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*Plucked-up Tales*  
Ancient Vietnamese Narratives

ALL STORIES TRANSLATED BY ERIC HENRY  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY VAN NGUYEN

## **BOOK SIX**

### **SAGAS WITH MULTIPLE EPISODES**



Ma Cô and Thôi Vy. This image relates to Story Number 1 below.

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The three tales in this section are all remarkable for the unusual luxuriance of their narrative elaboration and the wildly fantastic nature of the events related in them. – Eric Henry.

**Author: Unknown, 14th Century CE.**

**1. The Story of the Việt Well (Việt Tinh)  
(*Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái*, Narrative 12, “*Truyện Việt Tinh*  
越井傳, Story of Việt Well”)**

Thôi Vỹ 崔偉, son of Thôi Lạng 崔亮 (restorer of a Temple to the former King of the Ân (Ân Vương 殷王) at Trâu Sơn 鄒山, receives from Ma Cô, an immortal maiden, a talisman (moxa leaves) that cures people of warts, goiters, and fleshly excrescences. He cures Ứng Huyền 應玄 and Nhân Ngao 任囂, and has an affair with the latter’s daughter Phương Dung 芳容. He escapes the designs of her brother Nhân Phu 任夫, who wants to kill him. He has adventures, cures a white snake in a cave, and is finally reunited by Ma Cô with Phương Dung. – Eric Henry.

**T**he Việt Tinh Well is on Mount Trâu Sơn 鄒山 in Vù Ninh District. When, in the reign of the Third Hùng Vương King, the Ấn King raised an Army and invaded the South, he stationed his troops on Mount Trâu Sơn. Hùng Vương prayed to Lạc Long Quân for assistance. Long Quân told him to search the entire realm. If he found a person of unusual gifts, he would be able to put down the invaders. Hùng Vương then obtained the services of Đổng Thiên Vương who, sitting astride an iron horse, rode off to strike the enemy, whereupon the Ấn forces were all dispersed. The Ấn King died at the foot of the mountain and became Lord of the Underworld [Địa Phủ Quân 地府君]. The people established a Temple there where they carried out seasonal sacrifices, but over time

they gradually ceased to do this, and the Temple came to be empty and abandoned.

A compatriot of the Ân King named Thôi Lạng 崔亮, an official of the Qín Dynasty, rose to the position of Royal Officer [Ngự Sử Đại Phu 御史大夫] and often traveled to the place. Grieved at the dilapidated appearance of the Temple, he restored it and, to mark the occasion, composed a poem,

Men of old sang praises of the Ân King's deeds.  
 I came on tour to this locale last year.  
 The peak was overgrown, streams ran, no shrine was there.  
 The soul rose up, marks showed, and incense could be felt.  
 A decisive battle came about and Ân did not prevail;  
 Through all ages stands the majesty of his Việt Thường assault  
 The many clans shall from this day give service to his soul  
 So that his Kingdom down below may last and never fall.

The time was to come later when Nhâm Ngao 任囂 and Triệu Đà 越陀 campaigned to the South and stationed their forces there. They again restored the Temple and conducted handsome sacrifices in it. The Ân King was aware of the attentions being offered him and wished to repay Thôi Lạng for his deeds, so he sent the immortal damsel Ma Cô 麻姑 to search for him throughout the land. By that time, however, Thôi Lạng was dead; only his son Thôi Vỹ 崔偉 still survived.

On the day of the *shàng yuán* 上元 festival in the first month, the local people came to the Temple to celebrate it. One person made an offering of two crystal vases. Ma Cô took one in her hand to examine it, and it suddenly dropped to the ground, whereupon a shard broke off from it. The people there seized Ma Cô and demanded that she pay for the damage. Ma Cô was wearing ragged clothing so, since no one knew



that she was an immortal, they grabbed a stick with which to beat her. Seeing this, Thôi Vỹ took pity on her and removed his upper clothing so as to cover her and shield her from the blows. Having been rescued from the beating in this manner, Ma Cô asked Thôi Vỹ where he lived. Only when Thôi Vỹ mentioned the name of his father did Ma Cô realize that he was the son of Thôi Lạng. Very pleased by this, she said,

“I have nothing now with which to repay you, but later on you will be richly rewarded.”

