Chapter 19. The Marriage of a Court Woman

A bitter ballad

In Chang’an I saw a palace woman taken out to be married, and I felt compelled to write this bitter ballad for her.

At fifteen I entered the royal palace,
a flower smiling in the blush of spring.
A prince chose my jade-white beauty,
we made our bed behind a golden screen.
I coaxed him to the pillow as the moon rose,
we tugged off our clothes in love’s spring wind.

Hadn’t I heard how Flying Swallow
once stole an Emperor’s favor, leaving others endless pain?
Deep sorrow can ruin a woman,
turning thick black hair to tangled frost.
One day I wasn’t pleasing,
and now my life means nothing.

I’d pawn my down-lined furs for good wine,
the embroidered dragons have flown from my dancing gowns.
I can’t bear to speak this icy pain,
so I’ll sing a song for you.
When the strings go silent, my heart breaks,
a pulse of pain throughout the night.109

怨歌行

長安見內人出嫁。令余代為怨歌行
十五入漢宮, 花顏笑春紅
君王選玉色, 侍寢金屏中
荐枕嬌夕月, 卷衣戀春風
寧知趙飛燕，奪寵恨無窮
沉憂能傷人，綠鬟成霜蓬
一朝不得意，世事徒為空
鷦鷯換美酒，舞衣罷雕龍
寒苦不忍言，為君奏絲桐
腸斷弦亦絕，悲心夜忡忡