

## CHAPTER 5 (Before Prospect Garden is constructed)

The spirit of Bao-yu wanders about in the Phantom Realm of the Great Void. The Fairy of Fearful Awakening vainly interprets for him in songs the Dream of the Red Chamber.

1 VERY SOON BLACK JADE HAD BECOME THE AVOWED FAVORITE OF THE Princess Ancestress, and was put before the other grandchildren in every respect, just like Bao-yu. These two had become as closely attached to each other as glue and lacquer and were now an inseparable pair. In the daytime they sat side by side and went about hand in hand; in the evening they stood taking a long and affectionate leave of one another and slept wall to wall.

Now this new cousin had suddenly come to the house. Although not much older than the other cousins, Precious Clasp was so polished in her manners and of such charming appearance that according to the general verdict even Black Jade was not her equal. Besides, she knew how to win the hearts of all, even the servants, by her friendly, compassionate ways, whereas Black Jade was a solitary individual and went around with her head in the air. With secret annoyance in her heart, Black Jade felt herself displaced in the general popularity by her new cousin, and her annoyance turned to resentment when she perceived that even Bao-yu was not untouched by her charm.

Bao-yu was still too immature to discriminate tactfully between an old privileged friendship and a new acquaintance; for him one cousin was the same as another. In short, Black Jade felt offended whenever he said a friendly word too much to Precious Clasp, and this led to many scenes of jealousy in the course of which she would rush weeping to her room, and in the end forgive the faithless one again and again when he would come running after her with bowed head and apologize to her with youthful impetuosity.

One day at the time of the plum blossoms Prince and Princess Chen had invited the near-by relatives to visit them in the Ningkuo palace. After the company had walked about for a while in the Garden of Assembled Perfumes, which was shimmering in the full splendor of blossomtime, they all sat down at one great table to the usual family feast, about which there is nothing special to say.

5 At the end of the meal Bao-yu felt sleepy and expressed the wish to lie down for a while. Mistress Yung, the beautiful young daughter-in-law of Prince Chen, undertook to conduct him herself to a room which she thought seemed suitable for a midday nap. It was a small, beautifully and comfortably furnished guestroom, but two mottoes which decorated one of the walls caused the boy obvious discomfort. For when he read:

For knowledge of nature and the world Do not neglect the sciences.  
For knowledge of the human heart Devote yourself to the study of history

he turned petulantly back and said: "Let us get out quickly!" His beautiful companion thereupon laughingly offered to give him her own bedroom.

"But, Mistress, the uncle cannot well sleep in the niece's bed; that would be contrary to all good form," objected a chamberwoman, who was in attendance.

"Ah, why be so prudish? The uncle is after all still a boy," replied the young woman, laughing, and leading Bao-yu, who in kinship was in fact her uncle but in age could well be her nephew, into her bedroom. As he entered he was met by a wave of delightful perfume which intoxicated his senses and melted his bones.

"Oh, it smells nice here!" he remarked with pleasure, and his pleasure increased when he saw a painting by Master T'ang Pei Hu representing someone sleeping beneath begonia branches in early spring, and read the following words written to the right and left of it:

Gentle coolness surrounds the dreamer early spring!  
The breezes which caress him fragrant as wine!

In silent admiration Bao-yu let his eyes wander round the splendid furnishings of the room. Here on the dressing table was a bronze mirror which would have done honor to the mirror palace of the Empress Wu of the T'ang dynasty. There was a magnificent flat golden dish on which the celebrated dancer "Flying Swallow" might once have danced before her Imperial lord. That splendid jewel-studded couch on a raised dais would have been worthy to adorn the bedroom of Princess Shou Yang in the Han Chang palace. The strings of pearls which hung around the couch might have been fastened there by the hand of Princess Tung Chang.

10 "What a beautiful room!" cried Bao-yu, enraptured.

"Yes, isn't it? Even spirits and genii could feel happy here," remarked his niece, smiling.

Saying this, she threw off the blossom-white bedcover with her own hand, and arranged the soft pillow embroidered with mandarin ducks, which the "Red Maiden"\* might once have clasped to her bosom as she yearned for her lover. The swarm of waiting maids and chamberwomen helped Bao-yu to undress and put him to bed on the couch; and then they all withdrew noiselessly. Pearl and three other chambermaids had to keep watch outside the bedroom door.

"Take good care that the cats do not start fighting under the window and disturb your master's rest!" Mistress Yung impressed upon them thoughtfully.

Hardly had Bao-yu shut his eyes than he felt himself carried away into a land of dreams. His beautiful niece seemed to hover in front of him and lead him to a fairy palace with walls of jasper and pillars and balustrades of ruby, surrounded by the rustling of treetops and the murmur of silver brooks.

"It's good to be here," he sighed happily in his dream. "I much prefer being here to being at home, where I am always watched and always expecting blame and scoldings from Father and Mother." His guide had disappeared in the meantime. He listened. From somewhere or other beautiful celestial singing like a woman's voice resounded in his ears. Immediately afterwards he saw a most lovely fairy appearing from behind a hill and gently floating towards him. Bao-yu raised his hands to his breast in greeting and said to her, bowing: "Sister fairy, I have lost my way. Would you be so kind as to direct me, and tell me who you are?"

15 The fairy replied: "I am the Fairy of Fearful Awakening. I live not far from here, in the Phantom Realm of the Great Void, in the Sphere of Banished Suffering, behind the Drenching Sea of Trouble, on the Heights of Liberated Spring, in the Grottoes of Everlasting Perfumes. I judge the Play of Wind and Clouds between human beings and settle the unbalanced debts of love between unhappy maidens and languishing youths. It is not chance but destiny which leads me to you today. I shall lead you to my kingdom and entertain you in my palace with a bowl of celestial tea plucked by myself and a goblet of magic wine which I have brewed. My maids shall entertain you with their magic dances and sing to you the twelve new spirit songs from 'The Dream of the Red Chamber.' Will you follow me?"