She then presented Thôi Vỹ with a moxa branch and said,

“Keep this thing and take good care of it. Take it with you always. If you should meet anyone with a wart, the branch will infallibly cure it, and you will infallibly become wealthy and enjoy high rank.”

Thôi Vỹ took the moxa branch, having no idea that it was a medication used by immortals.

One day he went to the home of the Daoist Ứng Huyền 應玄 and saw that he had a wart on his head.

“I have a moxa brach that will cure this,” he said. “Let me get rid of it.”

Thôi Vỹ took the moxa branch and used it to treat Ứng Huyền, and the wart disappeared at once. Ứng Huyền said,

“That is a marvelous medication. I have nothing with which to repay you for this favor, but I have a close companion who also suffers from this condition, and who often says that if anyone can make him well again, he will not hesitate to bestow his entire fortune on that person. Let me bring you to see him, so you can cure his illness and so that I can repay you.”

Ứng Huyền took Thôi Vỹ to the home of Nhâm Ngao 任囂. Thôi Vỹ used his Moxa branch to treat him, and the wart subsided at once. Nhâm Ngao was overjoyed, treated Thôi Vỹ like a son, and opened a school for

him to study in. Vỹ was bright and loved to play the zither and, on seeing *Nhâm Ngao's* daughter *Phương Dung* 芳容, fell in love with her and soon had intimate relations with her. Their love for each other was very great. *Nhâm Phu* 任夫, the son of *Nhâm Ngao*, learned of the relationship and wished to bring about Vỹ's death.

At the end of the year, it became time to conduct a human sacrifice to *Xương Cuồng* 猖狂, and a victim had not yet been found. *Nhâm Phu* spoke to *Thôi Vỹ*,

“You must not go outside today. Go into the audience room to avoid the danger. You will have no cause for subsequent regret.”

Before *Thôi Vỹ* could guess his intention, *Nhâm Phu* locked him inside and told him not to leave the chamber. *Phương Dung* knew what he intended to do, so she conveyed a knife to *Thôi Vỹ* and advised him to cut his way out.

*Thôi Vỹ* stole out in the middle of the night and, wishing to go to the home of *Ứng Huyền*, began hurrying over a mountain, when he suddenly fell into a grotto. He was then surrounded on all sides by rock walls, and had no means of clambering out. Above him there was a great rock that was dripping fluid onto the flat surface of a lower rock. On this rock there was a white snake a hundred feet long. It had a yellow beak, a red maw, and silver scales. It had a great fleshy swelling where its chin might have been. On its forehead were three great characters: “*Vương Tử Xà*” 王子蛇 [“Prince Serpent”]. It crawled out to ingest the dripping fluid, then, seeing that it was all gone, it raised its head, saw Vỹ, and made ready to gulp him down. Terrified, *Thôi Vỹ* knelt down and appealed to it, as follows,

“I, your servant, was fleeing disaster and fell down here by accident. Due to hunger I have sought to eat things by stealth; I am indeed guilty of an offense. I see that Your Majesty has a chin wart. I beg

to use my moxa branch to cure it. Please pardon my offense, so I can demonstrate this insignificant skill of mine.”

The snake at once raised its head for Vỹ to treat the wart. It suddenly became apparent that that the fields outside were aflame, and a wave of fire entered the cave. Vỹ used the fire to cure the snake, and the wart disappeared at once. The snake then arched itself and crept near Vỹ, so as to invite him to mount its back. Vỹ climbed onto its back and the snake crawled out of the grotto. In about two hours, the snake reached the shore of a river. The shore was deserted; no one was going back and forth there. The snake curled its tail and returned to the grotto.

Vỹ walked on alone, lost his way, and suddenly came across a great gate with a second story, glistening red tiles, and bright lanterns, before which hung a horizontal sign with the words “Ân King City” (Yīn wáng chéng 殷王城). Vỹ sat down next to the gate. Seeing no one walk by for a long time, Vỹ at last stood up and walked through the gate into a spacious courtyard, in which he saw a pond on one side with multi-colored lotus flowers. On the bank were several ranks of willows. The way in was paved and level. Palaces adorned with jade and pearls extended horizontally on either side, and on the Palaces two golden beds with silver-patterned coverlets were placed, and on the walls were hung two iron zithers. Vỹ sauntered forward, took down a zither, and played on it for a lengthy spell.

