The Thrice-Promised Bride
By Chen-Chin Hsiung

The Thrice-Promised Bride is a Chinese Folk-Play. It was written last spring by Mr. Chen-Chin Hsiung, of Nangchang, China, in the course in Dramatic Composition and Production, English 31. It will be produced by The Carolina Playmakers some time this season, and will be published in the next issue of The Theatre Arts Magazine.

The Playmakers, although interested primarily in the writing and producing of Folk-Plays of North Carolina, welcome such graduate students from other sections as may be interested in writing Folk-Plays of their own locality. Last season we produced a comedy of Colorado folk characters, The Berry-Pickers, by Russel Potter, who has recently come to us from Colorado.

Mr. Hsiung came to America two years ago. He took the A.B. degree at the University of Wisconsin, and the A.M. at Cornell University. He came to Carolina primarily for advanced courses in the department of English. He expects to return to China in another year to have a part in the promotion of a New Theatre in China.

The author of The Thrice-Promised Bride informs us that this play is based on a folk-tale of old China, told in various versions, to the Chinese children to teach them the lesson of filial piety and fidelity, and to impress them with the justice of their superiors. In the incident as it actually occurred, the first candidate for the maiden's hand was faithful and consequently, won a beautiful and virtuous wife. He has been engaged to the girl, the daughter of his father's friend before either of the children was born — a form of marriage contract not uncommon in China. All the three candidates were insignificant, un- romantic, common folks, who were brought to the magistrate's court because of their rioting in the streets at the time of the interrupted wedding of " the thrice-promised bride". The excuse of long separation by war, flood, or examination is a device in the Plot of many a Chinese drama.

The author suggests that he has assigned the victory to the true lover, who, as in most Chinese plays or entertainments, usually wins out in spite of the customary adversities. He has drawn the characters from his own experience. Those of the mother and the magistrate are in ironical contrast: at the first, what seems benignant in the mother is really cruel; what seems cruel in the magistrate is really benignant in the end.

Another Chinese play Mr. Hsiung wrote in English 31 last year, The Marvelous Romance of Wen Chen Chin, will be published in the next issue of Poet Lore. Mr. Hsiung has a charming sense of humor, and writes with a naiveté of imagination and a freshness of phrase which our young American playwrights may well emulate. We predict that he will play an important part in the making of a new Chinese Drama.

Frederick H. Koch.
Professor of Dramatic Literature.

Characters:

- Wang Ta-Ming The Magistrate
- Tuan Chai His Secretary
- Chung Ting The Knight
- Li Che-Fu The Wealthy Merchant
- Wang Mei-Pao The First Matchmaker
- Han Chu-Yin The Bride
- The Bride's Mother
- Chien-Shou An Old Man
- Tu Kuang-Yang The Beggar-Scholar
- Liu Ma The Second Matchmaker
- Attendants, Musicians, Etc

Time: Long ago, many years before China became a republic.

Place: The Magistrate's Court in an interior district in Ho-Nan Province, China.

The rise of the curtain, if a proscenium curtain is used, discloses a Chinese stage. There are two doors in the rear wall; the left for entrance, the right for exit. At each door there must be a curtain exquisitely embroidered with threads of gold and bright-colored silk; on the left door curtain the figure of a dragon, and on the right, the figure of a phoenix. At the center there is a table. The audience cannot see the

table legs, for the table is curtained with a rich tapestry on which the figure of a unicorn is embroidered.

On the table are pen-rack with Chinese pens; ink-stones, one for red ink, the other for black ink; a wooden block resembling a mallet; a massive wooden official seal; two carved bamboo holders for warrant-sticks; two wooden panels with the representation of a tiger s head and with Chinese inscriptions which signify to the Chinese that the scene is unmistakably in a district court. To the right of the table is a chair where The Secretary is to sit. Behind the table is a chair for The Magistrate. On the Center wall we may have a picture of the God of the Theatre. But, lest The Magistrate should duplicate or intercept the picture, we had better have a painting of pear trees instead, under which the first Chinese actors are supposed to have practiced the histrionic arts. There is no other furniture on the stage.

The American audience is supposed to know the setting from the "write-up", in the newspaper, the "give-outs" of the press agent, from the showy posters, or, even at the last minute from the printed program. But, lest everything should fail, the American playwright has adapted the traditional Chorus and made him prepare the audience. We will keep the Chinese convention and let the principal relate the circumstances and establish a close contact between the players and audience.