"I will," agreed Bao-yu joyfully and followed the fairy. It was not long until the fairy led him through a high stone arch, over which he read the inscription: Phantom Realm of the Great Void. On the pillars to the right and left was written :

When seeming is taken for being, being becomes seeming,  
Where nothing is taken for something, something becomes nothing.

Very shortly they passed through a palace gateway, over which was written in big letters: Sea of Lover's Grief and Heaven of the Passions, while to right and left stood written:

Passions without end, old and new,  
Swell broad as the earth, wide as the sky.  
Too late, amorous youth, languishing maid, is your repentance,  
Ah, to atone for the guilt of wind-and moon-play costs pain !

That's true, thought Bao-yu to himself, in his innocence. If only I knew what is meant by "passions old and new" and by "to atone for the guilt of wind- and moon-play." I must certainly find out through personal experience.

In making this resolution he had unconsciously invited the wicked demons of sensual agitation to come into his body and take up their abode between his heart and his diaphragm.

After passing through another gateway, they came to a row of apartments, on the closed doors of which he read strange inscriptions such as Department of Love's Folly, Department of Jealousy, Department of Morning Tears, Department of Night Sighs, Department of Spring Grief, Department of Autumn Suffering.

Bao-yu asked if he might view the different chambers. The fairy shook her head. In the apartments, she said, there were registers of the memorable destinies of numerous women and girls, of whom some had already lived and others were yet to live. To a human being like himself, with his profane eyes and his body of dust, it was not to be granted to glance into the future. "Follow me," she said. "I have something far more beautiful to show you than these tiresome registers."

20 Bao-yu followed the fairy farther into the interior of the palace, until they came to a glittering hall. His eyes were quite dazzled by the splendors which appeared before him here: walls of jasper, floors of gold mosaic, glistening panes of glass, purple curtains in front of red doors, luminous colored pillars, artistically carved roof beams, and all around gardens full of spirit plants, and marvellous flowers, and rare perfumes. While Bao-yu was still sunk in amazed contemplation, he heard the fairy call in to the hall: "Come out and greet your worthy guest!"

Immediately four elves appeared at the entrance. They wore light feather garments, lotus leaves hung from their shoulders as sleeves, their stride was a dance, their walk was a glide, a gentle radiance like autumn moonlight enveloped them. When they noticed Bao-yu, a look of disappointment crossed their flower faces, and they said reproachfully to the fairy: "We thought you were bringing Purple Pearl, for whom we have waited so long, to visit us. Why do you bring this dirty creature here instead, and allow him to soil and profane by his presence this dwelling of pure maidens?"

Bao-yu heard this with shame, and he would have liked to run away at once. He was well aware of the fact that they were right, and that in the presence of these pure beings he really seemed an insufferably dirty person. But the fairy took him kindly by the hand and said to the elves with a smile: "You do not know the why and the wherefore of my action. I really wanted to go to the Yungkuo palace today, as I had promised you, to fetch your sister, Purple Pearl. But as I was passing by the Ningkuo palace on my way there, I met the ghosts of the two ancestors of the Yungkuo and Ningkuo palaces. They implored me to take charge of their descendant Bao-yu. After a hundred years of fame and splendor their families are threatened with ruin, and among their many great-grandchildren Bao-yu is the only one who is capable of perpetuating the race in honor. It is true that he is of a somewhat peculiar and frivolous disposition, but his intellect and talents justify the greatest hopes. All he lacks is the right guidance. Therefore, they earnestly asked me to warn him of the dangers of foolishly trifling with love and following the instincts without restraint, to guard him against pitfalls and allurements and direct him on the right path. They would be grateful to me forever if I do this.

"Moved with pity, I have brought him here in order to have him learn and realize the folly of earthly sensual indulgence. Perhaps it will be possible to awaken him, so that he will take my warnings to heart for his future life, and so become proof against dangers."

When she had finished speaking she led Bao-yu into the hall. Inside, a wave of indescribably sweet perfume, such as he had never smelled before, assailed his nostrils. When he asked what the perfume came from, the fairy informed him, smiling: "In your world of dust this aromatic mixture is quite unknown. It is distilled from the manifold juices of precious young plants and rare trees which grow on holy mountains. It is called the Marrow of Gathered Perfumes."

They sat down at the table and drank a most wonderful tea, such as Bao-yu had never before tasted.

25 "What is the name of this kind of tea?" he asked.

"A thousand red drops in one mouthful," replied the fairy. "The shrub grows near the Grottoes of Everlasting Perfumes on the Heights of Liberated Spring, and its leaves are boiled in the morning dew of magic flowers and plants."

"It is a wonderful tea!" said Bao-yu approvingly, nodding his head. He looked around the room once more. His glance fell on jewel-studded lutes, precious tripods, incense vessels, old paintings, new mottoes on the walls. Nothing required for the equipment of a comfortable living room was lacking. There were even velvet dusters hanging under the windows to wipe away the dust from time to time. Then he asked the names of the elves. The fairy introduced them: Elf of Amorous Dreams, Great Mistress of Passion, Golden Maiden of Sorrowful Longing, Bodhisattva of Avenged Lovers' Rancor.

Meantime young maidservants had laid the table. They now carried in a sumptuous meal and filled amber goblets with a choice golden wine from crystal jugs.

"What is this wonderful wine?" asked Bao-yu.

30 "It is prepared from the pollen of a hundred flowers, the juices of a thousand plants, the marrow of unicorns, and the milk of the phoenix, and it is called A Thousand Delights in One Goblet."

Bao-yu did not weary of drinking the wine freely and praising it fervently. Meantime twelve dancing maidens had appeared and taken up positions in front of the table.