A few hundred golden boys and silver maidens in the service of the Ân King’s Queen opened a door and came out. Terrified, Vỹ ran down to the courtyard and prostrated himself. Laughing, the Ân Queen said,

“Where have you come from, Officer Thôi?”

She sent a person down to invite him to enter the Palace, and said,

“This Temple, dedicated to our King, the King of Ân, was abandoned and disused for many years. Thanks to the efforts of the late Royal Emissary, who restored the Temple, people of the world began to resume the sacrifices formerly carried out there. The King sent Ma Cô to seek him out so he might be rewarded, but she could not find him. She found only you, young Prince, so the reward was not given. Now you have come to see the King yourself, but God on high has demanded that the Ân King wait upon him in Heaven. So, young Prince, you must wait here for his return.”

So they detained *Thôi Vỹ*, and had him eat and drink to satiety.

Suddenly, a man with a long beard and great belly appeared. Holding an official announcement, he knelt and addressed the Throne,

“On the third day of the first month, *Nhâm Ngao* was struck dead by *Xương Cuồng*.”

Having heard this, the Queen said,

“Let *Dương Quan Nhân* 羊官人 take *Thôi Vỹ* back to the world.”

*Vỹ* thanked his hosts and bade farewell. *Dương Quan* told *Thôi Vỹ* to close his eyes and sit on a fan. In a few moments he reached the mountain. *Dương Quan Nhân* changed into a stone goat standing on the mountain. Nowadays this may still be seen behind the Temple to King *Triệu Việt* 趙越 on Mount *Trâu Sơn*.

After *Vỹ* returned to the home of *Ứng Huyền*, he recounted what he had seen. On the first day of the eighth month, he went on an excursion with *Huyền* and met the immortal *Ma Cô*, who was leading by the hand a girl whom she gave as a wife to *Vỹ*. She also gave them *Long Toại* 龍燧, a clump of jade that she said was brought down to the world by a pair of birds, male and female. “This object was transmitted as a treasure from the time of the Yellow Emperor to that of Ân. In the battle that took place on Mt. *Trâu Sơn*, the Ân King took it with him and died.



The jade was buried in the earth, but emitted a ray of light that shot straight up to the sky. In the time of the Qín, battles went on without cease, and precious objects were destroyed by fire. Those who knew how to interpret *qí* knew that the Long Toại jade was still in the South. The Chinese have brought a fortune in gold, silver, and brocade to purchase it. You will be a rich man.”

It is not known where Thôi Vỹ and his wife went after being received by Ma Cô. The Well these days has been abandoned and has become dirty. The Grotto in Mount Trâu Sơn still exists. People have come to call it “Việt Tĩnh Cương” 越井崗, the “Yuè Well Ridge.”

**Author: Unknown, 14th Century CE.**

## **2. The Story of Man Nương**

**(*Lĩnh Nam Chí Quái*, Narrative 14, “Truyện Man Nương  
蠻娘傳, Story of Man Nương”)**

This tells of the miraculous birth of a daughter to Man Nương, a verbally handicapped young woman, and the Buddhist Master La Đồ Lê 羅闍黎. Đồ Lê entrusts the infant to a banyan tree, which develops miraculous powers. He gives his staff to Man Nương for her to use in finding water in times of drought, a power which leads to further miraculous events.—  
Eric Henry.

**I**n the time of the Hán Emperor Xiàndì, a City was built South of the River Binh 平江 (it is now South of the River Thiên Đức 天德). In the South, there was a Pagoda called Phúc Nam 福巖, and there was a Buddhist Teacher from the West with the name Già Là Đồ Lê 伽羅闍黎 who lived in that Pagoda, where he practised the art of standing on one foot. Young and old people of both sexes revered him, and referred to him as Tôn Sư 尊師, the Honored Master. Everyone desired to study the ways of Buddhism with him.

At that time there was a girl named Man Nương 蠻娘, whose father and mother had both died. Her family was poor, but she nevertheless sought instruction with all her heart. It was just that, since she had trouble with speech and could not chant the sutras with others, she often remained in the kitchen threshing rice and sorting vegetables, and seeing to the preparation of meals for all the monks in the Pagoda and the students from all over who came to study the Way.

