

Meng Chiao

Impromptu

Keep away from sharp swords,
Don't go near a lovely woman.
A sharp sword too close will wound your hand,
Woman's beauty too close will wound your life.
The danger of the road is not in the distance,
Ten yards is far enough to break a wheel.
The peril of love is not in loving too often,
A single evening can leave its wound in the soul.

Poems of the Late T'ang, trans. A.C. Graham
London, Penguin Books, 1977 [1965]:67