"To what text shall we dance?" they asked the fairy.

"To the twelve new spirit songs from 'The Dream of the Red Chamber!'" the fairy ordered.

The dancers bowed obediently and began to sing and dance to the gentle music of their twelve-stringed silver lutes and the measure of their sandalwood castanets. In order that he might understand it better, the fairy ordered a servant to hand her guest the written text of the twelve songs, and now he sat and tried to understand the meaning of the performance, listening to the music while his eyes followed the text. Yet his efforts were in vain. True, he could not escape the effect of the music, but what the text, with its many cryptic sayings and hidden allusions, might mean remained a complete mystery to him. But the melody was so exquisite and charming and so superbly performed as to bewitch the mind and intoxicate the senses, and he asked no troublesome questions in the intervals, but only listened to the music while just reading the text mechanically.

35 At last the girls had finished the long performance of the twelve songs. Actually, they were about to continue with a last refrain, but the fairy, who had noticed the sleepy indifference of her guest, signed to them to go away.

"It was all in vain," she sighed. "The fool has remained unawakened."

Bao-yu was glad that the fairy stopped the performance, and he himself hurriedly called out to the girls not to sing any more. He felt exhausted and sleepy from the meal and the abundance of wine, and asked if he might lie down for a while.

The fairy gave orders to clear away, and had Bao-yu led into one of the women's chambers. He thought he had never in his life seen such luxurious furnishings as he saw here. But a still greater surprise awaited him. He found in the room a young girl who resembled his cousin Precious Clasp in form and beauty but in expression and demeanor was the image of his cousin Black Jade. While he was still feeling quite dazed, he heard the fairy say: "Ah, how many green-windowed inner chambers in the houses of the rich and aristocratic of this world of dust are misused by frivolous youth for sinful amorous play! The reason that I take such a kindly interest in you is that you are the most inveterate amorous profligate of all time."

Bao-yu stammered, abashed: "Sister fairy, you are mistaken. It may be that I am lazy at lessons and have brought on myself deserved parental rebuke. But I am not aware that I am an amorous profligate. After all, I am still too young and I do not know what it is to be profligate in love."

40 "There are two kinds of amorous profligates, the carnal and the intellectual ones. The first strives only for physical possession; he is insatiable in his sensual desires, and regrets he cannot have all the beautiful women and girls under heaven as prey for his lusts. You do not belong to that category, but to the second. Your dissolute desire seeks the intellectual company of girls, therefore you would have been quite a suitable mate for the women's apartments of our spirit kingdom; whereas in the world of dust you will not be understood; there you will become an object of mockery and contempt. Touched by the pleadings of your two ancestors, I have led you into my kingdom, welcomed you with magic tea and fairy wine, and tried to awaken you with spirit songs. Now I present to you my younger sister, Ko Ching, so that she may share your couch tonight. The hour for your union is favorable. The joys of this bridal couch in our Phantom Realm will enable you to form an estimate of the delights of the bridal chamber in your world of dust. From today on wake up and change your former ways! Direct your mind to the wise teachings of the Masters Confucius and Mencius and resolutely tread the path of common sense."

When she had finished speaking she confided to him some further intimate information regarding the practice of the "Play of Cloud and Rain." Then she shut him into the chamber. Still quite confused and stupefied, Bao-yu followed her instructions and carried out with Ko Ching that time-honored practice of which an exhaustive description would no doubt be superfluous.

The two found so much delight in each other and had so many caressing and affectionate words to say to one another that they did not want to part the next morning. Hand in hand, they walked out of the palace and got lost wandering about. They were so engrossed in each other that they did not notice the road at all. Suddenly they found themselves in a wilderness of thorn bushes and thick brushwood and saw that wolves and tigers were their travelling companions. Then the road suddenly came to an end. They were standing on the bank of a dark rushing stream, over which no bridge led. While they were still hesitating as to where they should flee from the wild beasts which were pursuing them, they heard the warning voice of the fairy behind them, crying: "Stop! Do not go farther! Turn back!"

"Where are we?" asked Bao-yu.

"At the Witches' River," cried the fairy. "It is a thousand fathoms deep and runs a thousand li in zigzag windings. No boat and no boatman can find the way through this labyrinthine stream. Only the old ferryman Mu Ku Chi would be able to take you across in his raft. But he does not do this for gold or silver; he does it only if Destiny commands him. If he does not help you, then you are lost, and all my trouble will have been in vain. . . ." She had not finished speaking when a sound like a peal of thunder came from the Witches' River, and a swarm of night demons and river devils rose up from the river with a roaring sound and came fluttering up to Bao-yu shrieking terribly, to seize him and drag him into the depths of the river. Cold sweat dripped from his body like rain, and in his terror he cried out: "Ko Ching, save me!"

45 Thereupon he woke up from his dream. The maid Pearl was sitting on the bed with the three other maids, and she clasped him tenderly to her with comforting words: "Do not be afraid, Bao-yu! We are here!"

Bao-yu had cried out so loudly in his dream that his cry was heard outside by his niece, the beautiful Mistress Yung. "No one in the whole house knows my childhood name," she said to herself surprised. "How is it that he called me by my childhood name in his dream?"

She was not able to explain it, but she did not dare to ask the dreamer.

## CHAPTER 50 [Translation which condense the final chapters into one]

Bao-yu passes the examination with honors and renounces the red dust of the world. Shih Ying and Yu Tsun meet once more and conclude the story of the stone.

1 BAO YU HAD RECOVERED RAPIDLY AFTER HIS LONG SPELL OF UNCONsciousness and to everyone's joy was fully restored to health. The coffin-maker did not need to exert himself now, and Musk was able for the time being to give up with an easy mind her sublime resolve to follow Mandarin Duck's example. Happily, in view of the favorable turn of events, nobody thought of reproaching her afterwards.