In the fifth month, when the nights were short, Man Nương was hurriedly finishing up the preparation of a meal. When she had done, the monks were still chanting sutras and were not yet ready to leave off and eat stew. Man Nương sat and waited by the threshold. She started nodding and insensibly fell sound asleep. When the monks and students were done with their chanting and came to the dining room Man Nương was still sleeping in the doorway, and the Monk Đồ Lê stepped on her as he crossed into the room. Man Nương felt something move within her, and after that she was pregnant. About four months later, feeling shame, Man Nương left the Pagoda, and the Monk Đồ Lê also left and took up residence at a different Pagoda by a three-way intersection at the head of the river.

At the end of her term, Man Nương gave birth to a daughter and sought out the Monk's abode in order to turn the infant over to him. It was around midnight, and the Monk Đồ Lê was sitting beneath a banyan tree by the three-way intersection at the head of the river. Picking up the infant, he said,

“I shall deliver this disciple to the faith for you. Later, she will become a follower of the Buddha.”

The Monk Đồ Lê and Man Nương took leave of each other. Đồ Lê gave her a staff and said,



“I am giving you this staff to keep as you return. Whenever a year of drought comes, take the staff and move it back and forth on the ground. Water will flow forth and the people will be rescued.”

Man Nương gripped the staff, returned, and lived in the Pagoda as before. When a drought came, she took the staff and waved it on the ground, whereupon a spring gushed from the ground. Many were the people who relied on this.



Man Nương, the banyan tree, and the staff.

When Man Nương was more than eighty, the banyan tree inexplicably broke and was carried by the river to a place in front of the Pagoda, where it lingered and floated no further. People tried to cut it up for kindling, but their axes and adzes all broke. Then the people of the community formed a band of a hundred people to pull the tree away, but it would not move. But when Man Nương came down to the river to wash her hands, she tried pulling lightly on one of its branches, and the tree at once moved and floated. Everyone was astonished, and told Man Nương to pull

it onto the bank. Workmen were set to work on it, and they made four images of the Buddha from the tree.

When the workmen reached the place in the tree where the infant girl had been hid, that place became a sheet of very hard rock. When the workmen tried to cut into it, their metal tools all broke, so they flung the hard slab into the river, whereupon it emitted gleams of light. Only after some time did it sink into the water. The workmen all lost their lives. The people all begged to rely on Man Nương to entreat net fishermen to dive into the water and drag up the four statues so that they could be welcomed into the Buddhist grounds, and embossed with gold for worship.

The Monk Đồ Lê established the following names for the four statues: Pháp Vân 法雲, Pháp Vũ 法雨, Pháp Lôi 法雷, and Pháp Điện 發電 [Dharma Cloud, Dharma Rain, Dharma Thunder, and Dharma Lightning]. People of all ages and sexes came from everywhere and gathered at the Pagoda to gaze at them, and having gathered, performed stunts, sang, and danced. This was called a “Buddhist bathing party,” and the practice continues to this day.

**Author: Unknown, 14th Century CE.**

### **3. The Story of Hà Ô Lôi**

**(*Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái*, Narrative 21, “Truyện Hà Ô Lôi  
何烏雷傳, Story of Hà Ô Lôi”)**

This tale appears to be related to a series of events that took place in and around the Royal Court during the reign of Trần Dụ Tông (1341–1369), a ruler notorious for his devotion to music, theater, and other pleasures of sound and sense.

When the Minister Đặng Sĩ Dinh 鄧士羸 goes on a mission to China, the Spirit, Ma La 麻羅神, puts on his appearance and night after night cohabits with his wife Vũ Thị 武氏. The husband returns and



reports his wife's pregnancy to the King, who has her imprisoned. The Spirit, Ma La, appears to the King in a dream and demands the soon-to-be-born child. The King decrees that Vũ Thị is to return to Đặng, and that her son be dedicated to the Spirit. The son, Hà Ô Lôi, becomes a favorite of the King. He has black, shining skin.