We shall not introduce the property man, since he is obtrusive to some sophisticated Chinese dramatists and to all the uninitiated Western playgoers.

Music we must have. To avoid the overwhelming din of a Chinese orchestra we will invest the power of music in a single Maker-of-Sound, behind the scene.

With the overture, in which a variety of instruments are used, the left-door curtain is raised, and the Magistrate majestically enters with his attendants, one in front and one behind him. He has more than two attendants, but we must make imaginary puissance. He pauses before the door for a moment; then he walks gracefully down stage-. He strikes with both hands his mandarin gauze hat to pay a public homage to ' the emperor and to wish secretly for a promotion to higher rank. Slowly he straightens the lateral appendages of the official bonnet {These are not in the form of the Manchurian peacock feather, but in the shape of the wings of a bat, symbolizing happiness.) Carefully he makes sure of the clasp of his stiff belt which is beautifully decorated. Augustly he smoothens his imperial robe displaying the gorgeous colors and designs of his costume.

When the audience has had enough of his front elevation, he turns, and with pompous strides proceeds to the center of the stage to exhibit his profile. He waves, sweeps, and shakes his large and long sleeves to show that he has nothing there. Solemnly he walks up stage to show his gorgeously embroidered back to the audience; and then he "ascends" the dedicated chair. When the applause has abated he tells his story.

The Magistrate. My humble name is Wang Ta-Ming, the Magistrate of this Yen-Ling District of the Province of Ho-Nan. I was born in the Hain-Kien District of the Province of Kiangsi, of scholarly parents. At the age of eighteen moons my mother taught me to write with a reed in the sand. When I was yet wearing my hair like the tentacles of an octopus I studied the Four Books and the Five Classics. At the age of fifteen years I passed my first examination and won the degree of Blooming Talent. In my second decadal anniversary I was honored with the degree of Raised Man. The next leap year bestowed on me the rank of Entered Scholar. As a reward for

my literary distinction I was appointed the magistrate of this district. I hastened to this post that I might glorify my family name. I am watched by a thousand eyes and listened to by a thousand ears, for there is always an attentive audience within these four walls. It makes me shudder to think of the important duties, I have to perform.

Attendants!

[The audience's attention is directed to the attendants who have been standing on each side of the table. They

are dressed alike. They wear thin, flat-soled shoes but make up in height by their tapering felt-hats. Their costumes are of plain silk painted with the emblem of the district court. When not employed, each leans on his bamboo stave, a much abused symbol of justice]

Attendants. At your service, Your Honor.

The Magistrate. Call Mr. Secretary Tuan Chai!

[The First Attendant goes out and returns immediately with The Secretary, dressed as an old gentleman with a heavy mustache, who is ready to give the young officer his experience and opinion when needed. He carries a fan.}

The Secretary. What is your honorable wish?

The Magistrate. Have you any invention concerning the case of the interrupted wedding?

The Secretary. I have found the matchmaker, Sir. It is the plaintiff Chung Ting and the defendant Li Che-Fu be here.

The Magistrate. Strike the gong and open the court.

[The gong sounds behind the stage. The attendants pull open the imaginary doors. The Chinese drama demands that acting create scenery rather than vice-versa. The people who are yet to enter must orient themselves first, walk and step to suggest to the mind of the audience, doors and steps. The military man enters briskly with accompaniment of martial music. He is dressed in the costume of an ancient Chinese Knight, beautifully embroidered mantle, plumed bonnet, close-fitting uniform, a sword and trim, embroidered boots. He bows to The Magistrate but does not kneel.]

The Magistrate. Are you Chung Ting, the plaintiff?

Chung Ting. Yes, Sir, newly returned from my military career.

The Magistrate. What can you do besides disbanding the wedding procession of Li Che-Fu?

Chung Ting. I can shoot with a 300-pound bow and pierce a half inch willow leaf 100 steps away. I can separate and pacify two fighting bulls. However, I do not expect to win a wife by sheer force, but by prior claim.

The Magistrate. Why didn't you claim the maiden's hand until she was carried in the sedan chair to her new home?

Chung Ting. I had taken my military examination in the capital and was serving His Majesty and our country by defending the northern borders against the barbaric tribes, so I have not been able to plan to establish my own family.