As Mr. Cheng was now relieved of worry about Bao-yu and saw peace and order gradually restored to the house, he resolved to avail himself of the remainder of his mourning leave to take the coffin of the Ancestress from the Temple of the Iron Railings at long last, and to lay it to rest, as was proper, in the ancestral vault of the Shih family in her southern homeland. After having arranged various domestic matters with Jia Lien, and once more seriously appealed to Bao-yu's conscience regarding the approaching State examination, he took leave of the family and the ancestors, and set out to journey south on board ship with some of the servants and the coffins of the Ancestress and her faithful Mandarin Duck. The coffin of Ko Ching, Jia Yung's first wife, who had died young, and that of Black Jade were also taken at the same time, to be likewise laid in their native southern earth. Cuckoo was given the honor of escorting her dead mistress, Black Jade, back to her native town of Yangchow, while Jia Yung had charge of the coffin of his first wife.

After his recovery Bao-yu showed himself extraordinarily changed in character as compared with his former self. He was silent and wrapt in meditation; he buried himself in his books, mostly of Taoist literature, avoided conversation and company, and a fact which was particularly remarked with much shaking of heads paid no more attention to his feminine environment. Cuckoo simply could not get over the cool and indifferent reception he gave her when she came back from Yangchow, where she had laid Black Jade's remains in their last resting place. There she was, sitting lonely and forsaken in her room, mourning her dead mistress, and he did not think it necessary to pay her a visit, to speak a word of comfort to her, and shed a tear together in silent memory of her who had once been his beloved.

"One can see now how foolish we girls were to have taken his flowery talk so seriously and to have lavished our affections on him. That's how he thanks us, the heartless fellow!" she complained to Musk. And Musk and Pearl and the others confirmed her verdict. What did they know of the change which had taken place within him in the interval? He was waiting and preparing himself for the promised visit of his mysterious friend from the other world.

And one day he came.

5 "That crazy fellow who brought the stone is back again ! He is asking for his ten thousand batzes!" So the message ran, and it set the whole house in an uproar. Bao-yu rushed to the gate in joyful haste.

"Where is my dear master?" he was heard calling out as he went to meet him, to everyone's surprise. Yes indeed, there the fellow was standing in the gateway, and Bao-yu recognized him as his recent travelling companion. The servant Li Kwei was barring the monk's way. At a sign from Bao-yu he had to let him go. Bao-yu conducted him into the reception hall as an honored guest.

"Please make, no fuss about me. I have only come to fetch my money!" declared the visitor, brusquely. Bao-yu thought that this was not the language of holy instruction which he had expected. But when he saw him, with his scabious bald head, in his dirty, torn monk's habit, outwardly a picture of the utmost neglect, he remembered the old saying that the wise man does not care for outward display, and that those who do care for it are usually not wise men. He was therefore at pains not to think the less of his visitor because of his appearance.

"Do not worry about the money, Master! My mother is collecting it right now. But please take a seat meantime. The unworthy disciple has a few questions that preoccupy him. Do you not come from the Phantom Realm of the Great Void?" he asked politely.

"What do I know of Phantom Realm and Great Void? I come from somewhere and I am going somewhere; that is all," was the cryptic answer. "By the way, do you know the origin of the stone that I brought back to you?"

10 Bao-yu was unable to reply straight away.

"Then you do not know your own origin, yet you ask me about mine?" continued the bonze, laughing.

True, Bao-yu had been already awakened by his recent dream vision, but not yet completely. Now, so sudden was his awakening that the bonze's last remark felt like the blow of a cudgel on his head.

"I understand. It is not the money but the stone which the master demands. I will go and fetch it."

"Yes, you must do so," nodded the bonze, smiling. Bao-yu hurried into his bedroom and fetched the stone out of its hiding place in the treasure chest near the bed, where the careful Precious Clasp had recently been keeping it. She and the maids happened not to be present, so he could do this unhindered. He was hurrying back with the Stone in his hand, and in his haste heeded so little where he was going, that he unexpectedly bumped into Pearl turning a corner. She shrank back, startled.

15 "So you're here?" she asked, astonished. "Your mother imagines that you're in the front reception hall with the stranger. At the moment she is conferring with your wife as to how the large sum of money which he is demanding for the stone can be got together straight away." "Run and tell her that she need not worry about the money. I'm giving him back the stone itself, instead," he told her, and began to move on.

"That's impossible!" cried Pearl, horrified, and tried to stop him. "The stone is your life! Without it you're lost!"

"Don't you worry! I have my soul back, so I do not need the stone any more."

After a short struggle he shook her off and ran away. She ran after him shouting, and overtook him again. She clung to his belt desperately and allowed herself to slip to the ground so that he could not stir from the spot.

Her frantic cries of "Help! He wants to give up his stone!" attracted other waiting maids and maids, and later his mother and Precious Clasp, to the spot. Cuckoo helped Pearl, and by exerting their united strength they held him fast.

20 "Don't make such a fuss about a stone! Would it grieve you as much as that if I had to go away myself next?" he asked, laughing between gasps. A cry of horror from the two was the answer. Meantime Madame Cheng and Precious Clasp had joined the others.

"Are you up to mischief again?" asked his mother sternly. He saw that he had no chance of escaping now, so he gave up the struggle.

"It's of no importance," he said reassuringly to his mother; then, pointing with a smile at Pearl and Cuckoo, he said: "They are too easily scared. The stiff-necked monk would not hear of any bargaining. He would not reduce his demand by even a copper piece. That annoyed me, and I just left him standing there. I will offer to return the stone to him, and tell him that it's not the real one after all and that we do not set any great store by it. Then he will surely modify his ridiculous demand and be glad to get whatever we give him. That's all."

His cleverly calculated words sounded very reasonable to a thrifty housewife, and in fact Madame Cheng was instantly reassured.