One day, Ô Lôi meets the Spirit of Lã Động Tân 呂洞濱 (Lü Dòngbīn, a celebrated Táng poet, immortal, and eccentric, who was the subject of many fantastic stories) and says he desires nothing but a life of *shēngsè* 聲色, sensual pleasure. Lã Động Tân secures that destiny for him by spitting in his mouth. From then on, Hà Ô Lôi is endowed with wondrous verbal facility, though he remains illiterate.

When the King seeks unsuccessfully to gain the sexual favor of A Kim 阿金, a twenty-year-old widow of a high Official, Ô Lôi swears to make her available within a year or die in the attempt. He makes himself filthy and ugly, pretends to be a cattle herder, gains entrance to A Kim's compound by giving betel leaves and areca nuts to the gate keeper of the inner apartments, requesting that he be allowed to cut grass. He then cuts everything in the garden, including the jasmine flowers.

When the maids and servants discover this, they tie him up and detain him for questioning. No one comes forth to ransom him. He gradually becomes one of the menials in the establishment. All are enchanted by his singing. After some time, he enters the personal service of the widow. His singing makes her lovesick. They become lovers.

She asks to confer land on him, but he declines, saying that he desires only to try on a headdress embossed with gold and pearls that had been conferred upon the widow by the former Ruler. Having obtained the headdress, Ô Lôi hastens to Court and uses it to establish the widow's departure from virtue. This event gives rise to widespread comment and the composition of satirical verses.

High-ranking women continue to become his lovers due to the attractiveness of his singing. Eventually, Minh Uy Vương, the Queen's brother, kills him for having entered his house and slept with his daughter. Ô Lôi accepts his death philosophically.

Several concluding verses are written exclusively with *nôm* characters. – Eric Henry.

In the sixth year of the Thiệu Phong 紹豐 reign period under Dụ Tông 裕宗 of the Trần Dynasty, there was a person of Ma La 麻羅 Village named Đặng Sĩ Dinh 鄧士瀛. He was a Prefectural Magistrate. In obedience to an Order from the Throne, he went on a mission to China. His wife Mistress Vũ 武氏 remained at home. In the village there was a Pagoda dedicated to a Spirit named Ma La. This Spirit, night after night, transformed himself into Sĩ Dinh. His manner of standing and sitting, and the expressions on his face, were exactly like those of Sĩ Dinh, and at night he entered Mistress Vũ's room and had sexual relations with her. In the morning, he would leave and go no one knew where.

Some nights later, Mistress Vũ questioned him, saying, "You obeyed an order to go to the North as an Emissary. Why is it that you are able to return night after night, but that during the day, I don't see you?"

The Spirit replied untruthfully, saying, "The King ordered a different Official to go on the mission, and ordered me to remain in his entourage and play chess with him, without allowing me to leave. I remain attached to my marital relation with you, and so I steal away at night to satisfy the demands of love, but when morning comes, I must hurry to return, without daring to remain. The moment the rooster crows, I must go."

Mistress Vũ harbored suspicion in her heart. After a year, her husband Sĩ Dinh returned from his mission, by which time she was



pregnant and soon to give birth. Sĩ Đinh reported the matter to the King, and Mistress Vũ was imprisoned.

When night came, the King had a dream in which he saw the Spirit, which said, “I am your servant, Ma La. My wife, Mistress Vũ, is with child, but has been cast aside by Sĩ Đinh.”

Startled at this, the King awoke and, when morning came, ordered the Governor of the Prison to bring Mistress Vũ into his presence, so he could question her.

His judgement was as follows: “The wife is to be returned to Sĩ Đinh, but her child is to be turned over the spirit, Ma La.”

After three days, Mistress Vũ gave birth to a black sac. When it was torn open, an infant black as ink was revealed. When the child was thirteen, it was given the name Ô Lôi 烏雷. Though black as lacquer, his skin glistened brightly like fat. When he turned fifteen the King summoned him to Court. He was greatly cherished and so became a new guest of the Court.

One day, Ô Lôi went out for amusement and met Lã Động Tân 呂洞賓(Lǚ Dòngbīn),<sup>1</sup> who questioned him, saying,

“You are such an attractive child! Is there anything you would like to ask of me?”

Lôi answered: “The realm these days is totally at peace, and our land is free of trouble. I have no more regard for wealth and status than I do for drifting clouds. All I wish for is beauty of voice, and an appearance that will please the ears and eyes of others.”