The Magistrate. You didn't know your fiancée was: to be married to Li Che-Fu until the wedding day?

Chung Ting. Not until I came back with my title and my plumes and my sword.

The Magistrate. *[He takes a warrant stick and gives it to the First Attendant.]* Bring the defendant Li Che-Fu !

[The First Attendant goes out and returns presently with The Rich Merchant. Gay music accompanies the entrance. The Rich Merchant is a man about thirty years. His costume surpasses the magistrate's in richness. Like Tuan Chai, he may not use the design of dragons and clouds, but he may use the bat motif, or better, the ancient-coin motif. He wears jeweled Chinese shoes. He walks pompously into the court. As soon as he sees The Magistrate he kneels. There is no property man to assist him; such privilege is granted only to an important

personage or to a famous actor. An ordinary actor is expected to take care of his costume, however cumbersome and costly. The property mail is ubiquitously watching to see that the costumes are properly displayed, and not in the actors way. Handling any property attracts the audience ' s attention and spurs the audience' s imagination, often to the neglect of the actor. The costume is to be admired as it is worn, much like the long train formerly worn by the Western hostess. The wearer would consider any meddling on the part of another as a kind favor, or as an insult. Thus, comfortably, and without assistance, The Wealthy Merchant prostrates himself '.}

The Magistrate. Li Che-Fu, did you know this man Chung Ting?

Li Che-Fu. Not until he collided with my bridal chair, Your Honor.

The Magistrate. Did you know he was the first betrothed to the maiden of the Han family?

Li Che-Fu. *[Hesitating.]* No

The Magistrate. The truth, or the bamboo.

[The Attendants stand erect and threaten Li Che-Fu by tapping the table sides alternately with their bamboo staves.]

Li Che-Fu. *[Looks at The Secretary for advice. Tuan Chai, who has been bribed, nods his head.]* I heard that my bride, Han-Chu-Yin, had been promised to a person before either was born. The family of the boy moved away to the region bordering the barbaric tribes an was never heard of for twice eight years. My marriage was negotiated under the six ceremonies. All the village was invited to my feast. My matchmaker alone will establish the evidence.

{Tuan Chai nods repeatedly and whispers to The magistrate behind his spread fan.]

The Magistrate. Bring the matchmaker!

[The First Attendant goes out and returns with The Matchmaker. The Matchmaker is often the fool or tin- clown in the Chinese plays. She, (it might just as well be he) defies conventions, customs, all the reality and realism in the Empire and all the traditions of the world save that of the Chinese stage. She may be streak-faced and grotesquely costumed. No Chinese playwright describes this figure definitely, but grants the character all the license and the gagging which perfect or spoil the play according to which you may take it. During the clownish entrance, humorous music]

The Magistrate. Are you the Matchmaker Wang Mei-Pao by name?

Wang Mei-Pao. By profession, mister. Are you unmarried? Do you want me?

The Magistrate. Neither yourself nor your service, but your account of the families of these people.

Wang Mei-Pao. My account, to be sure. I can make the ignorant learned; the ugly beautiful; the blind see; the deaf hear; the shrew tame; in a word poverty, riches; misery, happiness; and earth, heaven. *[The Magistrate is nonplussed.*] And they all seem to believe me. They drink to my health and lift the stuff to the level of their eye-brows and live together contentedly, and harmoniously as the proverbial harp and lyre. *[The Magistrate murmurs as if not knowing what to do with her.]* Of course, if your first match is not so supremely perfect as you wish, you can depend upon me for concubines.

The Magistrate. Did you try to tie your blind and aimless cords around this merchant Li and the maiden of

the Han family?

Wang Mei-Pao. Yes, Sir, a heaven-made match. Their ingots of gold total the same figure, the gates of the two houses cope with one another. A perfect equation withal!

The Magistrate. That is enough, you may go home.

Wang Mei-Pao. *[She walks reluctantly to the right, where the retiring character may say the last word.]* I live next door to the house of Everybody. Don't forget to send for me when you want to augment your family; for I know all the superb marriageable maidens in the whole district.

[She goes out.]

The Magistrate. Bring the Han family in!