"Oh, that's all right!" she said. "I thought that you wanted actually to hand him over the stone. Why didn't you tell that to the two girls at once, and spare them this altercation?"

25 But Precious Clasp, full of anxious forebodings, was of another opinion.

"That sinister monk fellow is not to be trusted! Who knows? If he is allowed to have the stone even for a moment, he may suddenly disappear with it. Better safe than sorry! I would prefer to sacrifice my jewelry."

And before Bao-yu could stop her, she had wrested the stone from his hand in a trice.

"So that is settled," she continued. "Now you need not go back to him at all. Your mother and I will raise the money between us."

"Very well. But I want at least to say good-by to him properly, for decency's sake," he remarked with affected indifference. That also sounded reasonable. Pearl let go of him at last.

30 "It seems to me that you women set more store on the stone itself than on my own person. What if I ran off with the monk now? What good would the stone be to you then?" he jested. He wished to prepare them with such jokes for things to come. Pearl's suspicions were immediately reawakened. She caught hold of him again, then, remembering that two ladies of the house were present, withdrew her hand quickly and forced herself to a more restrained demeanor. And now the way was free for Bao-yu.

But Pearl was so frightened that she sent word to his personal servant, Ming Yen, behind his back, urgently asking him and his subordinates at the third gateway to keep a sharp eye on the little master, lest he might possibly be enticed away without ado by the strange monk.

Madame Cheng and Precious Clasp had retired to their rooms again, and there in privacy they got Pearl to tell them the whole story of the noisy incident which had just taken place. When Pearl repeated word for word the mysterious utterances which Bao-yu had let drop during the struggle, the two ladies became extremely perturbed again, and gave orders that the front hall, where Bao-yu was with his guest, should be surrounded by watchers, who were also to watch unobtrusively through the window what was going on inside. Waiting maids were sent to run back and forth and report what the watchers were able to catch of the conversation which was taking place.

"The little master does not seem to be quite right in the head," one messenger reported mysteriously. "The people listening under the window heard him saying to the strange monk that he could not deliver him the stone his inner self prevented him from doing so but that he offered him his person instead. He was ready to go away with him."

"Why, that's quite mad!" exclaimed the horrified Tai tai. "And what did the monk say to that?"

35 "He said he demanded the stone and not the person."

"The one is the same as the other," interjected Precious Clasp excitedly. "The stone and Bao-yu are one! The fellow is just being funny! Did he say nothing about money, then?"

"I don't know. After that the conversation became very lively, in fact merry, but the men under the window were not able to understand much of it."

"What nonsense! They don't have to be so very learned to be able to understand a simple conversation. That's the last straw!" cried Madame Cheng, flying into a passion. And she sent for one of the listeners. Naturally, he could not show himself before the ladies but had to give his report through the window from the veranda.

"We were unable to follow the conversation completely," he said, "as it was above our heads. We could only catch something about 'mountain wilderness' and 'green crags' and 'Realm of the Great Void' and 'red dust' and 'severing from earthly destiny,' and the like."

40 Madame Cheng did not know, either, what these expressions meant, but Precious Clasp did understand, and became extremely perturbed. She was so frightened that she was just giving orders for Bao-yu to be fetched back at once when he arrived himself. He seemed to be in very high spirits.

"Everything went off splendidly!" he announced gaily.

"Drop the foolery and pull yourself together!" said his mother sternly.

"Foolery? Oh, I feel perfectly clearheaded. The monk is a good old friend of mine. He only came to say hello to me. What he said about the money he didn't mean seriously. All he asked in return for his services was that I should change my ways

and remember my original higher destiny. He made that quite clear to me. Then he suddenly floated away. So we still have the stone, and we did not have to pay the money. Isn't that splendid?"

The others exchanged incredulous glances. Madame Cheng gave orders through the window to the listener who was still waiting outside to run to the front of the palace and find out if this was true. After a while the man came back and reported: "Yes, that is true. The gate watchmen saw the strange monk going away. He said to tell the Tai tai that she need not worry; he asked no money as recompense; he only wished that the little master should visit him now and then. And he said, moreover, that whatever happens is predestined by the higher powers."

45 Madame Cheng breathed a sigh of relief. She was now freed from a great financial worry.

"He seems to be quite a nice, reasonable fellow after all," she said contentedly. "But where is my son to visit him? Did the gate watchmen ask that?"

"He lives far away and near, according to how you look at it," interposed Bao-yu with a smile. How puzzling this remark sounded, too!

"Come back to your senses at last and take your head out of the clouds!" said Precious Clasp impatiently. "Have you no feeling for your parents, who are suffering so much on your account? Pull yourself together and reward their love by achieving something noble."

"Oh,, is what I intimated not a noble achievement? Do you not know the saying:  
50 "A son who to the Buddha vows his life Opens heaven's gate to seven ancestors."

Madame Cheng felt her heart torn when she heard him.

"How frightful! What curse has come over our house?" she cried, beside herself. "These perverse notions of fleeing the world! First Grief of Spring, and now Bao-yu . . . I'll never survive it!"

And she broke into violent sobbing.

"I was only joking," said Bao-yu, smilingly trying to reassure her.

55 But he was not joking. It was observed that he shut himself off more and more from his friends and the people of the house and withdrew to the silence of his study, ostensibly to prepare for the approaching State examination but in reality to bury himself more and more in his beloved philosophy. The only person in the house with whom he still indulged in an exchange of thoughts now and again was his cousin and kindred spirit, Grief of Spring. A mysterious utterance which he made on the occasion of Grief of Spring's removal to the Kingfisher's Cage aroused a great deal of comment.

