. If you two gentlemen had not gone out of your way to help me, I should probably have died in prison. How can I ever repay my debt of gratitude?"

"Why mention such a trifle?" asked Lou Feng. "When I hear how you resigned your post, sir, I am even more impressed by your lofty character and firm virtue."

"Friends should put their property at each other's disposal," said Lou Chan. "What we did is not worth mentioning. We are only sorry that we heard of this so late, and were not able to come to your assistance earlier."

When Yang heard how they spoke, he felt even greater admiration for them and exchanged some courtesies with Chu Hsien-fu.

Then Chou Chi-fu said: "Young masters, you have come a long way and must be hungry."

"A humble meal is already prepared," said Yang. "Please take seats in the back room." He invited them into a thatched hut which

he had built as a diminutive library. It overlooked a tiny courtyard planted with several plum trees, a few twigs of which were already in blossom, since the last three or four days had been warm. The walls were covered with poems and pictures, a couplet in the middle reading:

*At ease I inhale the sweet plum blossom by my window.  
Let others pluck laurel in the moon and dance.*

The two brothers could not repress a sigh of admiration, feeling as if they had wandered into fairyland.

When Yang had brought in the chicken, pork, wine and rice, they drank several cups of wine, then ate the rice. After that the table was cleared, tea was brewed and they began to talk freely. Mention of the deaf old crone's jumbled account of the Lou brothers' two calls set them all laughing heartily. The two brothers wanted to invite Yang Chih-chung to their house for a few days; but he declined.

"There are some mundane matters to attend to during New Year," he said. "However, in three or four days I shall count it a great honour to drink wine in your distinguished house."

They talked until the evening, when moonlight flooded the window and the sprays of plum blossom seemed to be painted on the window paper. The two brothers could hardly tear themselves away.

"I should invite you gentlemen to stay in my humble cottage," said Yang Chih-chung, "but I fear my poor accommodation might inconvenience you."

Then, taking their hands, he escorted the Lou brothers and Chu through the moonlight to their boat, after which he and Chou Chi-fu went back.

As soon as the two brothers and Chu Hsien-fu arrived home, the gate-keeper told them: "Mr. Lu has important business and asks Master Chu to go back. He has sent three messengers."

Chu Hsien-fu hurried home, where his mother-in-law told him that his refusal to study for the examinations had made her husband so angry that he had talked of taking a concubine so that he might have a son who would study and continue the family tradition. When she told Mr. Lu that he was too old and tried to dissuade him, he had become very angry. The previous evening he had fallen down and had a stroke, and now he was half paralysed, his mouth and eyes crooked. Tears were welling from his daughter's eyes as she sat beside him, sighing.

There was nothing the young man could do but hurry to the library to wait on his father-in-law. He found Chen Ho-fu there feeling the patient's pulse.

"Your pulse is rather feeble, sir," Chen Ho-fu told Mr. Lu. "The lungs control the breath, and the weakness here shows that you have a little phlegm. This is due to the fact that, though you have retired, like the good, loyal official you are, you still long to go back to court; and constant worry and depression have brought about this illness. The best way to cure it is by regulating your breath to get rid of the phlegm. I have observed that physicians nowadays often consider pinellia rather hot; thus when they treat cases of phlegm they use hermodactyl. Actually, hermodactyl is not efficacious in cases of phlegm. What you need is a tonic decoction composed of ginseng, atracylis ovata, pachyma cocos, dried liquorice root, ginger and dates. That will ease your kidneys so that the fiery humour does not rise easily; and then the illness will be cured."

Chen Ho-fu made out a prescription and, after taking four or five doses, Mr. Lu's mouth regained its normal shape although his tongue remained swollen. When Chen Ho-fu examined his patient again, he changed his treatment, prescribing certain pills and drugs efficacious against paralysis, until gradually Mr. Lu recovered. Chu Hsien-fu tended his father-in-law for more than ten days, during which time he had no proper rest.

One day when Mr. Lu was having an afternoon nap, Chu went to the Lou family where, hearing Yang Chih-chung's booming voice in the library, he knew that his uncle's guest had arrived. He went in to greet Mr. Yang and they sat down together.

"I was just saying," resumed Yang Chih-chung, "that since you two gentlemen admire true merit so much, although I am not worthy of your notice, I have a friend living in the hills in Hsiaoshan County who is a remarkable genius and a wonderful scholar. One might truly say of him: In retirement he would be a great scholar; and in office he could be the councillor of kings. Would you like to meet him?"

Marvelling, the two brothers asked: "Who is this remarkable man?"

Then, crossing his fingers, Yang told them his friend's name. But to know who this man was, you must read the next chapter.