{The First Attendant', goes out and returns directly with Han Chu-Yin and her mother. The women walk down-stage , between the two flags which are painted on the outside to suggest the wheel of a carriage, and are carried by supernumeraries. The supers withdraw as the women walk to the center of the stage with an accompaniment of slow and soft music, but not with mincing steps, for foot- binding has never been universal in China. It is superfluous to comment on their costumes. They are just beautiful. The designs for the young woman's costume are gay flowers and aquatic grasses of smaller and more exquisite pattern.

The young woman is about eighteen years old. The mother is old enough to require the role of "Lao-Tan" {The married woman s part.) Like the men without a title all women must kneel before the magistrate. In a district court or in a theatre there are always enough cushions

for that purpose, the women bow down low.]

The Magistrate. Face toward the north!

[The women face him. While he is looking at the young beauty, music expressing magnetic enchantment is played. The bashful woman turns her face from the Magistrate toward the audience.]

The Magistrate. The looks that destroy cities, the looks that destroy kingdoms! Small wonder you men quarrel with each other. Are you Han-Chu-Yin, formerly promised to Chung Ting and now being born to the house of Li-Che-Fu?

[The young woman is so shy that she can hardly hold her head up or make an answer}

The Mother. Yes, my Lord, if she is nothing else.

The Magistrate. And you, her mother?

The Mother. Yes, my Lord, her only living parent.

The Magistrate. Why did you intend marrying your daughter to the Li family while there was yet an engagement contract standing between the family of Han and the family of Chung?

The Mother. Because we thought the Chung boy sacrificed himself for His Majesty, and my dear little Chu-Yin was past her peach-blooming age.

The Magistrate. You may not marry your daughter to two men. *[Softly.]* I do pity your daughter. No ceremony has yet been completed. Whom do you prefer?

The Mother. I will marry. . . .

Li Che-Fu. I offer you my golden ingots.

Chung Ting. *[Advancing.]* I have my silvery horses.

Li Che-Fu. I have built my red mansion.

Chung Ting. I have won my scarlet jacket.

Li Che-Fu. My calculation always bears fruit.

Chung Ting. My arrows always hit the bull's eye.

The Mother. What say you to these genteels, my dear Little Chu-Yin?

Han Chu-Yin. A maiden has no lips, but heart.

The Mother. Well, whom does your heart yearn to choose?

Han Chu-Yin. I may neither choose whom I like nor refuse whom I dislike. I do as my parent decides.

The Mother. The parent should be wiser, but I am not. [To The Magistrate.] Your honor is the parent of the people. Graciously decide this according to your honorable will.

The Magistrate. I am not old enough to be the maiden's parent, though my intention toward her is good.

[To the men.] You deserve — [Chung Ting takes a step toward The Magistrate; Li Che-Fu straightens himself from his knees up. The Secretary, who you remember has been bribed, whispers to The Magistrate behind his fart.] Chung Ting, you deserve not to wed this maiden after you have neglected her till her prime-plum period.

[Tuan Chai grins.]

Li Che-Fu. A Kao-Yao to the judgment!

The Magistrate. And you, Li Che-Fu, scarcely deserve to wed this maiden who might be claimed by a more worthy and younger man.

[Both Tuan Chai and Li Che-Fu are disappointed and downcast. Tuan Chai, the secretary, again whispers behind his fan. The Magistrate pays no attention.}

The Mother. But what are we to do with my daughter who is in her prime-plum period?

The Magistrate. I know what to do with your daughter. You just wait — *[Tuan Chai motions with his hands to Li Che-Fu and extends his six fingers — meaning the six ceremonies.]*

Li Che-Fu. But the six ceremonies, and the matchmaker!

The Magistrate. She confessed herself that she could make anything out of nothing. Besides, the maiden has not entered the threshold of your house.

Chung Ting. Sir, I have a reliable witness. He is a very old man. He was witness to the verbal agreement between her father and mine. It's time he should be here.

[The Old Man enters feebly. He is old enough to use a stick — even in a district court. His robes are embroidered with symbols of longevity. He wears a long white beard, not hanging from the chin, but from the upper Up and the jaws. Perhaps the flowing beard has been used to cover up the bad teeth — if there are any — should the character open his mouth to sing. Or maybe it is to save the trouble of make-up in extending the wrinkles to the lower quarter of the face. Anyway it. is very convenient to hang up this beard at the last moment so that the player can drink tea, eat refresh merits, and smoke a water pipe in the green room until his call. Our Old Man has to speak through such a heavy beard.]