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<sup>1</sup> Lǚ Dòngbīn, a Táng Dynasty scholar and poet and, is said to have lived for 220 years. He is one of the “Eight Immortals,” a group often depicted in sculptures and paintings, and about whom many fanciful tales are told.

Đông Tân said, “If you wish for beauty and appearance, that will cost me nothing to give you. Your name shall be remembered in the world.”

With this, he ordered Ô Lôi to open his mouth, so he could peer inside it. Ô Lôi opened his mouth. Đông Tân spat into his mouth and ordered him to swallow the spit, then flew off and disappeared.

From that time on, though illiterate, Ô Lôi was quick in speech and reasoning, and surpassed others in many areas, such as argument, poetry, dramatic song, and poetic intonation. His rich and resonant voice, as if teasing the wind and joking with the moon, like flying clouds and flowing water, delighted all his listeners, and as for women and girls, they liked his voice even more, and sought to see his face.

The King often said to his Officers that if they observed that Ô Lôi brought dishonor to the daughter of any household, they were to bring the plaintiff to Court, and he would confer a thousand strings of cash on that person, and that if anyone should kill Ô Lôi, he would have to pay a fine of ten thousand strings of cash. The King often accompanied him on his excursions.

At that time in Nhân Mục 仁睦 Village there was a Princess belonging to the Tôn Thất 宗室 Lineage whose name was A Kim 阿金. She was only twenty-three years old, but her husband had died early. Though a widow, her beauty was without parallel. The King liked her, but was unable to draw near her.

Finding this strange, the King said to Ô Lôi, “Can you find some scheme to take this Lady?”

Addressing the King, Ô Lôi said, “I am willing to do my absolute best to gain her within the space of a year. If I am not able to meet her face-to-face, that will mean that my scheme has failed, and I will be as good as dead.”

With this Ô Lôi took leave of the King. On returning home, he immediately removed his Court clothes, plunged into mud and mire, and then exposed himself to the sun and rain so that his appearance would be ugly. After that, he donned a cloth codpiece and pretended to be a stablehand in charge of horses, and held a couple of bamboo baskets, one of which held a set of areca nuts and betel vines. He, then, approached the outer gate of the Princess' residence and gave the areca nuts and betel to the Field Supervisor who guarded the gate, and asked permission to go through the gate and cut grass. The man let him in.

It was then the fifth or sixth month of the year, and flowers bloomed throughout the gardens. Ô Lôi cut all the flowers and put them into his baskets. When the widow saw that her flowers were all gone, she called upon her servants to tie up Ô Lôi and had him detained for three or four days. Then, seeing that no one came to take him back, she questioned him, saying, "What household do you work for? Why has no one come to ransom you?"

Ô Lôi said, "I am a wanderer without parents, and without a master. I generally follow roaming singers, seeking work for hire, as a means to eat. Some days ago, I saw that a Magistrate had tethered his horse to a post by the Southern Wall. The horse was hungry and had no grass to eat. The Magistrate's houseboy gave me five coppers and told me to go and cut some grass. I was delighted to get the money and went to do the cutting. I had no idea what the flowers were; I thought they were just more grass to be cut. I have nothing with which to compensate you for this loss, but I am willing to enter your household and be a slave, so as to pay my debt."

They kept him more than a month. When the Stewards and servants saw that he was hungry and thirsty, they had him share their meals. In the evenings, he would sing, and associate with the houseboys.

All the Stewards, slaves, maidservants, and their relations were entranced by his singing, and wished to listen to him without cease.

One day after sunset, the Princess, noticing that no lanterns had been extinguished, concluded that no one in her entourage was present. Enraged at this, she called her maidservants into her presence, and, intending to beat them, scolded them for abandoning their work.

The maidservants all brought their arms together in supplication and sought to explain their dereliction, "When we heard that grasscutter sing, and we were so enchanted by it that we forgot everything. Now, Princess, we can only accept our punishment, whether it be beating or dismissal."

The Princess put the matter aside and did not question them further.

