

*And wish to enjoy shade during the evening.  
I fear you may spawn many small devils  
Who, years later, would leave you an old withered trunk-  
behind.*

(speaks) Old Willow, follow me. Leave this world.

WILLOW SPIRIT: I am grateful for your inspired teaching. I am willing to leave this world. But I am a creature of earth and wood. I have not acquired a human form. How can I achieve the Tao of immortality?

LÜ: What you have said is right. You are indeed a creature of earth and wood and have not acquired a human body. Therefore, it would be difficult for you to achieve the Tao. Listen, old willow. You shall go to the Kuo family, the owner of a tea house beneath this tower, and will be born as a boy named Kuo Ma-erh. I shall make the white plum spirit to be born to the Ho family as a girl. Then you two shall become husband and wife. Thirty years from now, I shall return to deliver you. (hands his ink basket to the willow) Carry this for me.

WILLOW SPIRIT: (puts the basket on his head) Is this the way to carry this, Master?

LÜ: No, try again. (the willow tries a second time) Not like that. (to the audience) He is a creature of earth and wood and has not acquired a human body. How could he know? (to the willow) Watch! (Lü takes the basket into his arms and sings again)

*Hold fast to this ink basket as I do.*

WILLOW SPIRIT: (holding the basket in his arms) Is this all right? Is this the way?

LÜ: (sings) *Indeed he looks like a human being now.*

WILLOW SPIRIT: Master, how did you recognize me?

LÜ: (sings) *From the very beginning, I have watched you grow and mature.*

WILLOW SPIRIT: Master, where is your home?

LÜ: (sings) *My home is where the white clouds linger.*

WILLOW SPIRIT: Is it quiet there?

LÜ: (sings) *There no noisy cicadas bothering the setting sun.*

WILLOW SPIRIT: I will follow you and leave this world. But I can't leave this beautiful water behind.

LÜ: (sings) *This lake scenery is hardly as big as half an acre of a fragrant pond.*

WILLOW SPIRIT: Master, I think I understand now.

LÜ: (sings) *You almost became a hitching post at the long pavilion.*<sup>29</sup>

WILLOW SPIRIT: Master, may I dare to ask some questions? What do you mean by conforming to the Tao, or not conforming with the Tao?

LÜ: Ask your questions one at a time.

WILLOW SPIRIT: Master, then what is not conforming to the Tao?

LÜ: (sings) *Not conforming to the Tao is to stand on the Pa-ling Bridge.*<sup>30</sup>

WILLOW SPIRIT: Master, what do you mean by conforming to the Tao?

LÜ: (sings) *Conforming to the Tao means you should be at the roadside of Chang-t'ai.*<sup>31</sup>

(speaks) If you are willing to leave this world with me. I can teach you the one way.

WILLOW SPIRIT: Which one?

LÜ: (sings)

*I will let you learn from the pines and cypresses on the Lü cliff—to withstand the wind and frost.*<sup>32</sup>

(both exit)

## ACT II

[Thirty years later. The willow spirit has become Kuo Ma-erh and married the spirit of the plum tree, who became the daughter of the Ho family.]

KUO MA-ERH: (enters with his wife, Ho La-mei; reciting a poem)

*The Lung-t'uan and Feng-ping teas are not ordinary,*

*They are the forerunners of all flowering plants.*

*Gathered at the summit where snow was still there.*

*When brewed; they have the fragrance of Chien-hsi.*<sup>33</sup>

(speaks) I am Kuo Ma-erh. This is my wife, Ho La-mei. We operate a tea house under the Yüeh-yang Tower. Merchants and travelers coming from all directions would stop at my shop for tea. I have heard from my old man that thirty years ago this was a wine shop. But now we sell tea. We have been married for several years, but so far have no children. So, I drink all the tea left by the customers. Why? This is called "stealing secret merits to