The Magistrate. Who are you?

The Old Man. I am Chien Shou, friend to Senior Chung and Senior Han.

The Magistrate. Are you a go-between?

The Old Man. Not exactly.

The Magistrate. By the hoary locks on your head I conjure you to speak the truth.

The Old Man. Precisely, It was because of my old age that my two friends appointed me to be the witness to their gentlemen's agreement. One asked me to be the Fairy-Below-the-Ice, the other the Aged-Person-Under-the-Moon, namels, a formal matchmaker. Said the parents to-be to one another:" If our children be both girls, sister them; if they be both boys, brother them; if they be of opposite sex, expouse them." And I was the only witness beside the two babes that were yet in their first nine month of infancy and whom you see now here as grown-up children.

The Magistrate. Was there any document? Were any betrothal gifts exchanged?

The Old Man. Nothing but their word of honor.

The Magistrate. That is scarcely valid.

The Old Man. Hut it is negotiable. By my three score and ten years I crave the law.

The Magistrate. Old man, do you gain anything by this union?

The Old Man. Yes, the fulfilled trust of my deceased friends. The marriage was upon even their dying lips.

The Magistrate. The law is for the living.

Chung Ting. Here I am; I, too, crave the law.

The Old Man. And I am still alive, and hail and hearty.

[The Magistrate, looks inquiringly at the women.]

The Mother. The old man speaks the gospel truth through that heavy beard.

Han Chu-Yin. O, Unkind Time, that the vase of my soul be the gossip of the court! I would rather seek the Other World.

Tuan Chai. Sir, this is a very difficult case. We should see everybody get his just reward according to law.

Chung Ting. Justice!

Li Che-Fu. The law!

The Mother. Give my daughter of the tour virtues a husband. Beget me a grandson!

The Magistrate. I told you to wait until . . .

[Just at this moment The Scholar enters. He is not the God of the Machine, but a beggar, half dreaming, half starving. Still he has a princely bearing. His scholarly headwear is awry, his shoes have perfectly lovely tops but only half soles. His gentlemen-beggar coat is all patched but made up of the most elegant silks and intricate patterns, like the frostings on a frozen window-pane. There is no hole in any part of the Theatrical attire, though the outfit may have lasted the company several generations. The Scholar haughtily walks down stage, surveys the imaginary doors, steps in, goes clear to the right, makes the motion of seizing something, and strikes the imaginary drum on high. The drum sounds behind the stage.}

The Second Attendant. *[Who may have retired and be on the job just now. Unlike The First Attendant, he sulks through his duties.]* Hey you, why do you drum the drum of justice? What wrong have you suffered?

[The Scholar does not speak but hands a scroll of paper to The Second Attendant, who spreads it from left to right. The Scholar twists the paper so the right side is up. The Second Attendant extends his lazy palm to ask for wine-money, — an institution, like opium smoking, the Chinese dramatist wishes to slight. The Scholar turns his purse inside out, revealing nothing but an old book. He beats again the imaginary drum, emitting u louder sound. The First Attendant comes to them, pushes away The Second Attendant, snatches the paper and takes it to The Magistrate, who reads it in about the same short time.}

The Magistrate: Kao-Yao be praised! Still another disputant! *[To The Scholar.]* Tu Kuang-Yang, do you claim the hand of this maiden? *[Everybody is startled except the girl Han Chu-Yin, who seems to be pleased. The Scholar nods his head.}* Who is your matchmaker?

[The Scholar goes out and returns with The Second Matchmaker. Without a matchmaker a Chinese match does not strike aright. On the Chinese stage, The First Matchmaker would also play the part of The Second Matchmaker without even the outward pretense of different make-up and costumes. To furnish variety, however, we will make The Second Matchmaker old, old enough to think everything aloud in Chinese maxims. She is dressed in uncouth apparel. Much of her character and her gagging are left to the producer and the player, for even the standard acting person should not be long.}

The Second Matchmaker. I thought some nobler and more affluent person than you would want my service.

[Seeing The Magistrate and imitating his bearing.} Oh, My Lord is handsome, clever and young! Are you contemplating furnishing another golden mansion? I know the dwellers of any red chamber.

