

Wang Chao said, "General Pan lost his jade rosary—you wouldn't know about this, would you?"

The young woman said with a slight smile, "How would I know about that?"

Wang Chao suspected that she was not inclined to be secretive and said, "If you, niece, happen to recover it, there is a generous rewards to be had."

The woman said, "Please do not speak of this to others. I happened to be playing around with some friends . . . I meant to return it, but have been procrastinating and not yet taken the time to do it. Tomorrow at dawn, wait for me, uncle, at the courtyard of the Ci'en Monastery pagoda; I know that someone has stored the rosary there."

Chao went there as agreed, and soon she too arrived. At the time, the monastery's outer gate had just opened and the door to the pagoda was still locked. She told Chao, "In a moment, look up toward the top of the pagoda and you will see something." She dashed off right after she said this, swift as a bird in flight. In a flash she was atop the pagoda's finial and was waving at Wang Chao. Just as suddenly, she came down carrying the rosary, and told him, "Now you can return it, but I have no wish for the reward."

Chao visited General Pan and returned the rosary, describing everything. He wanted to privately give her the reward of gold, jade, and silk. But the next day when he went to visit her, there was nothing but an empty room.

Supervising Secretary Feng Jian 馮緘 heard that the capital had its share of denizens of chivalrous daring.³² When he became the Mayor, he privately sought out these kinds of stories from those around him, and Wang Chao told him this story in full. What General Pan said exactly matched Wang Chao's account.

—L. Feng

32. Official histories indicate that Feng Jian was active during the reign of Emperor Xuānzong 宣宗 (r. 846–859).

Further Readings

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"The Female Slave of Li Fu" 李福女奴

Master of the Jade Spring (Yüquanzi 玉泉子) (author unknown)

Introduction

This tale treats the theme of the hen-pecked husband and his shrewish wife. This theme has a long history in Chinese literature. Accounts of jealous empresses or concubines were first recorded during the Han dynasty, and the first known collection of anecdotes exclusively treating this theme, *The Record of Jealous Women* (*Du ji* 妒記), was compiled in the fifth century. Interest in the subject continued into the Tang dynasty. The sixth-century encyclopedia, the *Collection of Literature Arranged by Categories* (*Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚), includes a category on jealous women, and the *Taiping guangji* includes a chapter devoted entirely to tales treating this theme.

Despite the ribald humor of this particular tale, male anxiety over female jealousy seems not to have been uncommon, especially given the norm, at least among elite men, of using maids for their own sexual pleasure. Wives might demand when getting married, for example, that the husband send away any concubines he may have had before their marriage. They might also, as in this tale, intimidate their spouses to the point where they feared to act on their desires. It is perhaps unsurprising

then that we find instances of husbands praising their wives' lack of jealousy in the tomb epitaphs they wrote for them.

The punch line of this tale involves the protagonist, Li Fu, being treated for fictional abdominal pains by having to drink his son's urine. This treatment was not just an arbitrary punishment. Traditional Chinese *materia medica* included many different human body parts—hair, fingernails, or bones—or bodily fluids—urine, menstrual blood, or seminal fluid—to treat a variety of ailments. Urine in particular, sometimes euphemistically referred to as “the ale of reincarnation” (*lunhui jiu* 輪回酒) or the “decoction of returning to the source” (*huanyuan tang* 還元湯), was primarily used to treat chronic cough, breathlessness, and hoarseness, as well as ailments of the digestive tract. For these purposes, a prepubescent boys' urine was considered to be particularly efficacious.

Li Fu was a historical person, the younger brother of the renowned minister Li Shi 李石 (ninth century). He passed the Presented Scholar examinations in 834 and served in a number of official positions. Based on the description of his career in his biography in the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書, the tale seems to be set in the Dazhong 大中 reign period (847–860).

Translation

Li Fu's wife, Madame Pei 裴氏, was very jealous by nature. Although he had quite a few concubines, Fu had never once dared indulge himself. When he was the Provincial Governor of Huatai 滑臺, someone gave him a female slave. Fu wished to take her for himself but had not yet succeeded. One day, he took advantage of a chance opportunity to say to his wife, “I have already reached the position of Provincial Governor, yet those who attend me are all elderly servants. Don't you think, my lady, that you have been a little shabby in your treatment of me?”

Pei said, “This is true, but how am I supposed to know with whom you want to indulge yourself?” Fu pointed out the female slave who had been presented to him, and Pei consented.

From that time on, however, the slave did no more than dress him and serve him meals. He did not get even a single opportunity for a dalliance. Fu subsequently instructed his wife's attendants, “When

Chinese
Medicine
tradition
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preparations are next made for my lady to wash her hair, someone must immediately come and inform me.” Sure enough, before long someone came to report that the lady was to wash her hair, saying, “The lady is washing her hair.” Fu promptly sent false word that he had a stomach pain and summoned his female slave.

After the female slave had gone to him, the attendants informed Pei of Fu's illness, believing that because she had only just begun washing, it would be difficult for her to finish quickly. Pei thought what they told her was true. She hurriedly took her hair out of the washing basin, and went barefoot to ask what Fu was suffering from. Since Fu had already claimed to be ill, he pretended that he could hardly bear it. Pei was extremely worried about him, so she put medicine into his son's urine and had him drink it.

The next day, the Army Supervisor and his subordinates all came to inquire after him. Fu told them everything that had happened, laughing about it and saying, “That the whole thing completely failed was just my fate. But what really kills me is that I drank down a goblet of urine for nothing!” Everyone who heard this laughed uproariously.

—A. K. Ditter

Further Readings

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