It was just then the height of the summer hot season and, to appreciate it, the Princess and her maidservants sat together amid the courtyard, enjoying the breezes and gazing at the moon, finding this supremely pleasurable. Suddenly, they caught the sound of Ô Lôi singing on the other side of the Wall. The sound of his voice rose and fell as if singing a strain from heaven, quite different from any sound heard on earth. The Princess, her spirit infected by the mournful import of the singing, was more deeply attracted to it than ever, and had her maidservants bring Ô Lôi into her dwelling as a houseboy, and had him stay near her so as to give orders to him as she wished, and thus he gradually turned into an intimately close servant, and she often had him intone verses so as to banish her feelings of frustration. Ô Lôi took advantage of this to serve her even more conscientiously, running here and there to carry out tasks, and the Princess came to rely on him so deeply that he became like a cherished child to her, the object of her adoration by day, and by night standing at attention, lantern in hand, to



serve her. Sometimes she commanded him to sing, and the sound would penetrate both inside and outside the chamber, so that she fell into a melancholic state. After three or four months, her condition worsened, and her maidservants, tired out by their long-continued service to her, fell sound asleep at night, so that none of them were aware of her calls for assistance.

One day Ô Lôi came into her sick chamber to assist her, taking up a position by her side, and the Princess, unable to suppress her desire, said to him, "Since the day you came here, I have fallen ill due to your singing."

She, then, had sexual relations with Ô Lôi, and her illness gradually subsided.

From that time on their love grew ever more intense, until at last, Ô Lôi's ugly appearance ceased to be something that caused her any concern, and she wished to give him a tract of land upon which he could build his own dwelling.

Ô Lôi said, "I had no place to live, but I have now been able to meet you, a divine being in Heaven. That is already a great blessing for me. I have no desire for property, for gold or silver, or for pearls and precious things. I wish only for your headdress embossed with gold and studded with pearls, the emblem of your sovereignty. If I can just once try placing it on my head, I will close my eyes content when I die."

The headdress embossed with gold and pearls had belonged to the former Ruler, and had been given by him to the Princess so that she could wear it on ceremonial Court occasions. She now gave it without the slightest regret to Ô Lôi. Having obtained the headdress, Ô Lôi returned secretly to the Trần Court and appeared before the King. Seeing what Ô Lôi had brought, the King was pleased beyond measure, and at once demanded that the Princess present herself at Court. When she came, Ô

Lôi was standing in attendance beside beside the King, wearing the headdress.

“Do you know Ô Lôi?” the King asked the Princess.

Seeing this, the Princess was much embarrassed. Ô Lôi had a verse in Southern characters that went as follows,

Through patient striving I became a slave,  
And Earth and Heaven were bestowed on me.



Hà Ô Lôi after having fulfilled his promise to the King.

From that time on, word of the matter spread far and wide, and the daughters of noble households often spoke scornfully about it. There was a verse in Southern characters that went as follows,

The dew recounts it, though the dew remains,  
And Houses of the noble have no lack of acolytes.  
Entrancing looks and sounds give rise to wantonness,  
It's something to be pitied, but also to be scorned.

Though derisive poems like this were made, ladies still became his lovers because they could not remain indifferent to the attraction of his singing. And no one dared do him physical harm because of the Court Edict requiring that money be paid in compensation for such acts.

Later, Ô Lôi had sexual relations with the first-born daughter of Minh Uy Vương 明威王. Vương seized and imprisoned him but did not at once kill him. The next morning Minh Uy Vương came to Court and addressed the Throne as follows,

“Ô Lôi entered my house at night. It was hard to tell light and shadow apart, so I struck and killed him. I, therefore, have come to ask to pay a fee in compensation for this in whatever amount Your Highness specifies.”

The King was not aware that the killing hadn't yet occurred, so he said, “That you struck and killed him on that occasion does not matter.”

Hearing this, the Queen Huy, Từ Hoàng Hậu 徽慈皇后, who was the sister of Minh Uy Vương, held the King in respect due to his words. Minh Uy Vương returned and killed Ô Lôi. When he was about to die, Ô Lôi intoned the following poem, written in Southern characters,

To live or die is all in Heaven's hands,  
 No man is worthy of a hero's name.  
 To die for sound and sight is only right;  
 Of what importance is a death, if just?

To this he added,

“L ũ Dòngbīn once said to me, ‘Your gift of song will be equally your gain and your loss.’ That indeed has proved to be the case.”