The Magistrate. Do you know this young man and this young maiden?

The Second Matchmaker. Yes, since they were weaned. They went to the primary school together. They studied the Book of Odes, the Book of Spring and Autumn The Book of Filial Piety, The Book of Great Learning, Histories of The Three Ancient Celestials and The Five Dynasties, and, well [gesticulating from the young woman to the young beggar} the other classics that have made the young ones as they are. They rode on the same bamboo-twig horse, kicked the same shuttle-cock, looked at each other in the same brass mirror, played hide-and-seek until age separated them. *[Euphuistically.]* Then the girl hides herself in the red chamber, and the boy — seeks rice on the street. He has the natural capacity of eight piculs and book learning of five wagon loads. He can compose the Five Phoenix Verse while pacing only seven steps — And they were so fond of each other. One day they said to me, "Liu Ma-Ma, we have played groom and bride; when we become man and woman we will be husband and wife, and you will be the match-maker, wont you?" And I promised them even as they promised each other.

The Magistrate. When was that?

The Second Matchmaker. It must have been in the last cycle of sixty years. Let me see. The ox-year has occurred twice, so probably it was the year of rats. The common denominator is six times ten. Ten stars form the heavenly system, and twelve creatures rule the animal kingdom. It should be about thirteen years ago.

The Magistrate. About thirteen years ago, Liu Ma.

The Second Matchmaker. Yes, and we did have a plague in that year. It was three years before the year of The Great Earthquake when the King Dragon whirled his trunk, six years before the Emperor moved south and made the people sing the song of the Call of the Deer, and nine years before Master Tu was admitted to the Circle of Bamboo Shoot and bestowed the blue-and-purple gown after the Red-Robe-Fairy had nodded his head to the civil examiner.

The Magistrate. How came he to this?

The Second Matchmaker. Because the long travel to the capital wasted and spent him as the chase does the elephant disposes of his ivory; but he has induced many a hero to come back and tell his luck and aspirations to me.

The Mother. I never knew anybody aspired after me as a mother-in-law, behind my back.

The Magistrate. What evidence have you that they were willing to be husband and wife?

The Second Matchmaker. Here is a picture of the Great Monad which they painted on a triangular lantern during the Lantern Festival. [She displays a picture of the Great Monad, a symbol of Chinese cosmogony representing the dualistic principal of man and woman, the male in the female and the female in the male, supposed to be the first Chinese philosophical document.] The one said to the other, "That black is Yin, that's you; this white is Yang, it's I," And each of us kept a copy as a testimony.

[Tu Kuang-Yang takes out a similar copy from his book and Han Chu-Yin takes out her copy from her sash. All, including The Magistrate, are surprised.]

The Magistrate. *[To The Mother.]* Do you wish this man as a son-in-law?

The Mother. My Lord, if my humble self be permitted to select the husband. —

The Magistrate. I grant the right to you to choose one, for your daughter.

The Mother. I will choose —

The Old Man. Remember the will of your departed husband.

Tuan Chai. Remember all the gossips of the villagers and the six ceremonies.

Chung Ting. My silvery horses, my scarlet jacket, and my skilled arrows.

Li Che-Fu. My golden ingots, my red mansion, and my prosperity!

Tu Kuang Yang. *[Speaking earnestly but reservedly for the first time.]* My affection for Chu-Yin.

The Mother. I think I will not choose the beggar.

Voices. No, not the beggar!

Li Che-Fu. Accept my riches!

Chung **Ting.** My glory!

The Old Man. My age!

Tuan Chai. My humble wish!

The Second Matchmaker. My word!

The Mother. I declare I never had so many suitors in my bygone days — not even a beggar.

The Magistrate. *[To Han Chu-Yin.]* Well, your mother does not approve of the beggar; what is your wish?

[Han Chu-Yjn is silent and hides her face in her sash.]

The Magistrate. Tell, me what do you choose?

Han Chu-Yin. [Distressedly.] I choose to die!

The Magistrate. In order to settle the case?

Han Chu-Yin. Yes, and quickly!

The Magistrate. Good Maiden, Kao-Yao had no more sagacity in dissolving disputes, but I fear you have made up your mind to deny yourself wealth, happiness, and po-ver which you might find in any of these people.

Han Chu-Yin. I am denied that which I value most. I wish to end it all.