After a quarrel with her sister-in-law Chen, for whom she had little love, Grief of Spring had suddenly decided to cut off the remaining half of her hair, and once more she gave her relatives the choice: either the Kingfisher's Cage or voluntary death. There was an agitated family council which lasted far into the night. Finally Grief of Spring had got her way. She was allowed to withdraw to the Kingfisher's Cage. The waiting maid Cuckoo willingly offered to follow her there. She was wont to reproach herself in secret for not having followed her mistress Black Jade to the grave after their long years together. And now she thought she would atone for this wrong done to Black Jade by leading a life of penance and chastity in the self-chosen solitude of the Kingfisher's Cave.

When Grief of Spring bade farewell to the family everyone expected that Bao-yu would get another of his bad turns and raise a passionate lament over the new loss of a little sister, but to everyone's surprise he remained quite calm this time.

"A-mi-to-fo! You have done it! What a pity that I am not ready yet!" These were all the words of farewell that he said.

Now he was completely alone, with no one to turn to, only the intellectual intercourse with his philosophers. Precious Clasp noted with growing uneasiness how he was shutting himself up and neglecting her and his family. At last she could no longer look on in silence. So one day she gave him a good lecture, urgently entreating him to finish at last with his useless philosophizing and turn instead to the practical philosophy of a Confucius and of the old idealistic rulers such as Yao, Shun, Yu, and Cheng Tang; and to remember the highest commandment of human morals, namely, filial duty and childlike reverence, and fulfill the just expectations of his father by doing well at the coming State examination. And she kept at him until finally he took her words to heart and did as she wished.

60 He had all the works of his favorite philosophers Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, and other apostles of the Tao simply packed into an empty lumber-room, and from that time on zealously dedicated himself solely to the study of the Six Classical Books and similar writings, Confucian in spirit, the knowledge of which would stand him in good stead at the State examination.

With a sigh of relief Precious Clasp noted the change in him, but then she became tortured once more with fresh doubts. "His encounter with the crazy monk had one good result since then he has given up his everlasting fooling and flirting with the girls. Who knows whether this latest change may not cause him to fall back into his old bad ways again?" she confided to Pearl.

And at Pearl's suggestion she took the precaution of arranging that the innocuous Oriole, whom he did not like particularly and who, besides, was her own confidential maid, should take over the duty of bringing him his tea and similar services of a personal nature, instead of pretty little Wu, the youngest of the waiting maids, who had been given to him in replacement of the late Bright Cloud. So now he would probably not get silly ideas and be distracted from his books.

Her apprehension was unfounded, however. He had resolved of himself not to look at any girl again, and up to the day of the examination he subjected himself to a life of strict voluntary seclusion. During those days of preparation he did not even pay the accustomed morning and evening duty visit to his mother, but got waiting maids to convey to her his daily *tsing an*.

The time for the great examination, which was awaited with tremulous anxiety by the ladies of the western palace, had come at last. On the morning of the opening day Bao-yu, accompanied by his nephew Jia Lan, came to take leave of his mother. It was the first time that Madame Cheng had had to allow her son to pass the night away from home. For during the three days of the examination the candidates were kept in strict confinement, and were not permitted to leave their bare examination cells even

at night. And so, though Bao-yu, at nineteen, was pretty well grown up by now, his mother gave him plenty of practical, maternal advice, and also wept some motherly tears of farewell. Bao-yu himself took the parting very solemnly too. He knelt down before his mother and saluted her with a ceremonial kowtow, touching his forehead to the ground three times.

65 "Up till now I have had no opportunity of repaying my mother for all the love that she has shown me since I came into the world," he said earnestly. "I will exert myself to pass the examination as well as I can and thereby make good my former negligence. If it is granted me to give my parents joy by a notable success, I shall regard my filial duty as fulfilled and the injustice which I have been doing my parents all my life as atoned for."

How solemn that sounded! Like a parting for ever!

"My good, good boy! If only your old grandmother had lived to see this hour!" sobbed the Tai tai, deeply moved, as she raised him to his feet.

"Even though she is no longer bodily among us, her spirit will be our witness and will rejoice with us," he declared simply.

"Do not weep, Tai tai" the others said comfortingly to Madame Cheng. "You have every reason to be joyful, seeing that he has matured at last into a sensible and conscientious son and adult."

70 And with many fond wishes the two youths, the future hope of the whole clan, were seen off on their way to the arena.

When the three days of the examination were over, Jia Lan came back without Bao-yu. It was already late in the evening.

"But where is your Uncle Bao-yu?" asked the ladies, dismayed.

"I have lost him," replied Jia Lan unhappily.

"What nonsense! How can a grown-up man, with whom you have been together the whole time, simply get lost?" said his mother, Widow Chu, sharply.

"I shared the same cell with him and ate at the same table, and in the examination hall, too, he was always within my sight. This morning we handed in our examination papers together, and then left the examination hall together. On our way home it was at the Dragon Gate I suddenly lost sight of him in the crowd. Li Kwei, who had come to meet us at the Dragon Gate with his people, had seen him a moment before, walking a few steps behind me. Then he had suddenly disappeared. I have been searching and inquiring for him with Li Kwei and the other servants all day, but he could not be found."

75 This news put the whole house into a turmoil of excitement and grief. The male servants, who were already looking forward to the customary feast, instead of sitting down to a banquet had to go out, despite the lateness of the hour, to search the city once more for the lost youth. The only person in the palace who did not seem particularly touched by Pao Yu's disappearance was Grief of Spring.

"Did he have his stone with him when he went away?" she asked Precious Clasp, and this was her only inquiry.

Precious Clasp nodded, whereupon she made no further remark. But Pearl remembered the oath which Bao-yu had sworn years before to Black Jade, and Precious Clasp also put two and two together, with a sigh.

It was already long past midnight when the searchers who had been sent out returned. They had no result to report. All the inquiries made in the days that followed likewise proved in vain. And then, early one morning, while the ladies were still asleep, the great and joyful news arrived that the results of the State examination had just been made known at the early morning audience. Bao-yu had won seventh place on the list of successful candidates. His nephew Jia Lan had also passed. His name was the hundred-and-thirtieth on the list. Both had thereby won the second doctor's degree, and henceforth might proudly count themselves one of the elect company of *ku yen*, or "Exalted Ones." jubilation filled the halls of the western palace, but Bao-yu still remained missing. Yet there was some little comfort in the thought that a new *ku yen*, whose name would be carried on the wings of fame throughout all the provinces of the Empire, could hardly remain undetected for long.

Jia Zheng had laid the body of the Ancestress to rest in her southern homeland, and was on his way back. One day he received a letter from the family telling him of the latest important events at home. The news that his ill-fated child, Bao-yu, had passed the examination so brilliantly filled his parental heart with proud joy, which was dimmed, alas, by his anxiety over the boy's sudden mysterious disappearance. He learned, further, that the Imperial master had particularly mentioned the magnificent achievement of the seventh candidate on the list, and had asked the examination commission to furnish him with a detailed report regarding the personal circumstances of the highly promising and talented young man. When he learned from the report of the Chairman of the examination commission, the Prince of the Northern Quietness, that the seventh on the list was a full brother of the former Imperial wife, Beginning of Spring, and that the Jia family had produced two *ku yen* on this occasion, he felt moved to pour out his Imperial favor over the Jia clan once more. Being gratified, moreover, by the success of the recent offensive against the pirate pest, and the generally contented and peaceable state to which the realm of the ten thousand families had now been happily restored, he graciously ordered a great general amnesty throughout the Empire. Thanks to this amnesty, the two exiled members of the clan, Shieh and Chen, were to be permitted to return from banishment; their confiscated property would be restored to them. Jia Chen, as Lord of the eastern palace, was, moreover, raised again to the nobility, though to be sure only to the third rank, namely, that of a count. Jia Zheng remained the only possessor of the title of prince, and, furthermore, was restored to his office of State Councillor in the Ministry of Works. In addition, the Imperial Lord gave orders that an official search was to be made for the seventh successful candidate on the list.

Ghia Cheng heard all this cheerful news with tears of mingled joy and shame. How unjust he had been in the past to his despised, degenerate son. The Jia clan had now to thank this despised and degenerate son for the fact that the roof of the Hall of Ancestors was being adorned with new luster!



80 Torn by a multitude of conflicting emotions, Jia Zheng urged the crew of his ship to greater speed. For he himself was unable to rest either day or night. He was burning with longing to see his family again, and also to throw himself upon his knees before the steps of the Throne, there to render heartfelt thanks.

He arrived one day at the post station Kun ling. Here he made a brief halt in order hurriedly to complete a letter in reply to the one from his wife. A sudden spell of cold had brought a light fall of snow that day which enveloped the landscape in a mantle of white. Jia Zheng had sent, all his staff, onto land with the exception of one young fellow. They had to present his visiting card to the various people of distinction and rank and acquaintances in the neighborhood, explaining that unfortunately their master did not have time to interrupt his journey long enough to visit them personally.

He himself was sitting all alone in the ship's cabin, writing to his family. He was just about to speak of Bao-yu; he laid down his writing brush and looked up to reflect for a moment. In that same moment he seemed to see a figure emerging from the midst of the falling snow on the bank of the river, opposite the bow of the ship. Suddenly there stood someone, bareheaded and barefooted, dressed in a long monk's habit made of coarse reddish brown monkey-hair wool. Now he went to his knees to Jia Zheng in a solemn kowtow, striking his forehead on the ground. Four times he pressed his forehead deep into the snow. Mr. Cheng jumped up and hurried over the gangway onto the bank. He stepped up to the peculiar stranger, who was still standing there, and was about to ask him who he was and whence he came. He had just raised his crossed hands to his breast to return the salutation when, looking more closely, he recognized the stranger. It was Bao-yu.

"It's you, Bao-yu!" he cried, astounded.

The other remained silent. His face expressed joy and sorrow at the same time.

85 "If you are Bao-yu, how is it that you are here, in that attire?" continued Mr. Cheng.

The other seemed to want to reply, but did not get around to it. Suddenly two other monkish figures came and stood beside him, one to the right and the other to the left. The one was a servant of Buddha, the other a disciple of the Tao.

"Your earthly destiny is fulfilled! Do not delay now, but follow us!" Mr. Cheng heard them say to Bao-yu, then he saw the three of them floating lightly upwards together over the sloping river-bank. Heedless of the slippery ground, Mr. Cheng rushed after them, but he was unable to catch up with them. Ever more quickly they sped away from him, and their outlines became more and more indistinct. He could still hear, out of the distance, the sound of singing, and could just catch some disjointed words about "green crag" and "great void" and "wandering into the far unknown"; then they disappeared behind a hill.

Mr. Cheng had run until he was completely breathless. He could not take another step, and had to stop to recover his breath. When he turned round he saw his servant tramping towards him through the snow.

"Did you just see the three fellows in monks' habits?" he called out to him.

90 "Yes, I saw them," replied the boy, "and I ran after you, and then all of a sudden I could see only you."

Mr. Cheng ran on a bit farther with the boy, but it was no use. Far and wide there was nothing to be seen but the white, snowy, empty landscape. Shaking his head, he turned back. Meantime his other servants had returned to the ship. Mr. Cheng told them of his strange encounter. They said he should interrupt the journey and have the whole district searched thoroughly for his son Bao-yu.

Mr. Cheng shook his head and sighed. He was lost in thought.