The Magistrate. Is that final?

Han Chu-Yin. Yes, to eternity!

The Magistrate. May your ancestor bless you! I accord you the potion that brings eternal tranquility. *[To The Second Attendant.]* Bring forth the potion phial provided for the ancients to impart to the mortal the pleasant sleep.

[The Second Attendant goes out; this time he makes us wait for some time. Slowly he brings the potion to Han Chu-Yin. She holds it in her trembling hand; life and death struggle within her. She sighs, lingers, and sighs yet again.]

The Magistrate. Be courageous, virtuous maiden. One dies only once; the rest is peace. If you cannot lift the phial, I shall have the attendant help you.

[Han Chu-Yin lifts the phial to her quivering lips. The Mother and Tu Kuang Yang advance toward the young woman, but are held back by the attendants. She swallows the contents at a gulp and sinks to the floor.]

Han Chu-Yin. I depart. May peace be with all!

[She lies down unconscious. Everybody is petrified. Solemn music. At length The Magistrate speaks.]

The Magistrate*.* Well, she died a virtuous death. Li Che-Fu, she was almost married to you. Will you bury her in your family grave yard?

Li Che-Fu. I wanted a live housekeeper, not a dead wife. Since she had an early betrothal, the body belongs to the first betrothed.

The Magistrate. Chung Ting, your stars crossed each other before either of you was born. Now you can accept the will of your parents and your parents' parents, you may have your claim.

Chung Ting. We never saw each other and were not formally married. Let the legal husband or the true lover take the body.

The Magistrate. Tu Kuang-Yang, there is the spoils of your love. She was your promised wife. Will you take care of her?

Tu Kuang-Yang. Yes, I loved her. A promise is a promise. I will take her, and will follow her soon.

The Mother. *[Realizing what has happened, she breaks into an hysterical ay.]* You beggar! You kill-joy! You will soon pay for it!

Several Voices. The beggar! The kill-joy! Hang him! Let him pay for it!

The Mother. *[Turning to Li Che Fu.]* You yellow dog! *[To Chung Ting.]* You spotted tiger*! [To The Old Man.]* You white-whiskered monkey! *[To Tuan Chai.]* You greedy rat! *[To The Second Match-maker.]* You lowly snake!

The Magistrate. *[Striking the mallet on the table.]* Order! Order! *[The Attendants tap the table sides with their bamboo staves. The people rise to leave.]*

The Magistrate. Wait a while! The case of the thrice promised bride is not yet finished. Among you three disputants only the beggar, Tu Kuang-Yang, is a true claimant; the other two are as false as shifting sand. I hereby confiscate, Li Che-Fu, your property, and deprive you, Chung Ting, of your degrees and privileges appertaining. To you, Tu Kuang-Yang, the true lover, I bestow the golden ingots of the merchant, the horses of the Knight and the life service of Liu Ma, so that you can have feasts and rituals. And now I grant you the privilege of administering a potion to revive the unconscious but virtuous maiden from the effects of the sleeping potion I gave the maiden to be known hereafter as your legal wife.

[The Second Attendant brings the potion to Tu Kuang-Yang who ceremoniously takes it to the heap of beautiful costumery, stoops over the beautiful face and goes through the motion of administering the potion. Han Chu-Yin conies to consciousness, and is bewildered at seeing Tu Kuang-Yang bending over her.]

Han Chu-Yin. Am I dreaming, or are we meeting in the Other World?

Tu Kuang-Yang. No, my beloved, we are under the sky, on the earth, and in the Middle Kingdom.

The Mother. And before all these people! *[Gesticulating].*

The Magistrate. Han Chi-Yun, I marry you to Tu Kuang-Yang and give you wealth, happiness and love in one.

[Successively he applies black ink and red ink with the Chinese brushes and then imprints his officio, seal to the three copies of the Great Monad. The couple kow-tow o The Magistrate and then to The Mother. The Second Matchmaker and The Mother help the couple to get up, holding the pictures of The Great Monad over their heads.]

The Bridegroom. *[Facing the audience.]* Long live my wife!

Source:
Koch, Frederick H. (1923). *The thrice-promised bride*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The Carolina Playmakers, Inc. Retrieved from https://archive.org/stream/carolinamagazine19231924/carolinamagazine19231924_djvu.txt last June 5, 2017.