"It is strange, very strange!" he murmured to himself. "I saw him and his companions with my own eyes. I also distinctly heard their singing. It was definitely not imagination, or some empty phantom vision. Many things are now becoming clear to me. He came into the world with a precious stone in his mouth. That was uncanny enough; I always felt uneasy about it from the very beginning. But . . . well, for the sake of his grandmother we reared and fostered the spirit child. Then these two peculiar fellows appeared on the scene. Three times they have intervened in his life. Once, when the boy lay ill, they restored the power of the stone with their incantations and made him well again. Then one of the fellows, the one in the bonze's cowl, brought back the lost stone and saved the boy from death for the second time. That time I saw him with my own eyes sitting in the reception hall, then all of a sudden he disappeared. And now today they have spirited away the boy himself. In the past I was filled with wonder over the fortunate fellow who had exalted spirits from the other world for his friends and helpers. But who would have thought that one day he himself would join the world of spirits? For nineteen long years, clothed in the form of a human being, he fooled his grandmother. Now he has become once more what he was before a spirit. No! It is quite useless to go searching for spirits!"

And with a sigh Jia Zheng picked up his writing brush to finish the letter home which he had begun. He reported his amazing encounter with Bao-yu, and added the remark that they should not mourn the lost son any more. In any case he had no aptitude whatever for the career of an official. Who knows what mischief he would have got into in an official position, and what disaster he might have brought on the clan? To have produced a bodhisattva was quite an honor for the family, and certainly no disgrace.

95 The various members of the clan who had been away arrived home in rapid succession. Jia Zheng from his journey to the South; Jia Shieh and Jia Chen from their exile; Hsueh Pan, pardoned and ransomed from his imprisonment. The latter was completely repentant, and on returning home swore a solemn oath that he would take his life if he ever again fell back into his old vices. At his mother's wish, he raised his concubine Lotus to the position of principal wife in place of Hsia, who had met her end by poisoning. And so the former slave girl eventually reached the position in society which was proper to her birth and education.

On the very next day after his return home Jia Zheng called at the Grand Secretariat and, through the good offices of the Grand Secretaries, who were kindly disposed towards him, obtained an audience of thanks with the Lord of the Thousand Years. The Emperor inquired sympathetically for the lost son, Bao-yu, and was deeply moved when he heard of Mr. Cheng's strange encounter in the snow. Once more he recalled appreciatively the magnificent achievement of the seventh candidate on the examination list. It had been his intention to call the young man up for service in the Imperial Palace near his own person. By his

Imperial grace he awarded him by decree the exalted title of "The Immortal of Marvellous Literary Achievement." The conferring of this honor consoled the clan to some extent for the physical loss of the son of the family. Another consolation was the fact that Precious Clasp was expecting a child. Thus Bao-yu would still, after all, live on physically too, in a certain sense, in the clan.

Yu Tsun was also among those affected by the great amnesty. In one day he had slipped from a great height, being dragged straight from his prefect's seat to prison, in chains. Corruptibility, self-enrichment through office, and defeating the ends of the law were the abuses of office laid to his charge by the Censors before the Imperial Throne. These offenses were enough to call for a severe punishment, for the ruling Son of Heaven was an enlightened ruler with a keen social conscience, ready to fly into a rage at the mere words "self-enrichment through office," "oppression of the people," and "exploitation." Thanks to the great amnesty, however, Yu Tsun got off quite lightly. He merely lost office and rank, was reduced once more to the status of a commoner, and had to return to his native town of Suchow as an ordinary subject. And so the proud career of the ambitious place-hunter ended just where it had begun in a small and humble way many years ago.

Yu Tsun had sent his family on ahead and was following with his baggage-cart and one servant, and so he had lots of time on the way to meditate on the futility of earthly ambition and the transitory nature of fame and splendor.

His way chanced to lead him over the ford in the vicinity of which he had had that remarkable encounter in a temple a year before. This time he noticed not far from the ford a hut made of reeds and bulrushes. At his arrival a hermit came out of the hut and raised his hands in greeting to him. It was Shih Ying. He bowed quickly, returning the greeting.

100 "Greetings, worthy Mr. Jia! How have you been since . . .?" began the old hermit.

"Are you not Master Shih Ying?" asked Yu Tsun. "Why did you hide your identity at our last meeting? I was greatly troubled about you after your temple was burned down and count myself lucky to see you again today. Only now do I realize how well you have done for yourself, thanks to your exalted and wise insight. I, wretched fool, on the contrary, was obdurate and deluded. Now I have received the deserved reward of my folly."

"The last time, you were resplendent in office and dignities. How could the miserable-looking hermit take the liberty of knowing you?" replied Shih Ying with the shadow of a smile. "It was only because of our old relations that I ventured to open my mouth at all. I feel deeply honored by your loyalty. Good fortune and misfortune, wealth and poverty, are predestined things. Our meeting today is no mere chance either."

"How did the master come to free himself from the red dust of the world that time long ago?" Yu Tsun wanted to know.

"Quite unexpectedly, with the speed of thought," replied the old man, smiling evasively, and countering the question with another: "In the great world, in the circles of soft, luxurious living, riches, and distinction, did you not meet a certain Bao-yu?"

"Indeed I do know him. I have been in and out of his home frequently. It is rumored that he also has passed through the gateway of the Great Void recently. I would never have imagined that worldly, effeminate fellow taking such a resolution."

105 "But I would have. I knew his whole story long in advance. Do you remember that summer evening many years ago, when you saw me standing in front of the door of my old home near the Temple of the Gourd? Shortly before that I had met him."

"Impossible! Your Suchow is many miles distant from the capital."

"In the intercourse between spirits there are no boundaries of space and time."

"Then you know, no doubt, where he is now?"

"His place is now again, as it was before, in the Blessed Realm of Purified Semblance, under the green crag, by the old pine tree. For Pao Yu is a precious stone. What? You do not understand me? Come with me into my hermitage, which is near by. There. I will explain to you the Story of the Stone."